

# How To Forestall State Repression

State authority must be on routine display

The state has monopoly over the use of force in a civilised polity. The greater the degree of social acceptance of this norm, the less the actual deployment of force by the state. That acceptance, in turn, depends on the state's credibility in enforcing the rule of law in pursuit of a just society. That authority and the respect that flow from the state's role as the keeper and enforcer of social justice must be made manifest all the time. Unfortunately, the conduct of the Indian state falls far short of this ideal, on many counts. The result is that when an occasion arises when there is no alternative to exercising the authority of the state to overcome violent resistance to it, the state is compelled to use force on a large scale. What happened in the wake of the head of a religious cult in Haryana being found guilty of rape must be understood in this perspective.

India harbours, in its cities, ghettos where the police dare not enter. Religious and quasi-religious places are deemed beyond the reach of the state, both by sections of civil society and by the state itself.



This must change. No place of worship or some other religious pursuit should be outside the reach of routine policing. When Sant Bhindranwale made the holiest shrine of the Sikhs, the Golden Temple, into a den of terrorists, the accumulated debility of for-gone policing finally resulted in the unfortunate Operation Blue Star. A similar logic was at play in Pakistani security forces' assault on Lal Masjid in 2007. Dera Sacha Sauda and other such cult headquarters function as independent enclaves beyond the reach of the Indian state. They should not.

No temple, monastery, mosque, church, seminary, gurudwara or dera should be beyond the reach of the routine policing that must serve all public places. To abdicate this responsibility in the name of religious sentiments is to lay the ground for extreme repression at some point of time. The government must take all political parties into confidence to arrive at such a consensus, even as recriminations for short-term political gains, par for the course, go on.

# Neighbour's Solidarity Is Rival's Envy

Nepalese Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba's promise not to allow his country to be used for any activity against its "friendly" neighbour is welcome indeed, in the backdrop of the standoff with China at Doklam. It illustrates the need for New Delhi to refocus its energies on strengthening its relations in the neighbourhood.

Having established itself as an economic power, China is focused on acquiring proportionate geopolitical power. Changes in US foreign policy aid these ambitions. China's attempt to cultivate Pakistan as a client state, especially useful in trying to tie India down to South Asia, creates direct friction with New Delhi. India must sustain efforts to build mutually beneficial partnerships with countries in the region and beyond. In terms of sheer economic capacity, India cannot compete with China. However, unlike China, India is not mercantilist, making New Delhi a better partner. For its part, India needs to improve its delivery to be seen as a reliable partner. New Delhi may not have Beijing's cheque book but it can work together with countries like Japan to counter China's economic advantage. The EXIM bank needs to be empowered as well to give India an investment edge. India can gain through focus, on the one hand, on challenges that developing countries struggle with, such as climate change, besides perennial ones such as education, healthcare and adoption of new technologies and skills, and, on the other, with historical and cultural ties.



The range of discussions and agreements signed during Deuba's visit indicates that the government understands the importance of strong relations in South Asia. Under the Neighbourhood First policy, it has taken proactive steps in strengthening its partnerships in region. New Delhi must stay the course.

Couch potatoes will welcome the idea of exercising without moving a muscle

# No Sweat, Exercise Pills Are On the Way

It is very heartening that the prime minister has pointed out in his latest Mann Ki Baat that playing fields are more important than playstations — though Sony may not agree — as exercise is indeed necessary for couch potato generations. Having well-toned fingers and thumbs are no substitute for a fit body with strong limbs. However, the PM's exhortations may be stymied by the supposedly imminent creation of a so-called exercise pill. The very idea that the benefits of physical activity can be availed of by the mere ingestion of a tablet is sure to excite those who prefer virtual to real anyway. But it may be still too early to mothball running shoes and put away racquets, bats and balls, as researchers in Britain have only just figured out what switches on our exercise response.

A protein called Piezo1 in our arteries detects increased pressure of blood flow from the heart caused by exercise and constricts vessels so that more is routed to the brain and muscles than the stomach. And scientists are now experimenting with a compound named Yoda 1 to 'force' Piezo1 to do the needful, without the actual exertions of exercise. Of course, even they admit any such pill cannot actually be a substitute for exercise; it will but merely act as an effect magnifier. But lazybones will now have more reason to take it easy, in anticipation.

China and India have a lot to lose in an open conflict. They need some kind of competitive cooperation

# It Takes Two to Untangle



Ajay Chhibber

The Chinese Ambassador to the US, Hu Shih, once said, "India conquered and dominated China culturally for 20 centuries without ever having to send a single soldier across her border." But more than half a century after the 1962 war, China is positioning to send its troops across the border in Doklam. While China-India economic and financial relations have grown considerably, border issues remain unresolved. They may even have worsened as a muscular China asserts its version of sovereignty in the Himalayas, the South China Sea and the East China Sea.

Both China and India have a lot to lose in an open conflict. India needs to keep its focus on economic development as it tries to double its economy from \$2.5 trillion to \$5 trillion before 2030. China has grown to over \$10 trillion, but is now looking outward with its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and needs a cooperative India. An open conflict could also coalesce many countries with concerns over China's growing assertiveness, fuelled by growing nationalism at home.

Trade between India and China has grown hugely. It was barely \$2 billion in 2001-02. In 2015-16, it exceeded \$70 billion. But a huge trade imbalance of almost \$50 billion in favour of China reflects India's lack of competitiveness and, to some extent, passive trade and wrong exchange rate policies.

The rupee has appreciated by 15-20% over the last decade in real terms. India's exports to China, mostly raw materials, have been declining since 2010-11 as the Chinese economy slowed down. But Chinese exports into India — mostly manufactures and heavy equipment — have increased rapidly and exceed \$60 billion. This is small potatoes for China, whose global exports are around \$2,300 billion. But with India poised to grow rapidly, it could be shut out of a lucrative market.

## Chinese FDI

Chinese investment in India remains very small. The total Chinese FDI into India is under \$2 billion, according to official figures, but could be over \$4 billion if investments through indirect routes, such as Hong Kong, are included. India's FDI into China is under \$1 billion.

One way to reduce the trade imbalance would be to get more Chinese firms to invest and manufacture in India. This would also support the 'Make in India' campaign. But distrust and political issues keep Chinese investments down. Case in point: India recently rejected a Chinese investment of \$1.3 billion in Gland Pharma.

India and China have seen selective cooperation on international issues. India joined the \$100-billion Chinese-led Asia Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB) as the second-largest shareholder. India and China are also equal shareholders of the Shanghai-based \$50-billion BRICS Bank and a \$100-billion contingency reserve arrangement (CRA). India recently joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), a gathering of China, Russia and Central Asian countries.

But India has not formally joined the BRI, objecting to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which has investments in Pakistan-



If they can break naan in Beijing...

occupied Kashmir (PoK), and is also wary of the Maritime Silk Road with ports in the Indian Ocean ('String of Pearls') which could be used to encircle India. Nevertheless, India has given positive signals on the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) road corridor that links Kolkata to Kunming through Bangladesh and Myanmar.

China faces huge internal adjustments as it tries to rebalance its economy. Its debt-GDP ratio has grown dangerously rapidly from around 150% of GDP in 2008 to around 280% today, as it expanded credit to keep its economy growing in the face of slower export growth. It now takes eight units of credit to generate one unit of GDP, according to the IMF. But this investment credit-led recovery has created enormous excess capacity.

The BRI, with heavy investment in infrastructure links, is seen as a way to utilise some of this excess capacity. But it has huge risks for China and recipient countries as it could create white elephants. Many see it less as an economic project and more a geo-strategic move.

## Slowing Economy

India's economy has slowed down, as it has been unable to carry out second-

generation reforms in labour and land. The problem of growing non-performing assets has slowed down investment. A bungled demonetisation has also hurt growth. A new goods and services tax (GST) law gave some hope, but a complicated structure and likely implementation problems have reduced its potential benefits.

India recently slapped an anti-dumping import duty on 93 Chinese imports, mostly in the steel sector. It is considering further restrictions in telecom and power. These are seen by some as a sign of an impending trade war between China and India. Shril nationalist posturing could become a downward spiral, which would hurt both sides.

India must somehow manage an aggressive China without an open conflict, just as Japan and Taiwan keep economic links growing despite contentious issues with China.

China must also learn from Ambassador Hu that in the long run it could win big in India without soldiers, money and knowhow. Some form of competitive cooperation is the way forward for both.

The writer is former UN Assistant Secretary General for Asia and the Pacific

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**WIT & WISDOM**

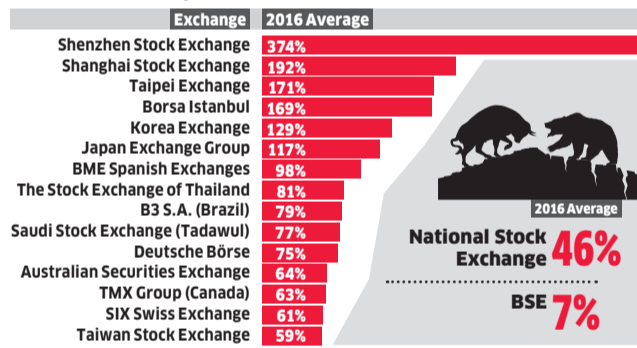
"Knowledge will give you power, but character respect."

Bruce Lee  
Martial Artist

## Liquid Markets

Here is another way to look at stock exchanges — by finding out their turnover velocity. This indicator — which gives a sense of the market's liquidity — is simply the ratio of traded turnover to market capitalisation. It shows the breadth and depth of a market. Weighed on this scale, India's stock exchanges are way behind their global peers.

### Turnover velocity of domestic shares (Top 15 & Indian exchanges)



Note: Turnover velocity is the ratio of electronic order book (EOB) turnover of domestic shares traded divided by their market capitalisation. The value is annualised by multiplying the monthly average by 12, according to the following formula: (monthly EOB domestic shares traded / month-end domestic market capitalisation) x 12.

## MEME'S THE WORD



## NEUTRON TO NYLON

# Following Cult Followings



Debkumar Mitra

In April 1993, the town of Waco in Texas was in the news worldwide. David Koresh, the leader of the Branch Davidians cult, was holding on to a 51-day FBI siege of a ranch that he and his followers called their home. It ended in a bloody conflict with more than 70 dead. Nearly 25 years on, Panchkula, near Chandigarh, evoked the same memories when thousands of supporters of the Dera Sacha Sauda cult leader, Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh, went on a rampage after their leader was sent to prison on charges of rape.

Psychologists have been studying the phenomenon of cults, their leaders and followers for a while. The accepted definition of a cult is a group of people who come together under a charismatic leader who joins them together on a common ideological platform. In this sense, from Bolsheviks to Dera Sacha Sauda supporters, are all members of cults. But why are some so destructive?

Science believes that the destructiveness of a cult is a function — in the mathematical sense — of its leader's personality. Primarily male, these individuals identify their victims, or followers, and first use their charms to make the latter believe in his path of truth or glory. When the charisma starts fading, several coercive techniques, including mass rape of women in the ranks, violence and blackmailing are used to put pressure on the followers to remain inside the cult.

Koresh has been known to rape minors in his commune. The unnamed letters written by 'sadhvis' that formed the basis of the case against Gurmeet Ram Rahim point to the same.

The initiation process of getting into a cult may not seem a radical move to the families of the victims. Often the pattern of manipulation is subtle and nuanced. Psychologists have observed cases where former cult members did not even remember what special qualities attracted them to be a part of the 'gang'. The issue here is not camouflaging, but creating a situation where the victim does not even realise what lies ahead if they became a member of the cult.

Cult leaders often manipulate emotions to forge relationships, which they later dominate. And there is no shortage of buyers for anything, however ridiculous what is being peddled may sound to some. As showman PT Burnum once famously said, "There's a sucker born every minute." Religion is the commonly used manipulative measure to net cult members.

The same is true for arcane, poverty alleviating economic theories, outlandish science as a saviour of mankind, and free sex — all these have been used in the past to create destructive cults. If one looks closely at the lifestyle and the films of Ram Rahim, the self-fashioned 'guru of bling', they may appear to be ostentatious to say the least. However, that did not deter

thousands to be a part of his dera. There is a huge sense of entitlement among cult leaders. Like sociopaths, these people crave attention and adoration. Most of the time they cover it well (remember Asaram Bapu, the other godman, accused of rape) while presenting themselves as the most enlightened among the sufferers who has it in himself to lead humankind out of this morass. This often works magic among followers resulting in mass hysteria.

In most cults, there is an inner core group handpicked by the leader himself. Researchers say irrespective of the nature of the cult, the core group has all the power and looks after the emotional, financial, and even the sexual needs of the leader. These people manipulate members to serve the purposes of their power-crazy, know-it-all leader.

According to psychologist Margaret Singer, cults are born and flourish during periods of social and political change and "during breakdowns in the structure and rules of the prevailing society". The fear of the unknown drives people to look for individuals who can give them 'support' and 'lead them to light'. Researchers have been able to link the rise in the number of cults with epochal changes in history, such as the fall of ancient Rome, the Industrial Revolution, the two World Wars and the turbulent 1960s.

Reason always seems to take a backseat when the crisis of the individual accelerates. These are the times when Ram Rahim and Koresh appear to 'save the world'. In India, with a large illiterate, superstitious and poor population, the crisis is omnipresent. It is little wonder that cults are born here every day. The unfortunate bit is the political patronage that lets babas and dera chiefs to become alternate centres of power. While it is difficult to change human behaviour, the agencies of law can at least protect innocent people, including cult members, from exploitation and violence.



Not just on the sleeve

## Citings

# Learning Is Never Static

ROMILA THAPAR

It is fashionable these days to quote from the texts of the Vedic culture when speaking of access to knowledge. So let me follow the fashion. It is stated in the Upanishads and the Brahmanas on more than one occasion, that among the most-respected rishis and scholars of that time were those who are described as dasiputrah, those that were the sons of the lowly dasis. They either had the required knowledge or were searching for it. Such little nuggets of information provide insights into the values not only of education but also of society. They also remind us of the centrality of ethics to a worthwhile society. If we have for various reasons moved away from this centrality, as it would seem these days, then we need to return to it.

The meaning of education has never been restricted only to the gathering of information. Its purpose is also to advance knowledge and to teach students how to do so. Students are taught to understand and assess existing knowledge, by questioning it, to think critically when enquiring into it and through this process advance knowledge. Learning is not learning if it remains static. The process of thought that asks questions and seeks answers has an ancient ancestry but the questions change as knowledge changes. It is a process that remains embedded in the mind once it is taught, whether one chooses to use it in later life or not.

Extract from Romila Thapar's speech accepting the honoris causa, from Presidency University, Kolkata, on August 18, 2017



# Be Happy On The Way

VN MITTAL

Your entire energy and concentration gets dissipated if you are not consciously aware of your focus. Focus is a fundamental aspect of volition. Focus helps us deepen our spiritual experiences, bringing about deep awareness, leading to new life-giving connection to spirituality. One is enabled to work through religious and spiritual issues. It is for this reason that the practice of meditation emphasises on focusing on an object or God. When we focus thus, we automatically and instantly attain a meditative state. The Bhagwad Gita talks of focus in relation to action; to perform karma without anticipating the result.

The best way to focus is to operate with the realisation that the present moment is all you have. Remember, your focus determines your reality. If you wake up and try to focus on what a wonderful gift your life is, you will have a great day. "All that we are is the result of what we have thought" says the Buddha.

Often, even when goals are realised, we are not happy. Story goes that a person was trying to climb to the top of a mountain when his friend with a helicopter appeared. He tried to persuade his friend to hop into the helicopter to cut short the journey but the climber declined. Because happiness is not only in reaching the top but also in the adventure of undertaking the journey to reach the goal that seems to leave a permanent sense of accomplishment on your mind. Hence, focus on the journey rather than on the destination. Be happy on the way.

## Chat Room

# Focus On Social Uplift

The mob violence in Haryana on Friday following the conviction of Dera Sacha Sauda chief Gurmeet Ram Rahim Singh is condemnable. Politicians must stop seeking political support through so-called godmen. Judiciary has done a commendable job to uphold the rule of law. The rational way to uplift the lives of gullible people is to them provide proper education to emancipate their minds. Here, the government plays a huge role. The vision of a New India will succeed only when the country is rid of such debilities.

PARTHASARATHY SEN  
New Delhi

# Cheer Right to Privacy

The Supreme Court's unanimous verdict declaring the right to privacy as a fundamental right of every citizen is not just victory of our Constitution but victory of democracy as well. The right to privacy

is intrinsic to the rights to life and liberty. Hopefully, the judgment will put an end to every organisation asking for

one's Aadhaar number. The government should come up with a mechanism that secures Aadhaar details, and ensures that these are used only for programmes that either benefit citizens or end corruption.

SN KABRA  
Mumbai

# Talaq Ignorance & Exploitation

The Supreme Court judgment in the triple talaq case brings relief to Muslim women. The judgment is an embarrassment to the Muslim clerics who till now were misleading and exploiting women who are ignorant about their religion. What should have come from within the community had to be done by the court. It would be appropriate if the ways and reasons for a talaq and the maintenance clause are clearly mentioned in the nikah-nama, in case the worst step of talaq has to be taken.

SYED ABDUL MONIM  
Vashi (Maharashtra)

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