



Fresh start in Punjab

Congress gains a lifeline in the State, and a nudge to empower regional leaders elsewhere

The Congress's victory in Punjab, bagging 77 of the 117 seats in the Assembly elections, comes as a salve for the beleaguered party. This is its first victory in a big State since Karnataka 2013, and it took a particularly feisty campaign led by Amarinder Singh. The party had to fend off not just the ruling Shiromani Akali Dal-Bharatiya Janata Party alliance but also the challenge posed by the Aam Aadmi Party, which had made a significant foray in the State in the 2014 Lok Sabha election. The results suggest a strong anti-incumbency sentiment against the SAD-BJP coalition. In its decade-long stint in power, it may have helped build the State's infrastructure. But during its second term, public distaste grew over the consolidation of power in the Badal family, and there were reports of corruption and high-handedness. The Congress managed to convert this disenchantment into support for itself, building a campaign around the leadership of Captain Singh and the promise of effective administration. The AAP, with its focus on rural areas, especially in the south-central Malwa region following its surprise success in 2014, made a play for the anti-Akali vote. But infighting and the absence of a grassroots presence or a clear State leader tested its organisation. In the end, the AAP was unable to substantially increase the vote share of around 24% that it had gained in 2014: a great chunk of the Akali-BJP vote went to the Congress.

The challenges the Congress administration faces are formidable. It must address the agrarian crisis as well as high unemployment in the State. Punjab leads the country in youth unemployment rate, and its urban centres need renewal. The drug problem continues to ravage rural Punjab, devastating families and nourishing a trafficking nexus. The high debt-to-GDP ratio (31.4% in 2015-16 against the national average of 22%) puts further constraints on the State administration. The Congress has no option but to deliver, as its performance in Punjab is the key to its revival in northern and western India where the BJP has won most Assembly elections over the past five years. Success here should also nudge the party to groom regional leaders elsewhere instead of being dependent on its high command, and more specifically, its vice-president, Rahul Gandhi. For the AAP, the presence of 20 members in the new legislature allows it an opportunity to develop a grassroots presence. AAP national convener Arvind Kejriwal has sought to move the party away from its early volunteer-driven model towards a more centralised organisation, with power concentrated in his hands. Its inability to convert the momentum generated in 2014 into a win in the Assembly election was partly a result of its failure in projecting a strong chief ministerial candidate.

On the rocks

A second referendum on independence may not be in Scotland's best interest

The timing of the announcement by Nicola Sturgeon, Scotland's first minister, to seek a second referendum on independence for Scotland may be no more than strategic. Her call on Monday coincided with the U.K. Parliament's adoption of a landmark legislation to begin talks to exit the European Union. But Ms. Sturgeon's move should remind Westminster that the thought of separation from the British union has never fully been excised from the popular imagination in Scotland, despite the resounding 2014 vote to stay. Recent developments seem to have hardened public sentiment against continuing in the United Kingdom among the Scots, who had voted overwhelmingly in June 2016 to remain in the EU. The popular mood in favour of independence did surge briefly, as reflected in opinion polls soon after the Brexit vote. But the support receded in subsequent months. The prospects for a separate Scotland once again revived after British Prime Minister Theresa May's landmark speech in January, in which she made clear her decision to quit the common market. It is futile to speculate on what better terms might have been offered to assuage sentiment in the north, as Ms. May has prioritised immigration control as the red line in her negotiations with her counterparts in the bloc. But Edinburgh has been growing more impatient of late with London over its demands.

The greatest political challenge for the Conservative government in London as it acts to take Britain out of the 28-country bloc, is to put forward a coherent and convincing case for Scotland to remain in the U.K. The economic argument for Edinburgh to leave is apparently at its weakest, given the recent slump in oil prices and a mounting fiscal deficit. The champions of access to the common market also run up against the argument that a large share of Scotland's trade is within the U.K. However, such rational arguments against independence may not cut much ice given that London's steps to effect Brexit continue to be divisive nearly a year after the vote. In fact, the advocates of independence are likely to argue that if London can rip apart a European partnership of four decades so easily on grounds of restoring national sovereignty, it may well one day reconsider Scottish devolution. But the proponents of Scottish separation would be most short-sighted to promise the moon to potential followers. In fact, countries such as Spain that are fighting their own secessionist movements are unlikely to back the current bid by the Scottish National Party. Edinburgh's EU entry would have to be ratified by every single member state, a prospect that would commit them to make similar concessions. Europe's leaders, alive to the sensitivities of undermining the sovereignty of member nations, have repeatedly cautioned against expectations of an automatic guarantee of admission in the event that Edinburgh exits Britain.

Reflections on the election of our time

Narendra Modi was better tuned into grassroots voices, who spoke a different language of immediacy



SHIV VISVANATHAN

The Uttar Pradesh election results are like a riddle wrapped in an enigma. The sheer scale of the victory, the arithmetic, shows it was a tsunami that no one had predicted. More than the act of prediction in the form of the exit polls that confounded us, the problem lay in deciphering the results. At the macrolevel, it is like watching the arrival of a juggernaut, whose presence now looks inevitable, but which still requires an explanation of how it came there. At a microlevel, one looks at pieces which make a little sense as the whole picture. It is not the immediacy of the result that challenges us but what it implies for the future.

This is a strange election where one man became a national phenomenon. As a wag put it, Narendra Modi became a final cause, remote cause and immediate cause of the election results. He represented the idea of India the majority wanted. People believed his words, and his utterances such as development, nationalism and "Make in India" acquired a shelf life beyond the original meaning of these terms. What Mr. Modi seemed to convey is what I call a lowest common denominator democracy. He has created a "roti, kapda aur makan" (food, clothing and shelter) imagination for the new middle classes. His communalism – which he wore like a badge, pretending it is a patriotism – is so blatant and confident that it challenges the old tenets of secularism making it irrelevant. When a Prime Minister, not merely a head of a party, refuses to allocate a single seat to a Muslim candidate in U.P., the message is clear. He has pushed out an old political vocabulary



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which already had a shop-soiled quality. His style of electoral ambush of appropriating the Opposition's favourite stereotypes was acutely tactical.

Consider the issue of demonetisation. He was not devaluing currency but instead rendering some older political styles effete. The Congress and the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) could no longer claim to be the spokespersons of the poor. Ironically, Mr. Modi made demonetisation speak a political rather than an economic language. He demonetised political currency and challenged the bankability of terms such as secularism. Simultaneously, he appropriated the pro-poor platform by pretending to be anti-rich. He became an anti-corruption crusader in that sense, telling the poor that he was their way out of their current world. His combination of patriotism and anti-poverty became a potent brew.

The strategy

Let me be clear. It is a strategy that we have to understand. Mr. Modi formulated a symbolic strategy, while BJP president Amit Shah spelt out the tactics on the ground. He created a sense of the new,

promising a sense of the world by appealing to demography and a new generation. He did it in two ways. He cleared the decks by treating Samajwadi Party leader Akhilesh Yadav and Congress vice-president Rahul Gandhi as old furniture. But he went beyond this by suggesting almost blatantly that the stereotypes of caste and ideology were outdated because change has dated them. Such categories create the captive minds of the old electoral politics.

What he was offering was a simple, aspirational, mobile society where those at the bottom of the pyramid – a clichéd word for the poor – feel a different sense of possibilities. His overt change in style, dress, and his muted muscularity all helped create an effective veneer around his political style. This not only added to his vote catching power among Dalits but also made old warhorses such as BSP leader Mayawati appear like yesterday's newspaper. What Mr. Modi was signalling to each caste category which had frozen into a vote bank was that caste alone would not work. One needed development, innovation, a new sense of energy, and not the old lethargy of waiting for reservation. Mr. Modi

hinted that the politics of resentment had to be replaced by a strategy of mobility.

Capturing the imagination

Third, Mr. Modi realised, that the media's understanding of the social order was incomplete. He had a better hearing aid to listen to what I call grassroots voices. They spoke a different language of immediacy unembellished by the rhetoric of concepts. Mr. Modi's concepts such as "Make in India" were more performative, promising delivery of the goods and competence better than any of the words that the socialists or the Congress offered to the people. It is in this sense that one has to understand that his victory was not merely an organisational victory created by Mr. Shah and the millions of party workers on the ground but also a literal capturing of the mass imagination. It was so total that it was virtually emasculating to the Opposition. Brutally put, it went beyond a capture of votes to a seduction of the imagination. It captured not only the working concepts of today's electoral language but also the very grids of thought that determine the thought styles of the future. It is in recognising this that this article, which till now appears like a compilation of what made the BJP tick, becomes a symptomatology of fears. Let me admit that I might have got my psephology wrong but my intuition tells me that my sense of the future might be pathetically and prophetically right.

An epitaph for the old

Think of a few simple facts. Here is a party which even after the Gujarat riots is virtually contemptuous or indifferent to the Muslim, clear that this critical election did not need the help of any Muslim candidates. Mr. Modi has also told Dalits that their politics, like minoritarianism, is doomed. The two great concepts that created the compost heap of Indian electoral politics, the vote banks which have

acquired a reified life of their own, are socialism and secularism. Mr. Modi, in rendering them effete, has also created a set of closures we must understand. It is clear that while mobility is an aspirational dream, dissent today is an almost extinct possibility between the inanity of the left and the liberals and the hostility of the BJP regime. What we are facing is individual aspiration but a death of the old categories which at one time created the romance and the Utopian around words such as justice and equality.

The U.P. elections show that the old covenant around the concepts we once held sacred is dead. The hegemony of the BJP-Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh-Bajrang Dal combine is almost clear. What we face is what I am going to call the closure of the Indian mind. There are few possibilities of new political dreams. Mr. Modi is offering a straitjacket of a narrow idea of development and globalisation which contain no alternative possibilities, no dissent, no side bets. It is not a post-truth society we are confronting but a creation of a captive mind. This society by choosing Mr. Modi has closed itself to many great imaginations. What we see is not a new generation speaking a new liberated politics but a bowlerised society oozing simplicities, created by the masterminds of propaganda. India, like the United States, has today become a collection of hard hat minds, facing a tragedy where the aspiration is global but the categories are parochial while masquerading themselves as national. Mr. Modi's victory signals the victory of the parochial and affordably mediocre over any vision of the cosmopolitan or plural. Deep down, it is the future which we have lost today. This is Indian democracy's most ironic gift.

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Prejudice makes no distinction

It's time Indian-Americans in the U.S. involved themselves deeply in civic issues



VISHAKHA N. DESAI

Srinivas Kuchibhotla in Kansas, Harnish Patel in South Carolina, and Deep Rai in Washington, all well settled Indians in America, were shot at in a span of three weeks resulting in two deaths. The words repeatedly used by their assailants were, "go back where you came from." While these are the most visible cases of attacks against Indian-Americans, the harassment of the community is far more pervasive since Donald Trump took office as U.S. President.

In my own family, spread throughout the U.S., we are hearing stories of insults and innuendoes. A niece in Maryland being told by a co-worker that she will have to go back where she came from, if she was not a citizen (she is); a friend in the DC suburb detained by the local police for "suspicious appearance" and for not carrying an identification (she was simply taking a walk in her neighbourhood as she has done for years). In our family WhatsApp group, we are constantly sharing

stories we hear in our communities, reminding each other about carrying identification, staying away from bars in the Midwest, worrying that hate speeches about our "foreignness" could easily end up in gunshots as it happened to the three victims of the crime. Needless to say, it has shaken the Indian-American community to its core.

Faulty terms of engagement?

For the longest time, we were proud to declare that Indian Americans were the true success story in the U.S. After all, even as a relatively young immigrant group (87.2% being foreign born) at 1% of the population (around 3 million), we could claim to have the highest per capita income (\$88,000 median household income compared to all U.S. median at \$49,800) and highest levels of education (70% of those age 25 and older with college degrees, two-and-a-half times the figure for overall population) of any ethnic group.

We could boast that Indians had truly arrived in America, as prominent writers, business leaders, academics, and even policymakers. We lived and breathed the so-called American dream; we bought expensive homes in American suburbs, sent our children to the best universities and reaped the benefits



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of the American system. But, by and large, we didn't engage in the messy issues of civil rights, political participation, or racism. We thought these were not our issues.

We remained attached to our country of origin, going back and forth frequently, contributing to local causes (after all, our dollars could go much further in India, and India surely needed help). Some of us also got very active in the politics of our homeland, especially when it came to right-wing Hindu causes. Like other immigrants, we nostalgically longed to hold on to our sense of belonging in the old country while moving forward with our lives in our adopted country. Secure in our successful American experience, we took the American part of our hyphenated identity for granted.

From my perch as a leader of an international organisation, I often criticised my fellow Indian-Americans for not strengthening their roots in America, not getting involved enough in the civic organisations in America, and not engaging enough in the American issues of the day. In the age of Trump, this is no longer just a good idea. Now the stakes have become dangerously high and the need visibly urgent. While the White House, including the President, continues to deny any relationship between the rhetoric and policies of the new government and the unprecedented spike in hate speech and hate crimes against South Asian, Arab, Muslim and Jewish communities, the truth is that the Trump presidency has emboldened latent racist and ultraright nativist elements to come out in the open. This has to be the real wake-up call for the Indian-American community.

During the election, a group of Indians, calling themselves "Hindus for Trump," tried to make a distinction between themselves and other Indians, especially Muslim Indian-Americans, and other brown-skinned people, suggesting that they were different, that they should not be confused with Muslims and, therefore, should not be targeted. As political

scientist Sangay Mishra has pointed out, such an approach shows real ignorance about the fundamental dynamics of racism – treating all people of a particular colour or ethnicity as an undifferentiated mass, "erasing individuality, distinctiveness and humanity."

Now, it is time for this well-to-do community to recognise that criminals who commit hate crimes are indiscriminate. As we know from the assaults of the three Indian victims, they confused their target for Iranians and Arab Americans, or Muslims. It didn't matter that all three of them were well-to-do, living in comfortably prosperous communities.

It's time Indian-Americans joined hands with all Americans who suffer from racial, ethnic or social prejudice, Muslims, Arabs, African-Americans, Latinos or the LGBT community, to fight for what makes America the great country that it is, welcoming new immigrants eager to make a new life here, and in the process, constantly renewing the very idea of America, always in the process of becoming, not so much looking in the rear view mirror as moving forward.

Vishakha N. Desai, president emerita of the Asia Society, is senior adviser to the President of Columbia University

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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

Success and setbacks

The BJP needs to be complimented for its thumping victory in Uttar Pradesh which was branded as the mother of elections and a semi-final for the 2019 general election. The party cadre and its leaders have proved that caste, creed and religion are not the only factors that influence electoral wins. What voters, especially the young, expect is development and prompt action.

It was foolish on the part of the Samajwadi Party's Akhilesh Yadav to ignore his father's advice against joining hands with the Congress. The Congress has still to erase its image of being deeply corrupt and has lost its identity. The win should also be an eye-opener for parties such as the SP to pay heed to the wisdom and experience of seniors leaders.

N. MAHADEVAN,
Chennai

victory, no mean feat, was made possible by the untiring efforts of Narendra Modi. Voters saw in him a very bold and efficient leader who is corruption free, has no family baggage and is an orator par excellence. The criticism being levelled against the BJP, of it not having fielded even a single Muslim candidate, is unfair since no one from that community came forward to join that party.

It is clear that the mainstream media failed to read the mind and mood of those in rural U.P. who reposed faith in Mr. Modi's aim to make the country strong. As usual, *The Hindu*, especially in its recent Editorials, has not missed an opportunity to pillory the BJP as a majoritarian and divisive entity out to destroy the secular fabric of the country.

K. CHELLAPPAN,
Chennai

government formation. The Congress has emerged as the front-runner in Manipur and Goa and it is quite natural that the Governor should have invited this party to form the government. If this failed, it should have been the next contender. But it is intriguing that the BJP has been given precedence, which has also resulted in candidates who fought against it till yesterday now jumping ship in the lust for power and identity. That the BJP too is encouraging them is nothing short of stealing the mandate. It amounts to taking voters for a ride especially after they have stood in queues, sometimes for hours, in order to exercise their franchise.

What happened in Arunachal Pradesh is being shamefully attempted in Manipur and Goa.

M.Y. SHARIFF,
Chennai

analyses of the Assembly elections was the dismal performance of the Left. The Communist parties are paying a heavy price for ignoring the importance of caste in Indian society. Their notion that class mobilisation will neutralise caste affiliations has proved to be wrong. One wonders how the Communist parties are becoming irrelevant in a country like ours where people still live under sub-human conditions and economic disparities are mounting by the day. Their electoral prospects are bound to get bleaker unless they shed their ideological blinkers.

MANOHAR ALEMBATH,
Kannur, Kerala

Water conservation

It is happy news that the long-forgotten "Kudimaramathu" project has been revived by the Tamil Nadu government – to desilt canals, lakes and other waterbodies in all districts, with the

involvement of the local farming community. It would be better still if NGOs and welfare associations also joined in this effort to conserve every drop of rainwater if and when the

sky opens up (Tamil Nadu, "Throwing a lifeline to waterbodies", March 14).

S. VAITHIANATHAN,
Madurai

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

A sentence in the report headlined "IAS officer arrested in paper leak scam case suspended" (March 4, 2017, some editions) stated erroneously that "Mr. Kumar was Officer on Special Duty (OSD) with the Indian Railways when RJD chief Lalu Prasad Yadav was the Railway Minister." The Sudhir Kumar who was arrested and suspended, from the 1987 batch of the Indian Administrative Service, was not an OSD in the Railways at any point.

Editing error: The report headlined "Modi felicitated by world leaders for poll victories" (March 14, 2017) incorrectly referred to Stephen Harper as *Canadian Prime Minister*. It should have been *former Canadian Prime Minister*.

In "What is hyperloop? When can we see it?" (Explainer, Business Review page, March 13, 2017), the route choices proposed for India for hyperloops were given as: Bengaluru-to-Chennai (334 km in 20 minutes), Bengaluru-to-Thiruvananthapuram (736 km in 41 minutes), Delhi-to-Mumbai via Jaipur and Indore (1,317 km in 55 minutes), Mumbai-to-Chennai via Bengaluru (1,102 km in 50 minutes), and Bengaluru to Chennai (334 km in 20 minutes). The fact that the Bengaluru-Chennai route was proposed by two companies was cut out due to an editing error.

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552963; E-mail: readerseeditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturba Buildings, 859 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com

THE WEDNESDAY INTERVIEW | SHYAM SARAN

'Early visit of PM Modi to the U.S. would have a positive impact'

The former Foreign Secretary says he remains optimistic about India-U.S. ties and that India should reject China's territorial claims

KALLOL BHATTACHARJEE

Several recent developments indicate the need for India to strategise long term: China's ambitious connectivity infrastructure in South Asia, the arrival of a new U.S. president, and New Delhi's increasing political distance from Russia, a traditional ally. Former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran has been speaking about careful strategising of India's policies since the Narendra Modi government came to power in 2014. In this interview, Mr. Saran, who was also a key negotiator with the U.S. for the nuclear deal, assesses India's key foreign policy choices. Excerpts:

In the context of recent developments in the U.S., what do you suggest are the best possible options before India to strategise priorities for its global aims?

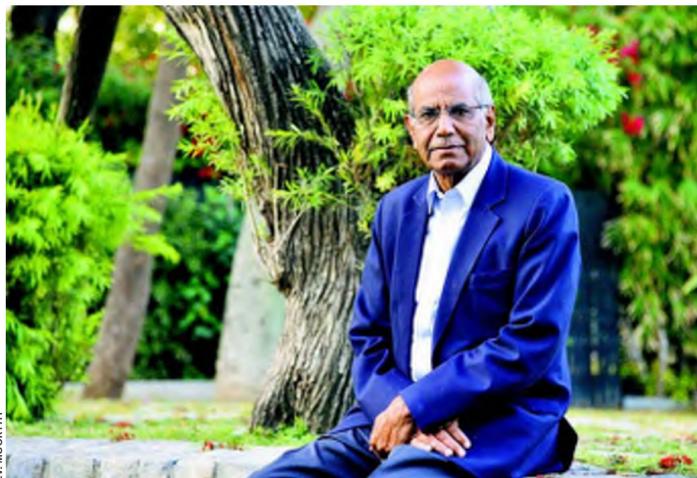
India will have to deal with the reality of the likely persistence of a Trump administration grappling with domestic political turmoil, the resistance of the Washington elite to several of his policies (witness the strong blowback on his efforts to improve relations with Putin's Russia), and the growing polarisation in American society. This could mean that external engagement of the U.S. may well suffer, with its global profile becoming relatively diminished.

Nevertheless, India-U.S. relations have become much stronger and broad-based in the past decade and enjoy bipartisan consensus. This is a valuable asset and a factor of stability even in uncertain times. India should seek to expand the relationship wherever possible. Despite its current preoccupations, the U.S. is and is likely to remain the foremost economic and military power in the world and the source of cutting-edge technological innovation. Therefore, it will continue to be an indispensable strategic partner in India's trajectory towards great power status. Our engagement with the Trump administration should reflect this. An early visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Washington would have a positive impact.

Following the temporary suspension of premium H-1B visas, there are new concerns about the future of India-U.S. ties over Information Technology. Is the U.S. violating trade ties by suspending the visas? Can India take the U.S. to the World Trade Organisation for violating trade conventions?

One hopes that the suspension is only temporary. The trend towards limiting visas to Indian IT professionals offering their much sought-after services in the U.S. began during the (Barack) Obama administration and is likely to continue. Since issuance of visas is considered to be an immigration issue and not a trade issue, one cannot take the suspension to the WTO dispute settlement mechanism. What we can do is to highlight the fact that Indian IT services contribute to enhancing the global competitiveness of U.S. companies, that Indian IT companies are providing significant employment in their operations to U.S. citizens, and U.S. tech companies in India are some of the most profitable in the world. This is a partnership in which both parties gain.

Furthermore, in negotiating with the U.S. on this issue, we should leverage the fact that India is a growing market for U.S. products and services, in particular for defence hardware and technology. There should be some element of trade-off. Indian IT companies should also adapt to the changed situation by diversifying markets away from the heavy dependence



R.V. MOORTHY

on the U.S. There are expanding opportunities in other parts of the world and within India itself. Advances in digital technology should be used to offer services over cyberspace rather than personnel to clients abroad.

Several attacks have taken place recently against Indian immigrants in the U.S. Do you think that India will have to come up with a new policy on immigration and look at other parts of the world as more favourable immigration destinations?

The hate attacks against Indian citizens and Indian-Americans are most reprehensible. When there is a general anti-immigration sentiment unleashed by the government itself, people with prejudice feel empowered to abuse and attack people who look different from themselves. What is reassuring is the reaction of ordinary American citizens and local communities in support of the victims and the promptness with which local and central administrations have responded. Nevertheless, there is an anti-immig-

China's credibility as a partner in the war against international terrorism has taken a dent as a result of its move to prevent the inclusion of Masood Azhar in the UN terrorists list.

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There seems to be growing support for the position that given the protectionist policies of the U.S., India should avoid getting too close to the U.S. and invest more in other international partnerships, such as with

Russia. Is it time to be more cautious towards the U.S. and build a more robust relationship with Russia, or a quad with Japan, Australia and New Zealand?

The premise behind this question appears to be that we have neglected our relations with the other countries referred to, in favour of strengthening relations with the U.S. In fact, the objective of Indian foreign policy has been to develop and expand a diversified set of relations with all major powers and with countries in the developing world. These relations are never mutually exclusive, nor do they constitute a zero-sum proposition. Even if protectionist trends are visible in some sectors in the U.S., there are opportunities to expand trade and investment in other sectors. We have concluded Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreements with Japan and South Korea and a Free Trade Agreement in trade, investment and services with the ASEAN. Similarly with Russia, we have been expanding our trade and investment relations, particu-

larly in the energy field. However, we must acknowledge the fact that India is no longer a priority country for Russia in the commercial field. Its focus remains on China and Europe.

Have developments in the U.S. left India more vulnerable to China's aggressive trade and territorial moves?

It is too early to say how developments in the U.S. will affect global geopolitics. If the global footprint of the U.S. and its Western allies diminishes, this may create spaces for other major powers to play a bigger role. We see this already in Russian activism in West Asia and recent Chinese initiatives on the Afghanistan issue. However, it is not clear whether the U.S. under Mr. Trump will reduce its global engagement, so we should wait and see. Furthermore, not all Chinese activism should be considered negative from an Indian perspective. For example, if China is able to contribute to peace in Afghanistan and is able to restrain Pakistani meddling, that should be welcomed.

While India-China relations are influenced by India's relations with other major powers, it would be a mistake to look at these relations as a mere derivative of the state of Indo-U.S. relations. The future of India-China relations will be determined by how the two countries handle the several bilateral issues between them and whether there is a readiness, despite differences, to seek areas of convergent interest and shared concern and develop a habit of working cooperatively on them. There is an outstanding border issue between the two countries and China reiterates its territorial claims, such as an Arunachal Pradesh, regularly. Recently, the former State Councillor and Special Representative for In-

dia-China border talks, Dai Bingguo, stated that India should make concessions in the eastern sector, including Tawang, and China would respond by making appropriate, though unspecified, concessions in the western sector. This is despite the fact that in 2005, in the Political Parameters and Guiding Principles concluded between the two countries, it was agreed that settled populations would be taken into account in any settlement. Both sides understood that this referred to Tawang, which is the only area with a significant population in the border area. We should continue to reject Chinese claims even while seeking an early settlement. At the same time we must strengthen our border defences and capabilities, so that we are able to effectively foil any aggressive moves by China on our borders. Having said that, we should welcome the fact that the India-China border has remained peaceful over the past four decades.

As far as trade is concerned, enhancing the competitiveness of Indian goods and services, developing a modern infrastructure, and improving trade practices and support facilities will be the keys to confront the Chinese challenge. India's relations with other countries is not really a factor.

Compared to trade and immigration, there is greater convergence over counterterrorism and security between India and the U.S. Yet, India's concerns on Pakistani involvement in terrorism seems to not be getting the necessary support from Beijing, and surprisingly from Moscow.

Since the Mumbai terrorist attack in 2008, India-U.S. cooperation on counterterrorism has expanded significantly and has contributed to

the security of both countries. Such cooperation is likely to continue and even expand under the Trump presidency. To the extent that Mr. Trump considers jihad terrorism a threat which needs a robust response, this is positive because it also puts pressure on countries like Pakistan. Some recent measures announced by Pakistan, including the arrest of the Lashkar-e-Taiba chief, Hafiz Saeed, are a response to the likelihood of Pakistan being targeted on the issue of terrorism. While this is welcome, we will have to tackle crossborder terrorism on our own. It cannot be outsourced to the U.S. or any other country. India has garnered support from the international community on the issue of terrorism and no country needs convincing that Pakistan is the breeding ground of terrorism. China, in fact, has isolated itself, and its credibility as a partner in the war against international terrorism has taken a dent as a result of its brazen move to prevent the inclusion of JeM chief Masood Azhar in the UN terrorists list. This is a blow to China's credibility, not India's.

Russia has not joined Chinese efforts to shield Pakistan. It has, however, changed its position on the Afghan Taliban and has joined China in initiating peace negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government. There is no reason for India to object to this. However, it is true that Russia has recently improved relations with Pakistan and entered into a military hardware relationship with it for the first time in several decades. This is a matter of concern for India and should be clearly conveyed to our Russian friends. Our response should be to enhance our engagement with Russia rather than react by limiting it.

The full interview is available on www.thehindu.com

SINGLE FILE

Not so accessible after all

The government's own documents are not accessible to persons with disabilities

PARUL GHOSH



Irony: a state of affairs or an event that seems deliberately contrary to what one expects and is often wryly amusing as a result.

Now that we have the definition of irony established, let me explain how that connects with the disability rights movement.

But first, a little context. A landmark year for the movement was 2015-16. A fight that was decades in the making went from a murmur to a resounding roar that echoed through the chambers of Parliament. And that roar led to the passing of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Bill, 2016. From only seven recognised disabilities in the previous archaic Act of 1995 to 21 disabilities now, the new law is a true game changer that provides provisions that will benefit many. This isn't just a piece of legislation that is the politically correct thing to say. It is the real deal which takes into account real issues like accessibility to infrastructure, technology and information.

We also saw the launch of the Accessible India Campaign (Sugamya Bharat Abhiyan) by the Department of Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities (DEPwD) in 2015, and it was welcomed for its spirit and intention. The campaign has a heavy focus on not just accessibility to physical infrastructure, but also on Information and Communication Technologies – which is the elephant in the room we need to address.

As per the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, 2016: "The appropriate Government shall take steps to ensure that all their public documents are in accessible formats." The Accessible India Campaign itself has a separate objective and its own targets on enhancing the proportion of accessible and usable public documents. From all the other provisions laid out in the law and the campaign, this needs a special mention since more often than not, people with disabilities miss out on information to do with their own lives because of lack of accessibility.

Attitudinal barriers

And there's the connect. The irony. Recently, the DEPwD drafted the rules of the new law which have now been made available to the public for comments. The 74-page-long comprehensive document will be scrutinised by many, but not by those whose lives these rules directly impact. It's ironic that the rules, a public document on the department's website, are not published in an accessible format to those whose roar made this happen.

I have put out opinion pieces, both in long form and those of the 140-character variety. And I have been a part of the Accessible India Campaign and the department. I chose to play that role to understand the dynamic of the government instead of simply pointing fingers and playing the blame game.

And what did I learn? Attitudinal barriers are here to stay. Formulating an ambitious campaign is a wonderful idea, but what about the barriers within the walls of the system? Change cannot come about if it does not first begin at home. And publishing the rules of the Accessible India Campaign without making them accessible is just ironic in a tragic way.

Parul Ghosh is a disability rights professional



CONCEPTUAL

Simpson's Paradox/Statistics

First described by British civil servant Edward Simpson in 1951, it is also referred to as the Simpson-Yule Paradox or the reversal paradox. The starkest examples emerge in medical statistics where an aggregate of samples may show a trend that is the opposite of when those samples are broken into subgroups. For psephologists, Simpson's Paradox could explain why the Muslim vote, Yadav vote and Other Backward Classes vote may individually suggest trends that are different from the Uttar Pradesh Assembly election verdict.

MORE ON THE WEB

The last of Tabei's guerrilla fighters
http://bit.ly/DalaiLamaEscape

NOTEBOOK

That one phone call

Sometimes reporting can result in lifelong relationships

RAMYA KANNAN

When the phone rings, it could mean many things for a journalist. At best, a story; at worst, a PR pitch. But sometimes, it's also the beginning of a lifelong relationship.

In May 2013, on the day the Class XII State Board examination results were announced, a doctor friend called asking if the newspaper would be interested in a story about a young girl with cancer who had scored high marks. She felt if someone wrote about the girl, people would be moved to contribute to help with her treatment, as her family could not afford it. At that point, the story was only lukewarm interesting, and the girl's score was not that high at 81%. I decided to call anyway.

Lakshmi Priya was a revelation. She had heard of her result when she was undergoing chemotherapy, and she asked if it was okay if could we just speak over the phone. She had

been diagnosed with acute myeloid leukaemia and could not go to school. Her father Velu interjected with the mild, respectful tone I've come to associate with him since: "But she was studying all the time she was in hospital. Even when we would ask her to rest, she'd refuse."

A Dalit, Velu had struggled to give his daughters Lakshmi Priya and Lavanya the education he had a mere introduction to. The diagnosis came like a bolt from the blue for the family which was trying to keep it together with Velu's monthly salary of ₹14,000. Gradually funds poured in and the transplantation took place. Velu called from time to time, to share information about her small milestones, the doctor's remarks, his joy, and to seek reassurance: "All will be well, no Madam? She is everything to me."

Lakshmi Priya died on August 26, 2013. I knew because Velu called, his

voice heavy with tears. He called again later to say there were funds remaining in her account and that he was writing a cheque for a girl with cancer. He'd call every now and then: when Lavanya cleared her Class X examination with flying colours, his wife Sumathi's sorrow, on Lakshmi Priya's birthdays, even when he said he could not take it any more. I would listen and sometimes say things that could not matter much. Over one conversation, he said he had saved money for Lavanya's higher studies, but if she got through admission on merit, he was willing to give that money to some other deserving student or patient. Could I recommend someone?

Lavanya is writing her final school exam and I'm expecting a call from Velu any time saying the same thing he always does: "Madam, are you fine? So happy you picked my call." No Sir, I'm so glad you called.

FROM THE HINDU ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO MARCH 15, 1967

Vigorous procurement of grain in Madras

Mr. C.N. Annadurai, Chief Minister, said here [Madras] to-day [March 14] that in the present food situation in the State, the Government was not emboldened to lift controls altogether. At the end of a day-long conference with District Collectors on the food situation, the Chief Minister told Pressmen that Government would implement the procurement programme effectively. He hoped the food situation would improve in another two years, and enable Government to lift the controls.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MARCH 15, 1917

Mr. Kipling in Lahore

A pleasant informal little ceremony took place at the offices of the "Civil and Military Gazette" on Monday afternoon (March 13, Lahore) when Sir Michael O'Dwyer unveiled the bronze tablet commemorating Rudyard Kipling's connection with the "Gazette". The tablet which was designed by Mr. Sullivan, architect to the Punjab Government, and executed at the Mayo School of Art, under the direction of Mr. Heath, bears the simple inscription "Rudyard Kipling Worked Here 1882-1887." It has been erected by the Punjab Government and, it is believed, the first of a series which will be placed on various buildings in Lahore to commemorate the work of distinguished men of the Punjab.

His Honour in unveiling the tablet said that he was there not as the Lieutenant Governor but as one of the few men remaining in the Punjab who had known Mr. Kipling in his earlier days.

DATA POINT

Giving it up too soon

A look at student suicides over the last two decades shows a peak in 2015 with 6.7% of overall suicides. 'Failure in examinations' remains a major reason for student suicides

