

A victory, but hold the bubbly

The Jadhav case verdict will hit India-Pakistan relations badly

India's gambit of approaching the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in the Kulbhushan Jadhav case has paid off. Passing interim orders, the court has directed Pakistan to ensure that Mr Jadhav — accused and convicted of spying and subversive activities — is not executed till the case is finally decided. From here on, it would take a year of more for the court to conclusively decide the issues raised by India. The order is historic. This is because the last time in 1999, when the two countries went to the world court over shooting of a Pakistani military plane by India — the International Court of Justice said that it had no authority to decide the case. But 18 years on, the International Court of Justice in changed circumstances has come to a different conclusion.

For India, this International Court of Justice verdict is a victory. India has not only saved its citizen from the gallows but also its image of not being the meddlesome actor in Balochistan in Pakistan. Mr Jadhav was allegedly arrested from Balochistan. There's a flip side to the story too. After this ruling, nothing stops Pakistan in future from approaching the world court for consular access for Pakistan terrorists arrested by the Indian security forces. And if read with the world court's dismissal of Pakistan's argument that Vienna Convention on Consular Relations doesn't apply to people suspected of terrorism, there are implications for India.

For Pakistan, this verdict could trigger fresh round of bickering between the Nawaz Sharif government and the military. While the military establishment wants to send Mr Jadhav to the gallows, the civilian government is under an international obligation to protect him till the case is finally decided. This verdict also poses a serious challenge for the already strained India-Pakistan relations. The ruling may have come in India's favour but there's a gap that this order does not address. On the core issue of granting consular access to Mr Jadhav, the court is silent and in the days to come the only comfort for him will be that he will not be hanged soon.

Chipping away at the sense of entitlement

The steep fines on those clinging on to State housing could end this practice

It was a step which was long overdue. The Union Cabinet has cleared amendments to the Public Premises (Eviction of Unauthorised Occupants) Act to ensure that our parliamentarians and bureaucrats don't use their clout to flout accommodation norms. The amendments will ensure that ministers, Members of Parliament and bureaucrats do not continue to overstay their welcome in government bungalows even after their term is over. They'll also have to pay steep penalties. Nobody overstaying beyond five months, for instance, will have to pay a fine of ₹10 lakh.

At present, a former minister can hold on to official accommodation for a month after demitting office. Once the stipulated time to vacate the house is over, the urban development ministry takes about two months to begin eviction proceedings. This gave ample time to squatters to get a stay and stall eviction. Around the world, in most democracies, the concept of official accommodation, except for the president or prime minister, is unheard of. In India, on the other hand, not only do politicians and bureaucrats take this perk for granted, they also shamelessly squat on official accommodation long after eviction notices are served. Last year, a Right to Information reply revealed that as many as 60 parliamentarians owed close to ₹1 crore as rental charges for overstaying in government accommodation long after leaving office.

Since it assumed power in May 2014, the Modi government has evicted about 1,500 officials and MPs. It is a departure from earlier regimes that chose to ignore the transgressions of VIPs holding on to prime real estate in Lutyens' Delhi. Although moves such as banning the red beacon on politicians' vehicles and evicting netas are mostly symbolic, they go a long way in sending out the signal that the government is gradually doing away with the culture of undue perks and privileges for VIPs.

Blame the West for China's OBOR

New Delhi must step up efforts to counter Beijing's economic and geopolitical clout



ARUN K SINGH

Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, and initiation of Chinese economic reforms in 1979, two approaches have characterised western, particularly the US, strategy towards Russia and China. Some attempts were made in the early 1990s to build a closer relationship with Russia, particularly when it was under Boris Yeltsin. In 1997, Russia joined the G7. Earlier, in 1994, it had joined the Nato's Partnership for Peace programme. Russia, however, was seen as a vanquished power in the context of the Cold War. Beginning in 1999, Nato was expanded to the east to include several former Warsaw pact and Soviet space countries, despite Russia's objections.

This Nato-enabled expansion of the European Union further contributed to Russia being pushed back from its earlier areas of influence. The differences over Russia's perception of its own role and areas of influence, and the European/US acceptance, led inter alia to crises in Georgia (over Ossetia and Abkhazia in 2008), and more recently in Ukraine/Crimea. Russia's membership of G8 was suspended in 2014. In contrast to the

attempt to push back Russia, the western approach has been to facilitate and accommodate the rise of China. In 1971, Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger effected an opening to China as a check on the Soviet Union in the global balance of power. Since 1979, western corporate interests pursued economic interests and profits. The strategy projected was to "integrate China in the international mainstream" and within the framework, rules and norms of the "liberal international economic order" pursued, without any countervailing influence, since 1991.

China's inevitable challenges to these norms have not generated any effective western response. The US has not done anything meaningful in response to Chinese construction activities in South China Sea. It has refused to take a position on ownership, but merely asserted its right of "freedom of navigation" through international waters, and occasionally carried out carefully orchestrated operations to this end.

Similarly, there was no effective response when China announced in 2008, soon after conclusion of the US-India civil nuclear cooperation agreement, that it would supply two additional nuclear power plants to Pakistan without seeking any waiver from the Nuclear Suppliers Group. The US has also encouraged China to get more actively involved in Afghanistan economically, and in the reconciliation process with the Taliban. Many hope to see in the 'China-Pakistan economic corridor' some potential of contributing to economic stabilisation in Pakistan,



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping, Beijing GETTY

to the detriment of extremism.

During his presidential campaign, Donald Trump claimed he would take immediate action against Chinese trade imbalances and currency practices. Instead, following his meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping in April, a 100-day plan was announced to resolve trade-related frictions. The joint press release saw China repeat some of its earlier commitments on imports of beef, biotechnology products, and access to credit rating agencies and credit card companies.

In return, the US agreed to consider China for LNG export authorisations, welcome Chi-

nese investment, treat Chinese banks on par with other foreign banks and recognise "the importance of China's One Belt and One Road Initiative" and to send delegates to attend the Belt and Road Forum.

Earlier the US had stayed away from the China-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. The two sides also agreed to begin discussing a one year plan "to further solidify actions in promoting US-China economic engagement and cooperation". China has also been repeatedly described by Trump as important in addressing the North Korean nuclear and missile challenge.

Thus, India faces a dilemma on many fronts. One of the anchors of India's foreign policy, Russia, has been pushed into a closer engagement with China because of its difficult relations with the West. President Vladimir Putin was a leading presence at the Belt and Road Forum. European countries, faced with stagnant economies, will look for potential economic opportunity. Countries in south and southeast Asia and Africa are also short of capital, and will find it difficult to resist surplus Chinese capital, even though it has proven to carry heavy baggage in terms of debt and lack of transparency.

India will no doubt have to further step up its diplomatic and economic engagement, particularly through more effective implementation, while avoiding unnecessary competition in areas where it does not have strengths.

In the US, India must deepen further its outreach to the US Congress, think tanks, business and leverage the Indian-origin diaspora.

Arun K Singh is former ambassador to the United States
The views expressed are personal

GENE JUNCTION



A farmer protests against genetically modified mustard crop, New Delhi, October 25 REUTERS

In the quest for GM crops, don't endanger health

If the Centre decides to commercialise modified food, it has to consult all stakeholders — from scientists to farmers



POONAM PANDEY

DMH 11 (Dhara Mustard Hybrid) is the Genetically Modified (GM) version of Mustard that was recently given a nod for commercial cultivation in India by the apex transgenic products regulatory body of the government. DMH 11 is produced by an Indian government institution and said to be commercialised by an Indian company; thus addressing the concerns of farmers of a corporate capture of agriculture. The variety has two main functions that could be attributed to its genetic modification. The first is it makes hybridisation for mustard easier, since mustard is a self-pollinated plant and it is not easy to produce hybrids for mustard. Second, it has a gene that provides the plant with herbicide tolerance.

There are several concerns about what it would mean to approve the first genetically modified food crop in India. Till now, Bt cotton, a non-food crop, has been the only GM crop cultivated in India. Similar attempts were made in 2009 to commercially release Bt brinjal, but were stalled by a moratorium in 2010. Scientists have made claims about the increased productivity of GM mustard, but these claims are not fully supported by avail-

able scientific data. On the contrary, civil society organisations have claimed that given the right inputs, some local varieties can produce the same yield with lower farm costs. In the case of GM mustard, just like in the case of Bt cotton (an insecticide tolerant crop), bringing in a herbicide tolerant crop would increase the tendency of farmers to spray chemicals on the crops and jeopardizing their own health as well as that of water bodies, flora and fauna.

Scientists suggest that there should be rules to regulate herbicide spray, which means farmers could be penalised or jailed for excessive spraying of chemicals. A similar attempt has been made for farmers who burn agricultural residues. I met some of these farmers while conducting research, and found that criminalising farmers in this way has a huge negative impact on their dignity and self-esteem rather than changing the practice in any considerable way.

The mandates of the Bt brinjal consultation were to develop institutional structures and capacity to ensure safety to environmental and human health, farmers' and consumers' rights and inclusive decision making for GM crops. Not a single attempt has been made in this direction after the Bt brinjal consultation. It remains to be seen whether the government decides on the commercialisation of GM mustard on the basis of half-baked scientific facts and expectations or engages all stakeholders in a more inclusive and democratic manner.

Poonam Pandey is postdoctoral fellow, Maastricht University Science Technology and Society Program
The views expressed are personal

BJP is trying to snatch the Sena's Marathi plank

The renaming of railway stations and temples fits in well with the saffron party's Hindutva agenda



SIDHARTH BHATIA

In March 1996, the name of the imposing headquarters of the Central Railway in Mumbai was changed from Victoria Terminus to Chhatrapati Shivaji Terminus. The colonial name, it was decided, had to go and in its place came in the Maratha hero's. Recently, the Centre gave its clearance to a proposal by the state government to rename it again — now it will be called the Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj Terminus. Delhi also gave its nod for the renaming of Elphinstone Road railway station in Mumbai to Prabhadevi.

Politicians now and then get afflicted by the enthusiasm to change names. After independence, streets and neighbourhoods were stripped of names given by the Raj to honour grandees and even small, local officials.

The demand to rename Bombay to Mumbai was pending for a long time, but it was the ever-accommodating Narasimha Rao who finally said yes. Since then, Bangalore and Calcutta have turned into Bengaluru and Kolkata, both words commonly used in local languages — Madras, which was an entire presidency during the Raj, became Chennai in 1996.

But what the politician proposes is not always what the populace practices. Connaught Place still continues to be called by its old name and in Mumbai, asking a cabbie to take you to Gopalrao Deshmukh Marg will get you blank looks, though Pedder Road, the older name, will work instantly.

At one time, the emphasis was to revert to 'native' names. Now, it is not merely to remove the vestiges of the past but also to impose names that fit an agenda, however ludicrous it may be. Aurangzeb, the Mughal everyone loves to hate, gave way to APJ Abdul Kalam in a swift move.

AT ONE LEVEL, THE IMPULSE OF POLITICIANS TO DO AWAY WITH COLONIAL NAMES IS UNDERSTANDABLE, BUT TO DO IT INDISCRIMINATELY IS SHORT SIGHTED. WE CAN'T WISH AWAY THE PAST

In Mumbai, this pandering has reached ludicrous levels. The BJP is demanding changes not just of railway stations named after colonial officials but in other instances where the names are evocative of local history.

Take Marine Lines, a station on the western railway suburban network that got its name from the nearby Marine Battalion Lines which now belongs to the Indian Air Force. A BJP leader wants it named Mumbadevi, after a temple located quite a distance away.

Temples seem to be foremost on the minds of those who want names changed. Elphinstone Road, named after Lord John Elphinstone (Governor of Bombay 1853-1860) after Prabhadevi, a temple that is nowhere near the station. If at all it had to be dedicated to something relevant, the government should have thought of naming it Girangaon (mill village) in honour of the mill workers who lived and worked in the area and whose hard work built modern Bombay.

The BJP in Mumbai is doing everything it can to snatch away the Marathi manoo plank from the Shiv Sena. It has appropriated Shivaji, an icon that has been part of the Sena lore for 50 years, the insertion of 'Maharaj' in the railway terminus name was not a Sena demand. At the same time, the constant invocation of temples — a brand new station has been called Ram Mandir — fits in well with the party's stated Hindutva agenda.

Where will this lead to? The possibilities are limitless. There is no dearth of Moghul (and other Muslim rulers') names all over the country. Ditto British colonials. At the same time, there are temples and deities galore and mythical legends of the hoary past. Less than two years ago M Venkiah Naidu suggested that Delhi could be renamed as Indraprastha or Hastinapur — it is casual airings like this that eventually become policy. Ahmedabad to Karnavati too is an idea that has been floating around for a long time. In Maharashtra, Ahmednagar and Aurangabad could be prime candidates for a name change.

At one level, the impulse to do away with colonial names is understandable, but to do it indiscriminately is short sighted. We can't wish away the past. Besides, many of the officials contributed to the development of the towns and cities where they worked. And how far does this go back? Are we going to rename the Taj Mahal because it was built by Shah Jahan, who, according to the Sangh way of thinking, was an invader?

Sidharth Bhatia is a senior journalist
The views expressed are personal

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DON'T BE SAD, BE THANKFUL FOR WHAT YOU HAVE

Amisha Batra

We all have those days when we are filled with negativity. Recently, I happened to have one of those days where I found nothing good about life, and was disheartened.

I was also comparing my life to others around me. As I delved deeper into self-pity, I randomly flicked through videos on social media. One of the first videos on a video channel I saw was: 'How to never give up'. As I pressed the play button, I sat motionless for the next five minutes, with

tears rolling down my eyes. The man in the video was born with phocomelia, a rare disorder characterised by the absence of legs and arms.

Despite his physical condition, he took charge of his life and chased his dreams. This man exemplifies living life to the fullest even in the throes of adversity and facing the storms in your life, with a cheery smile. He is an inspiration to thousands of people who feel disheartened, or are unhappy because they do not have the things that they desire.

Seeing the video, I realised that in our race after our desires and meet deadlines, we forget to be thankful for the innumerable blessings in our lives.

Therefore, the next time when the shadow of negativity looms over you, just remember to spare a minute to count your blessings and whisper a silent prayer of 'Thank You'.

(Inn Voice comprises contributions from our readers. The views expressed are personal)
innvoice@hindustantimes.com