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The playing field is wide open

Women's cricket in India breaks the glass ceiling at last

A cricket final is guaranteed to generate more than a frisson of excitement among aficionados in India — our men in blue are always the cynosure of all eyes. But what is heartening this time is that it is our women who have stormed their way to the World Cup final at Lord's, who are the subject of feverish interest as they take on England tomorrow. And with this, women's cricket in India has crossed a boundary that has not been breached before — public interest that almost matches that when the men take **ourtake** to the field. With this, attitudes are bound to change.

For years, women's cricket was treated with a certain amount of condescension. No endorsements, no publicity, it was not even considered elegant enough to watch for long periods. No longer. As captain Mithali Raj tersely said when asked who her favourite men's cricketer was, "Do you ask the same question to a male cricketer? Do you ask them who their favourite female cricketer is?" Well, they will now irrespective of the outcome of the match at Lord's. The remarkable fact is that women's cricket has blazed such a trail in India despite overwhelming odds in terms of lack of institutional support, corporate sponsorships and public interest. So far, it was seen as a very poor cousin to men's cricket much as many other sports are. So much so, that captain Virat Kohli while congratulating Mithali on becoming first women cricketer to reach 6,000 runs in one-day games did not even identify her correctly. The meteoric rise of the women's team demonstrates an extraordinary perseverance and commitment. It cannot have been easy to keep at the game and improve quite so much in an atmosphere of indifference. The positive from this is that women's cricket is now firmly established and opens the doors to younger players who may have hesitated in taking up the sport so far.

While it will be a long time before women's cricket enjoys the near cult status that the men's game does, it will now be taken as a serious sport, one which can be a career option for many young women. With the trend of talent coming from the hinterland, this throws up opportunities for young women across the country, especially from small towns and villages. We are not there yet, but the very fact that Mithali's 11 will open their innings at the mecca of cricket tomorrow suggests that a level playing field is not far off.

bigdeal

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ANIRUDH BHATTACHARYYA

China is building a great wall of silence in the US

As Aadhaar becomes the norm in India, and gets skewered for the involuntary nature of its imposition, our northern neighbours, as is their wont, want to do a number that will make this appear benign. That's the proposed 'social credit', which the non-profit Freedom House, in its latest report, describes as a regime that "would connect each citizen's financial, social, political, and legal data to produce a single numerical rating of his or her behaviour and

trustworthiness." Fittingly, it's coordinated by the Orwellian-sounding Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reforms. This reality contrasts with the alternate vision seen by some in recent months of China occupying a central place in the world as Donald Trump's America withdraws into itself.

That the Chinese machinery has managed to further such propaganda is no surprise. As China unveiled a monumental \$200 million new embassy building in Washing-

ton in 2010, it was a symbolic and in-your-face marker of its outsize ambitions. It employs lobbyists across the K Street corridor of the Beltway, including some dedicated to image-making for its ambassador. American companies with manufacturing bases in China are force multipliers for Beijing, while inroads into American academia and media add to its influence. China has ventured capital into Silicon Valley. Its investments into Hollywood, for instance, have made support for Tibet within the film community nearly non-existent.

Those are credible reasons why voices once raised over China's actions, in Tibet or Xinjiang, have been muted to whispers, of the sort that country's netizens have to resort to in questioning the regime, since even Winnie the Pooh can be blacklisted by the Chinese checkers for bearing an alleged resemblance to President Xi Jinping. Money can talk but, even better, it can buy silence.

As a result, the death by negligence of Nobel laureate Liu Xiaobo attracts bromides from the White House. As China watcher Jocelyn Ford poignantly noted in an article for Asia Society, this summer as

Liu was essentially condemned to death, the World Economic Forum had its annual summer meeting in China. Despite its tagline "committed to improving the state of the world", she wrote, it "self-censors on issues that China may take as an affront." Beijing uses its support for a globalism, for example the Paris climate agreement, as it segues into its practical and tactical agenda.

Yet another Nobel, the Dalai Lama, meanwhile, once had to exit the Obama White House via the back, walking out amidst ranks of garbage bags. While the human rights industrial complex hums along nicely in the democratic world, it confronts a barrier in the Great Wall of China.

The world, led by the United States, has vacated the moral space in challenging China. And that has allowed Beijing to, literally, push the boundaries of its megalomania. India's vaunted soft power projection may have its votaries, but the Chinese velvet glove has punched its way into the heavy-weight category.

Anirudh Bhattacharyya is a Toronto-based commentator on American affairs. The views expressed are personal.

comment

Doklam issue: India must be ready to give China a real bloody nose

Beijing is currently waging full-throttle psychological warfare over Doklam to tame India

BRAHMA CHELLANEY



The current troop standoff with China at Doklam offers India important lessons that go far beyond the Chinese intrusion into this Bhutanese plateau.

Unless India grasps the long-term threat posed by an increasingly muscular China and responds with an appropriate counter-strategy, it is sure to confront much bigger problems than Doklam. Unfortunately, institutional memory in India tends to be short, with a mindset of immediacy blurring the bigger picture.

For example, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti's recent statement that China is "meddling" in her state was seen as signifying a new trend. In truth, China — occupying a fifth of the original princely state of J&K and now enlarging its strategic footprint in Pakistan-occupied J&K — has long been playing the Kashmir card against India. In 2010 it honed that card by aggressively adopting a stapled-visa policy for J&K residents.

To mount pressure, Beijing has tacitly questioned India's sovereignty over the 45% of J&K under Indian control and officially shortened the length of the Himalayan border it shares with India by purging the 1,597-kilometre line separating Indian J&K from Chinese-held J&K.

China's Kashmir interference will only increase as a result of its so-called economic corridor through Pakistan-held J&K, where Chinese military presence is growing, including near Pakistan's ceasefire line with India. India now faces Chinese troops

on both flanks of its portion of J&K.

China, which fomented the Naga and Mizo insurgencies, taught its "all weather" client Pakistan how to wage proxy war against India. China still fans flames in India's northeast. For example, Paresh Barua, the long-time fugitive commander-in-chief of ULFA, has been traced to Rullii, in China's Yunnan province.

Some other Indian insurgent leaders have been ensconced in Myanmar's Yunnan-bordering region controlled by the China-backed Kachin Independence Army. This newspaper reported in 2015 that Chinese intelligence played "an active role" in assisting nine northeast Indian insurgent groups to form a united front.

The illicit flow of Chinese arms to India, including to Maoists, was confirmed by Home Secretary G.K. Pillai in 2010. Meanwhile, the deepening China-Pakistan nexus presents India with a two-front theatre in the event of a war with either country.

China's strategy is to subdue India by attacking its weak points, striking where it is unprepared, and hampering its rise to the extent possible. As part of this strategy, it is waging a multipronged unconventional war without firing a single shot. It is closing in on India from multiple flanks, extending from Nepal to the Indian Ocean.

Sixty-six years after gobbling up buffer Tibet and mounting a Himalayan threat, China — with the world's fastest-growing submarine fleet — is opening a threat from the seas against India.

Its recently opened naval base in Djibouti, at the Indian Ocean's north-western edge, constitutes just a first step in its game plan to dominate the region.

For India, whose energy and strategic infrastructure is concentrated along a vulnerable, 7,600-kilometre coastline, this represents a tectonic shift in its threat calculus.



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Add to the picture China's economic warfare to undermine India's strength in various ways, including stifling its manufacturing capability through large-scale dumping of goods. Artificially low prices of Chinese products also translate into India losing billions of dollars yearly in customs duties and tax revenue.

Portentously, China, including Hong Kong, made up 22% of India's imports in 2015, with the US just at 5% and Japan at 2%.

Yet India has yet to fully shed its policy blinkers. As India repeats the same old platitudes about conciliation and cooperation, China is making clear that there cannot be "two Suns in the sky" — or, as a Chinese idiom goes, "one mountain cannot accommodate two tigers". With its rekindled, atavistic nationalism, China plainly wants to be Asia's sole tiger.

Beijing is currently waging full-throttle psychological warfare over Doklam to tame India. Deception and mendacity are its tools.

If India gives in, it will endure strategic subordination and ignominy forever.

Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj's excellent rebuttal in Parliament of Chinese disinformation begs the question: Why has India been so slow in countering Beijing's propaganda war?

New Delhi must play psychological hardball: Instead of appearing zealous for talks, it should insist that China first withdraw both its troops and preconditions, while leaving Beijing in no doubt that India will hold its ground, come what may. If India is to stop China's creeping, covert encroachments and secure Himalayan peace, it must be ready to give Beijing a real bloody nose if it escalates the standoff to a conflict. Humiliating China even in a localised military engagement, in 1967 style, is vital to help destabilise its expansionist regime.

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WORKINGCLASS

How to make government officers more efficient

India faces severe staff shortages in critical public service functions like education and health, among others

VISHNU PADMANABHAN

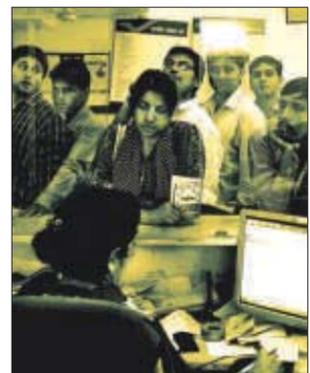


Last month, the UN celebrated its annual Public Service Day highlighting the importance of public servants for development and recognising the work of public servants across the world. It is easy to see why competent public service matters and especially in India — because whether it is a teacher neglecting their duty (one study in India revealed that 24% of teachers are absent on any given day) or corrupt field staff diverting funds into their own pockets (by one estimate, as much as 36% of India's public distribution system does not reach the intended recipients), inefficient workers can cripple the delivery of well-intentioned public services and even harm the poor.

The natural place to start is the selection of public officials delivering public services. India faces severe staff shortages in critical public service functions like education and health. One report last year estimated a shortage of one million government school teachers while India's doctor-patient ratio of 1:1,674

is below the WHO norm of 1:1,000. A major reason for these shortages is limited budgets — creating additional roles is expensive especially since government jobs pay significantly more than their private sector counterparts. This higher pay combined with unparalleled job security also means that government jobs are heavily oversubscribed. Yet the higher salaries and larger candidate pool may not translate to better productivity in all cases. For example, evidence from an evaluation conducted by researchers affiliated with the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) in Andhra Pradesh revealed that contract teachers are as effective as public teachers and less likely to be absent. These research insights ask us to explore alternatives to adding on more government employees, like contractors or apprentices, to fill the shortfall, with effective workers and without burdening the exchequer. Another possibility is screening for traditional government roles can be changed. There is evidence to suggest that 'pro-social' traits like empathy and openness could be better predictors of performance than a candidate's qualifications.

After selection, the major challenge is ensuring that workers remain motivated and perform. An effective incentive (or disincentive) is one way to do this. Incentives could take two forms: output-based (like rewarding teachers for improving student learning out-



The major challenge is in ensuring that government workers remain motivated and perform well.

comes) or input-based (rewards or punishment based on an input like attendance). For instance, performance-linked pay in schools in Andhra Pradesh improved learning outcomes as teachers exerted more effort in classrooms. However experiments with incentives for absenteeism have been less conclusive. A new attendance-recording system for health centres in Rajasthan worked initially but enforcement gradually weakened. Any incentive system hinges on implementation and follow-up; otherwise behaviour can revert to the status quo, as it did in Rajasthan.

Typical government departments are characterised by rigid bureaucracies and inflexible budgets, which make implementing incentives and changing a status quo difficult. In this environment of inertia, where even the intrinsically motivated can lose enthusiasm, driving change may require more innovative solutions. For instance, the World Bank is

experimenting with a values-based leadership approach with water departments in Tamil Nadu, where trained facilitators lead officials through a series of intensive, day-long group sessions to engage in open dialogue and introspection. At the end of the workshops, officials are re-energised, rediscover their motivation for public service and establish connections with fellow-entrepreneurial public officials to drive improved performance. While this is in the process of being evaluated, ideas like these could improve worker productivity without disrupting existing institutions and entrenched interests.

Finally, technology can improve service delivery by supplementing government officials' work and obviating opportunities for corruption. In India, biometric authentication in program delivery significantly reduced corruption in Andhra Pradesh by ensuring the right beneficiaries received the right benefits. Similarly an electronic fund-flow reform in Bihar, which directly transferred money from state to field level officers decreased corruption and improved program efficiency. Implementation of any new technology has technical, logistical and political challenges — that can be overcome by pushing for policy reforms based on evidence from approaches that have been found effective.

In sum, the productivity of government workers is a major public management problem that can be addressed by simultaneously improving the recruitment and selection of public officials; enforcing incentives to reward performance or finding other ways to motivate staff; and leveraging technology to streamline delivery. The existing evidence have given us some ideas on how to do some of this but more research is needed. Ultimately public personnel reform requires changing a deep-rooted status quo — this needs strong political will along with the willingness to continuously test and evaluate ideas.

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Make time for dear ones and show true love. You will feel wonderful



Yamini Sinha

We often come across situations where we fail to accept indifference from people we love. Thanks to fast-growing technology, the world is changing. Gone are the days when everyone had time on their hands to spend with family, friends and relatives.

The virtual world has replaced real life and its pleasures. A formal exchange of emojis and virtual hugs is what most of us resort to. Heartache and break-ups are common, and don't seem to be too big a deal anymore. Because everything hap-

pens with the click of a button — you can unfollow, delete or even block people!

I have always felt that unconditional love is something that very few of us are actually aware of. It has the power to change things and situations. I don't say that we should simply accept everything, but one mustn't let indifference and hatred deteriorate his or her self-worth.

Expectations are the root cause of heartache. When you see a mother care for her child, you see selfless, unconditional love. Why can't that be true for all relationships? If you feel true love for someone, let it guide you to a brighter tomorrow where your heart will meet enlightenment, and beautiful things will surely happen to you. Believe this and see its wonder!

Inner Voice comprises contributions from our readers. The views expressed are personal.