

Expect political cloudbursts

Two crucial elections will top the monsoon session's agenda

Parliament's monsoon session, which starts today, will be significant both for debate on burning issues and elections to high constitutional offices. In the month-long sitting, it will witness change of guard in the presidency and the office of the vice-president.

The Houses summoned by Pranab Mukherjee, the outgoing president, will be prorogued — after adjourning sine die — by his successor. The new president and vice-president are to be sworn in on July 25 and August 11 respectively while Parliament is still in session.

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The president is Parliament's integral part as its head. In that capacity, Mr Mukherjee, whose term ends on July 25, will deliver his farewell address in the Central Hall a couple of days before demitting office. His last address to the nation will be broadcast on July 24. NDA nominee Ram Nath Kovind's election as president against the Opposition's Meira Kumar is almost a foregone conclusion, the ruling combine at the Centre having overwhelming numbers in the electoral-college. The outcome is unlikely to be different for the V-P's office held for a decade by Hamid Ansari who retires on August 11. The ruling combine hasn't yet named its vice-presidential nominee but the Opposition has fielded former governor Gopalkrishna Gandhi. Regardless of the outcome, the session of the council of states will be adjourned sine die by the new V-P's who is also its chairperson. Amid the elections, a host of issues could engage Parliament's attention besides the treasury's legislative business. Foremost among them are: The India-China faceoff, the Kashmir crisis, beef vigilantism, the Darjeeling ferment; and, the agrarian crisis.

The all-party meeting on the Doklam standoff on the eve of the session was aimed perhaps at giving diplomacy a chance — besides forging a national consensus on the tricky issue. The initiative has been well-received and will have a sobering impact on a parliamentary debate if the Opposition insists on it. But sparks are likely to fly on the situation in the Kashmir valley — including the lynching of a police officer in Srinagar — and cow vigilantism and farmers protests in BJP-ruled states. In sum, the monsoon session will have its share of political cloudbursts.

After NGT order, it can't be business as usual

The PM's Namami Gange project will be in jeopardy if UP fails to get its act right

Last week, the National Green Tribunal (NGT) declared an area of 100 metres from the edge of Ganga between Haridwar (Uttarakhand) and Unnao (Uttar Pradesh) as a no-development zone. It also prohibited dumping of waste within 500 metres from the river. The observation was part of a raft of measures that a six-member NGT bench headed by Justice Swatanter Kumar, listed in a 543-page judgment on a petition by environmentalist MC Mehta. Sending out a signal that it won't be lenient with polluters any longer, the NGT also declared a fine of ₹50,000 on anyone who dumps waste in the Ganga and said the UP government is "duty-bound" to shift tanneries from Jajmau to Unnao or any other place it considers appropriate within six weeks.

Indicting the callous manner in which public money is being spent, the bench noted that "even after spending ₹7,304.64 crore up to March by the Centre, state government and local authorities of the state of UP" the status of the Ganga has "not improved in terms of quality or otherwise and it continues to be a serious environmental issue". This is a damning indictment of the authorities involved in restoring/rejuvenating the river. However, as environmentalist Manoj Misra said in a recent tweet, mere pollution control is not rejuvenation. Much more needs to be done. The Centre has allotted ₹2,000 crore for the Namami Gange project to clean up the river. Now the onus of ensuring that the polluting tanneries abide by the norms is with the state.

For years, lax implementation has meant the government hasn't been able to restrain factories and people from polluting the Ganga. Ensuring that this happens won't be easy. But now with same party ruling the Centre and state, there should be better coordination. If the state is unable to do so, then it will be failing to execute a pet project of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

straightforward

SHASHI SHEKHAR



Hindustaniyat will defeat terror

Rather than indulging in needless criticism, allow the government to do its job in Kashmir

Extreme darkness is always followed by light, or so goes an old saying. Even today, amid all that bloodbath in Kashmir, some people are hoping for a ray of light. They are not wrong.

Let me begin with talking about Sandeep Sharma — aka Aadil. Born in Muzaffargarh, Uttar Pradesh, Sandeep was a welder by profession. Work opportunities took him to Kashmir. Here he met members of the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT). They were planning to use his skill to rob ATMs. Sandeep considered it an easier option rather than spoiling his eyes in the searing heat while working as a welder. Around the same time he met a Kashmiri girl. They got married and he converted to Islam. The possibility cannot be ruled out that the LeT hatched this conspiracy to mislead Hindu boys from western Uttar Pradesh.

Can those fighting with the so-called 'love jihad' sense a new challenge here? They'll now have to keep a close watch not just on the girls but the boys as well.

Sandeep's story isn't a crime thriller full of twists and turns. If the LeT militants are using 'non-believers' to break into ATMs, it can be interpreted in a number of ways. Is a shortage of cash compelling them to rob

banks? When their separatist movement was dying down, militants in Punjab had adopted similar tactics to make a fast buck. That was the beginning of their downfall.

If you remember, I had mentioned Dehradun's Danish Ahmed four weeks ago in this column. He had come in contact with militants through social media. He had affirmed that in the garb of militants certain people were busy extorting money and creating the impression of being macho. Sandeep's story appears to be the next episode of the same story. This is because till now the militants described themselves as mujahideen. They used to justify bloodshed in the name of jihad. Their attempt was to make the issue of Kashmir's independence synonymous with Islam so that the unity and sovereignty of India could be challenged by internationalising regional dissent.

There was a time when it was perceived that most personnel of Kashmir police sympathised with the separatist cause. But the manner in which the Jammu and Kashmir police personnel have recently come under attack has unleashed a wave of anger and sorrow across the state. "Is this the azaadi we were fighting for?" asked the sister-in-law of Ayub Pandith, who was killed outside the Jamia mosque. A few days before that



■ A protester at a rally against the attack on pilgrims in J&K, New Delhi

the barbaric manner in which the bodies of six policemen from the Kashmir Police were mutilated also raises the question whether it is a holy war (jihad) or terrorism foisted upon us in the name of jihad?

This is where the role of politicians in Kashmir comes to the fore. Mehbooba Mufti may say with a heavy heart that the murder of seven Amarnath yatra pilgrims has brought shame upon Kashmiriyat, but she has to sow the seeds of such emotions in the hearts of common people. Are the ministers,

MLAs, leaders and activists of the PDP in a position to confidently ask the people on the street to boycott those spreading terror in the name of Kashmiriyat? Why doesn't she seek the cooperation of the National Conference and other regional parties for the sake of peace in Kashmir? Why doesn't Mehbooba request spiritual organisations and religious leaders at mosques not to issue statements in the favour of terrorists and speak about the well-being of Kashmir? History is looking at Mehbooba Mufti with curiosity. Her failure won't just be the failure of a leader, but the failure of an entire political system.

Here I have a hope from people in the rest of the nation. Even my heart is crying over what happened to the Amarnath yatra pilgrims. But instead of spreading sensation or self-destructing rumours, let us keep our faith in the system. You have good reason to do this. At the Centre, apart from a government armed with a majority, we have a national security adviser of the calibre of Ajit Doval. He has spent more than five decades of his life fighting terrorism and separatist forces. Rather than indulging in needless criticism and pontification, let us allow him to do his work.

We have to keep believing that in the ultimate analysis, Hindustaniyat will triumph over imported terror. This is what our 5,000-year-old history teaches us.

Shashi Shekhar is editor in chief, Hindustan Times. letters@hindustantimes.com

STAND TOGETHER



■ Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Hangzhou, China September 4, 2016

Why India and China must learn to coexist in peace

They'll fail to provide better opportunities to their citizens and also give the West a chance to continue its hegemony



GULSHAN SACHDEVA

The military stand-off at Doklam will test effectiveness of changing foreign policy orientation in both India and China. As both President Xi and Prime Minister Narendra Modi would like to be portrayed as strong leaders, neither side is likely to back down from the standoff in a hurry. The behaviour of both big powers is going to shape the evolving Asian economic and security architecture.

Indirect Chinese reference during Modi's US visit and Indian decision to boycott Belt and Road Initiative gathering seems to have annoyed Chinese authorities. Similarly, Chinese objections to Indian entry into the NSG as well as blocking Indian move to ban Masood Azhar in the UN have made New Delhi suspicious of Chinese intentions. The nationalistic rhetoric fuelled by media from both sides has created a situation, in which Doklam has become more than a 'normal border incident'. The entry of a new actor, Bhutan, into this game has made things further complicated and to some extent unpredictable.

Most European powers are not comfortable with the rise of China. However, they are unable to do much. How to manage China's rise was left to the US. The 'pivot to Asia' or

rebalancing initiated by the Obama administration is over. The current policy muddle in the US will benefit China. The South China Sea dispute is opportunity for the West to put pressure on China. An extended India-China standoff would provide another chance for them to pinprick China without getting involved in a serious manner. The vice-president of the European Parliament Ryszard Czarnecki has asserted that "Chinese action in the Doklam plateau can be seen as a part of the country's recent tendency to unilaterally change the ground situation in areas that are disputed". The US so far has avoided commenting on the standoff.

The all-party meeting on the standoff has rightly stressed on diplomatic engagement. Enhanced engagement and understanding is required not just for Doklam but also for broader strategic issues and economic projects. Some serious issues are involved in projects like China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Still, there is an ample scope of coordinating Chinese BRI with our own initiatives like INSTC Chabahar port or Asia-Africa Growth Corridor etc. Beyond geopolitical moves, all these projects offer tremendous developmental opportunities for citizens in participating countries. With cooperation and coordination both India and China can make 21st century a truly Asian century.

Other wise conflicting Asian powers will offer opportunities for the West to continue its hegemony for some more decades.

Gulshan Sachdeva is director, Europe Area Studies Programme, JNU

The views expressed are personal

India's coastline is as vulnerable as ever

We are safe more because of the shifting priorities of our enemies, than any big improvement in security



A.JAI SAHNI

A Russian yacht recently entered Indian waters without authorisation and, undetected, dropped anchor barely 500 metres from the shore near a location no less prominent than the Gateway of India in Mumbai. Till this point, it had escaped security scrutiny. This is eight and a half years after the 26/11 attacks, which were initiated after infiltration from the sea, and after coastal security was declared to be one of India's highest counter-terrorism priorities.

The 390-tonne US-owned Seaman Guard Ohio, operated undetected as an illegal anti-piracy 'floating armoury' in Indian waters for 45 days, prior to its detention off Tuticorin on the Tamil Nadu coastline on October 12, 2013, while illicitly refuelling on subsidised diesel.

In 2011, three massive vessels drifted into Mumbai, unnoticed by the multiple layers of security purportedly established after 26/11. They included the container ship MV Wisdom, which drifted onto Juhu Beach that June; the MV Pavit, a month later, which ran aground at roughly the same location. That August, MV Rak, carrying 60,000 metric tonnes of coal and 340 tonnes of fuel oil, sank 20 nautical miles off Mumbai, causing a major oil spill.

These may appear to be occasional aberrations — but so was 26/11. These incredible incidents demonstrate that existing coastal security systems lack the capacities to detect and respond to a breach by relatively massive vessels, leave alone the detection and neutralisation of a terrorist infiltration on a small fishing boat.

While we may take consolation in the fact that there have been no subsequent attacks from the sea since 2008, the sobering reality is that our vulnerabilities remain undiminished, despite proclamations of improvements and hundreds of crores spent.

A six-year Coastal Security Scheme (Phase 1) was implemented between 2005

AMONG A RANGE OF GLARING LACUNAE IN INDIA'S COASTAL SECURITY, THE GREATEST IS THE ABSENCE OF A COMPREHENSIVE SYSTEM FOR IDENTIFYING ALL VESSELS THAT ENTER INDIAN WATERS

and 2011 at a total cost of ₹646 crore, to establish a network of coastal police stations, check posts and outposts, backed by an array of interceptor boats and motor vehicles, as well as a range of other equipment. A second phase, originally intended for completion in 2016, with a sanctioned outlay of ₹1,579 crore, remains substantially incomplete.

Over the three years between 2014 and 2017, the total expenditure on strengthening coastal security totalled a paltry ₹110.73 crore, and some of this money has been poorly spent. An October 2016 Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) report noted that in Odisha "as against patrolling of at least 81,000 hours during 2012-15 as per norm, the actual patrolling hours were only 2,805 hours (3.46 %). The shortfall in patrolling hours ranged from 93.43 to 99.44 %." In Maharashtra in late 2016, of 19 projected coastal police stations, work was just to start on seven; of 2,134 personnel appointed there, just 916 had been trained by the Coast Guard as intended, and 57 % of the total could not swim; of 61 functional boats available, 34 did not have GPS devices; and, of 426 bulletproof jackets required, 170 were available.

Several institutional changes have been brought about to improve coordination and intelligence, including a three-tiered security mechanism under the coordination of the Indian Navy, and a specialised desk in the Intelligence Bureau to handle maritime intelligence. A biometric identity card scheme for fishermen and a colour coding scheme for their boats has been partly implemented, with glaring deficits. A coastal surveillance system of 74 automatic identification system (AIS) receivers and 46 radars is due to be expanded to plug remaining gaps.

Among a range of glaring lacunae, the greatest is the absence of a comprehensive system for identifying all vessels in Indian waters. The AIS is only effective if every such vessel is fitted with a transponder. At present, a notification has been issued for all vessels above 20 metres to be fitted with transponders, and has been partially implemented. There is no provision for vessels below this length — which constitute a majority of all boats in coastal waters at any point of time, and would be the likely transport to be used by terrorists.

Governments continue to congratulate themselves on the 'comparatively better' coastal security as a result of their erratic efforts, but the reality is, we are safe more because of the shifting priorities and calculus of our enemies, than because of any dramatic reduction in our vulnerabilities.

Ajai Sahni is executive director, Institute for Conflict Management. The views expressed are personal



COMMITMENT LEADS TO ACTION AND ACTIONS BRING YOUR DREAM CLOSER

Shivani Aggarwal

The turning point in your life comes when you seize the moment and convert it into an opportunity to alter your destiny.

Reaching to a particular elucidation without escape brings commitment in life. Commitment creates a mental picture, which immediately works to achieve the preferred result. Commitment works when we refuse to quit — when we are willing to do something, then several prospects come in our way. These opportunities give us

ways to achieve success in whatever we want to. Doors will unexpectedly open for us.

The quality of a person's life is in direct proportion to their commitment to excellence, regardless of their chosen field of endeavour. Anyone can transform a dream into reality by making a commitment to it. Commitment leads to action and action brings your dream closer. When our state of mind is clear towards our vision and we know exactly what we want, then the only requirement is full determination — not

quitting till we find our destination.

But remember that on this path to success, not everything would be rosy. We will make mistakes. Failure could be one of the setbacks which will insist us to give-up. But it's important not to lose faith in oneself. In such times, remember the commitment you began with. Sooner or later, you will triumph.

(Innervoice comprises contributions from our readers. The views expressed are personal)

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