

# 11 EXPLAINED

## Understanding the debate around 'compassionate capitalism'

Narayana Murthy's constant battle for 'democratisation of wealth' reached a flashpoint last week. The debate on corporate salaries, which has raged for long in both India and the West, is complex.



**IN FACT**  
BY SHAJI VIKRAMAN

EXPRESS EDITORS INTERPRET

SOME YEARS ago, as the West debated unconscionably high executive salaries and compensation, the fabled investor Warren Buffett observed that the way to get fatcat corporates to change was to embarrass them. Infosys founder and Chairman Emeritus NR Narayana Murthy may not have had exactly Buffett's solution in mind — but his skirmishes with the company's management and board over what he saw as sliding corporate governance standards has probably had, in the exit of CEO Vishal Sikka, exactly the effect that Buffett predicted.

Since Sikka made his announcement on August 18, a wider debate has raged over whether a founder who has stepped down and is not a dominant shareholder, ought to indulge in the kind of public campaign that NRN mounted — rather than making an unambiguous choice between total detachment and committing himself to addressing Infy's challenges as part of the board. The debate

has also touched on issues of conformity to a company's core cultural values and ethos.

Murthy has flagged the issue of distributive justice in corporate India — the widening gap between the top earners and the bulk of those lower down, especially at a time when the economy is slowing. On COO Pravin Rao's high salary, he said this April, "I have always felt that every senior management person of an Indian corporation has to show self-restraint in his or her compensation and perquisites. He or she has to fight for maintaining a reasonable ratio between the lowest salary and the highest salary. In a poor country like India, the board has to create a climate of opinion for such a fairness through their actions. This is necessary if we have to make compassionate capitalism acceptable to a majority of Indians who are poor."

Beginning 1994, Murthy's ideal of the "democratisation of wealth" saw practical manifestation in the granting of stock to company staff down to the level of drivers, and went on to contribute to a culture of donations from personal wealth by all the founders of the company.

But the idea of self-restraint has not often sat comfortably with the new generation of professionals. The environment is far more competitive now, it is argued, and to attract global talent, you need to pay top dollar. That

would seem a fair point for a company that operates and competes globally — software services, for instance — but not so much in the financial services sector. And yet, compensation for the top deck has continued to soar higher above the company median in some of India's celebrated private banks — at least one of which, interestingly, had an Infy-like culture of granting stock until some years ago.

Proxy advisory firms such as IiAS red-flagged governance practices at Larsen & Toubro, whose executive directors, they said, issued stock options at face value from a couple of subsidiaries before these firms were to go public. There is also the case of a company whose promoters — husband and wife — individually take home among the largest pay packets in the country, besides dividend payouts and capital appreciation. And the National Stock Exchange (NSE) of India Ltd was in a controversy regarding payouts to top executives.

The counter-argument, of course, is that these practices are not illegal, and have the sanction of the board of directors and shareholders. But what the case of Infosys underlines is not merely ethical behaviour — which, many argue, is bound to show in operational practices — but also the role of compensation committees. In his annual letter to shareholders in 2006, Buffett made the point that compensation reform will only occur if the largest

institutional shareholders demand a fresh look at the system. In India, the largest shareholder is LIC, which is owned by the government.

Regulators in India have been careful not to intervene — even though the central bank has, in the past, shot down proposals from private and foreign banks to offer sign-on bonuses and parachutes designed to protect bosses who are fired. To return to Buffett — he once observed that politicians respond only when the public is outraged. This has happened in the West to an extent — with economists like Thomas Piketty mapping the growing levels of inequality.

In his recent book, *Adults in the Room*, Yanis Varoufakis, who was the Finance Minister of Greece when the country was negotiating with creditors after defaulting on loans, refers to a conversation he had with Larry Summers, economist and former US Treasury Secretary. Summers told Varoufakis that there was a kind of politician — the "outsider" — who may have prioritised the freedom to speak his version of the truth, but who, as a result, was ignored by the "insider" who made the important decisions. "The insiders follow a sacrosanct rule: never turn against other insiders and never talk to outsiders about what insiders say or do."

Summers asked Varoufakis which of the two kinds he was. That's the question shareholders — especially institutional shareholders — must put to those on the boards and the compensation and audit committees of many Indian firms.

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### SUGGESTED READING

■ *Adults in the Room: My Battle with Europe's Deep Establishment*, by Yanis Varoufakis

## Today: Up above the world so high, seeing rare solar eclipse from nigh

THE GULFSTREAM V jet pictured alongside has tracked thunderstorms, blizzards and hurricanes around the world. On August 21, it will soar about 45,000 feet into the sky in pursuit of a natural phenomenon unlike any it's faced before: a total solar eclipse.

Scientists led by Louis Lussier, research aircraft project manager at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Broomfield, Colorado, hope to use their fleeting moments beneath the moon's shadow to grab data about the Sun that cannot be collected from the ground. It's one of numerous experiments being conducted across the US by scientists who see the Great American Eclipse as an unprecedented opportunity to deepen understanding of the Sun as well as Earth's atmosphere.

The flight of the specialised jet will occur as astronomers simultaneously observe the Sun's corona from the ground and citizen scientists snap pictures and collect sounds.

"There's never been an event like this in human history, where so many people can participate and with such unique technology," Carrie E Black, associate programme director for the foundation's division of atmospheric and geospace sciences, said during a gathering of astrophysicists in Boulder, Colorado, last month. "This is being treated as a natural laboratory."

She expects millions of people will watch the eclipse, many of whom might collect images she said will be analysed for years to come. That deluge of data from both professional astronomers and amateurs might one day help scientists with forecasting eruptive solar ejections, or "space weather", detrimental to communication satellites and power grids.

This is the first time that the modified



Gulfstream V, which carries sensors and equipment for atmospheric research, will study space. The camera will be looking up at the Sun through a specially made 6-by-9-inch porthole on top of the plane. From their eye in the sky, the researchers will experience totality, the point at which the Moon completely blocks the Sun, for about four minutes, while those below will see about 2 1/2 minutes.

The scientists will use the extra time, and a large device known as a spectrometer, to observe the Sun's corona, the sheath of plasma surrounding our star. The corona is visible from Earth only during a total solar eclipse, and scientists use the

phenomenon to study its properties.

Because of several technological advances in the past few decades, this eclipse offers scientists the chance to observe the corona in the infrared spectrum, which may reveal insight into the sun's magnetic fields. The data could help answer a long-standing puzzle: Why does the corona burn at millions of degrees Fahrenheit, much hotter than the sun's surface?

The Gulfstream V will not be the only jet chasing the total solar eclipse. Two WB-57F aircraft operated by NASA and outfitted with nose-mounted high-tech telescopes will take off from Houston and fly over Missouri, Illinois

**On August 21, a total solar eclipse will crawl across the continental US for the first time in nearly a century. Totality will start around 1.15 pm EDT in Oregon (10.45 pm IST), and finish its path in South Carolina around 2.49 pm EDT (12.20 am IST Tuesday). NASA will stream the event live.**

The Gulfstream V aircraft at the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Colorado.

Nick Cote/The New York Times

and Tennessee, each chasing about 3 1/2 minutes of totality. The cameras aboard the planes will take high-definition images of the Sun 30 times per second.

While the planes set their sights on the sun, plenty of scientists on the ground will be focusing on the Earth during the eclipse. One area of particular interest is the ionosphere, a region in the upper atmosphere that is home to the International Space Station and through which signals pass from communications and Global Positioning System satellites that billions of people rely on. The eclipse will provide an opportunity for researchers to investigate how the ionosphere reacts to cosmic disturbances.

THE NEW YORK TIMES

### GREAT AMERICAN ECLIPSE

## How car attacks are changing city life's mental geography

When even one of the commonest machines of mundane living becomes a deadly weapon, it hits the hope that terror attacks can be predicted or controlled

AMANDA TAUB  
THE INTERPRETER

THIS TIME it was Barcelona. An ordinary van was transformed into a deadly and indiscriminate weapon.

It was yet another blow to trust in a basic social compact: that people are essentially safe when they walk down the street, relying on drivers to at least try to follow the rules. That accidents would be impersonal and random, and that everyone would try to avoid them.

Automotive terrorist attacks are a warning that a driver can wield the ordinary car as a weapon. If anything — even something as ubiquitous as a car — can be a weapon, that adds a sense of menace to daily life.

Years of research have found that fear can



Las Ramblas, Barcelona, where the attacker struck on August 17. Reuters File

divide and poison societies, hardening people against perceived outsiders, even causing them to abandon key values. This kind of attack, using one of the most ordinary objects of daily life, could heighten that effect.

Political scientists Marc Hetherington and Elizabeth Suhay have found that when people who are usually open and trusting toward

outsiders feel they are at risk of a terrorist attack, they become more likely to support harsh, authoritarian policies and more willing to sacrifice civil liberties in exchange for perceived safety. ("Authoritarianism, Threat, and Americans' Support for the War on Terror", *American Journal of Political Science*, April 2011)

Terrorist attacks are designed to draw

### CAR ATTACKS OVER THE LAST YEAR

2017

**BARCELONA, AUG 17:** A man drove a van into pedestrians; 13 killed, 50 injured

**CHARLOTTESVILLE, AUG 12:** 'White supremacist' James Alex Fields drove into counterprotesters; 1 killed, 19 injured

**PARIS, AUG 9:** Man drove BMW into a soldiers on patrol in suburb of Levallois-Perret; 3 seriously injured

**LONDON, JUNE 19:** Darren Osborne drove van into worshippers outside Finsbury Park Mosque; 1 killed, 10 injured

**LONDON, JUNE 3:** Three men drove a van into pedestrians on London Bridge, got off, stabbed people in Borough Market; total 8 killed, dozens injured

public attention and force us to make a mental calculation: Could this happen to me or someone I love? Is there a way I can stay safe? What would it take to protect me?

After 9/11, many avoided flying. People who worked in small, anonymous offices could comfort themselves that only buildings as high-profile as the World Trade Center or



### SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

Both mens' rights & alt-right movements "appeal to men with fantasies of violent, sometimes apocalyptic redemption."

SPLC (@SPLCENTER), 251,000 followers, quoting blogger @DavidFutrelle's post on @TheCut. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), an American nonprofit legal advocacy organisation founded in 1971, combats hate, intolerance and discrimination.



On Xinhua propaganda video, "India's seven sins"

## Gruff warnings and a funny video: reading mixed Doklam signals in the Chinese media



**BEYOND THE NEWS**  
BY JYOTI MALHOTRA

EXPRESS EDITORS INTERPRET

AS INDIAN and Chinese troops entered their third month of being eyeball-to-eyeball at the Doklam trijunction, Twitter users around the world — except in China, where Twitter is banned — were late last week treated to a video on the Chinese state news agency Xinhua that mostly triggered mirth rather than resentment.

In heavily accented English, a Chinese anchor discussed India's "seven sins", a mixture of Sesame Street and foreign policy, and told India it had broken the law by trespassing into "undisputed" Chinese territory. "Didn't your mama tell you never to break the law?" she asked.

The attempt at humour, that too in a foreign language, was highly unusual. Over the last two months, the Chinese media has vigorously protested the Indian resistance to its attempt to transform the character of the territory in Doklam. In August alone, some 125 articles have been written on the Indian "trespass", "hijacking a small neighbour", and a so-called Bhutanese acknowledgement to China that Doklam actually belongs to China.

Never mind the Bhutanese foreign office publicly reiterated the request to respect the status quo around this "disputed" territory.

Certainly, the Communist Party of China (CPC) takes its media seriously. As it celebrates 96 years of its existence with a party congress in October, the CPC Central Committee's powerful propaganda department issues advisories thrice a day, telling the media what's fit to print. In August 2013, Document No. 9 declared that "the power of leading the press and media is always controlled by the hands of those who are at one with the Central Committee of the Party with Comrade Xi Jinping as its general secretary."

All card-carrying comrades must, in fact, carefully read Quishi, the Central Committee organ that issues the daily line.

On August 17, Quishi's English-language website carried a surprisingly mild Xinhua commentary, saying, "As a Chinese saying goes, a good neighbour is better than a distant brother. China of course has no desire to enter into a war with its neighbour."

The signals are certainly mixed. It seems that one of the outcomes of the late-July meet-

ing between the two Special Representatives, Ajit Doval and Yang Jiechi, was to advise their respective media to restrain themselves.

In China, that amounts to issuing a fatwa. So far about a week after the leaders met, from July 27-August 3, most India-related stories were about "the difficulties Indians faced in shaking off the caste system" (*Global Times*), or "Indian coast guard seizes 1500 kg of heroin" (*People's Daily*), and only a handful about Doklam ("India should withdraw its troops immediately and unconditionally", in *Jiefang* daily).

From August 4, the tenor changed, when several articles warned Prime Minister Narendra Modi "not to pull India into reckless conflict". On August 5, *PLA Daily* said, "Do not underestimate China's determination to defend its territorial sovereignty." On August 7, *Global Times* said, "China will probably take action in two weeks, India tense," while *China Daily* warned "India should come to its senses while it has time".

On August 13, *Global Times* pronounced that the "Southern Himalayas is not India's backyard". An editorial stated, "Bhutan's stand is unbearable for India".

Indian officials say they are unperturbed, and that their orders are to "hold the line", whether in Pangong Tso, the lake in Ladakh where troops got into fisticuffs on August 15, or elsewhere along the 4,000-odd km disputed border that stretches from Aksai Chin to Arunachal Pradesh.

"We have long buried the ghost of 1962," one official said, pointing out that since Sumdorong Chu in 1986, the Army had resisted Chinese incursions in Depsang (2013), in Chumar (2014), had held its ground a decade ago in Daulat Begh Oldhi (and even landed aircraft on Chushul airfield).

Certainly, India hasn't hesitated to protect its interests in the region. Since it intervened on the side of Bangladesh in 1971 and helped break up Pakistan, fought the LTTE in Sri Lanka in 1987, and helped avert a coup against Maldivian President Gayoom in 1988, Delhi has held its nerve despite public criticism.

Exactly a fortnight from now in Xiamen, China, Modi and Xi will meet at the BRICS Summit — will they agree to tone down the rhetoric and recommend troop withdrawal at Doklam? At Sumdorong Chu, partial troop withdrawal had commenced six-seven months after the incident.

Officials say Modi will seek no favours from Xi. For the time being, the PM seems to be following Deng Xiaoping — "Keep your head down and seek a low profile". As for China, on August 9, *Global Times* said, "Military conflict with India is never a favoured choice for China... the best scenario will be winning without fighting, Sun Tzu's favourite method, a victory through 'shì' (energy)."

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The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY RAMNATH GOENKA BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Where freedom has gone



SUHAS PALSHIKAR

As a society and as individuals, we are quick to succumb to the temptation of being unfree

WINNER TAKES ALL

Election Commissioner Rawat's brave and wise warning against the deforming of political culture must be heeded

A CONFERENCE on electoral and political reforms held in the capital last week, when Election Commissioner Om Prakash Rawat spoke of the "creeping new normal of political morality", he sounded a cautionary note that must be heeded by all those with stakes in a polity more democratic.

Rawat's comments come barely days after the Rajya Sabha election for one seat in Gujarat became prime-time theatre, riveting the nation's attention with its mix of high-profile players and low tactics. Six Congress MLAs crossed over to the BJP ahead of the August 8 poll.

There is a larger backdrop in which Rawat's intervention must be read. It is not just the Gujarat RS polls, the winner-takes-all approach to politics is mirrored in the wider polity as well, and it is threatening to undermine the careful mosaic of checks and balances of a constitutional framework.

AMERICAN TRAGEDY

As at Charlottesville, damage done by Trump's perverse moral compass will outlast his presidency

THINK THERE is blame on both sides", said President Donald Trump, of the carnage in Charlottesville. He is wrong, profoundly so. There are no two sides to driving a car into a crowd of peaceful protestors, just because one happens to disagree with their politics.

President Trump's perverse moral compass tells us that freedoms hard-won by large swathes of US' citizens are under real threat. The country's founding Constitution treated a black slave as equivalent to three-fifths of a free white; even after the Civil War abolished slavery.

His actions have been called tragic. They are not. Tragedy could be invoked if the US President did not understand what he was doing. Trump, in fact, understands precisely what he is doing.

FREEZE FRAME

E P UNNY



AS INDIA COMPLETES 70 years of its existence as a free nation-state, two contradictory tendencies mark its collective existence. One is the ambition to make India a global power. This search for power is based on a perception of national greatness as a society, as a culture, and increasingly, also, as a market.

Take the case of the cow. Those from the Muslim community who earn their livelihood from the meat trade are targets of suspicion and mob attacks with impunity. We seem to ignore that a sacred animal for one community need not be made forcibly sacred for others too.

So, the problem is not perceived as a problem about freedom, it is the "Muslim problem". The implicit argument is that being a Hindu majority society, what some Hindus think to be part of Hinduism has to be acceptable as a norm for everyone.

But let us leave the cow alone, and look elsewhere to see if there are signs of unfreedom. Take nationalism. Our newly enforced ideas of patriotism and nationalism imply that it is not enough for a citizen to be a law-abiding person, co-operative and compassionate towards other citizens.

Our newly enforced ideas of patriotism and nationalism imply that it is not enough for a citizen to be a law-abiding person, co-operative and compassionate towards other citizens, ready for occasional service to the collective cause and proud of the national community in an inarticulate and diffuse manner.



R.S. SHARMA

WHO OWNS MY DATA?

A citizen-centric data eco-system is necessary to protect privacy

WHO OWNS MY data? In this question, if you replace data with a physical object, like a car or a house, the answer would obviously be "me". That's true not only of physical objects, but also of content because the latter is governed by copyright laws.

However, the concept of ownership has undergone a fundamental shift in the digital world. For example, if you take a picture and publish it on any platform or, in some cases, even store it in an online "drive" or a "cloud", then you give to the concerned platform or even the device a "worldwide, royalty-free, non-exclusive license to use, distribute, reproduce, modify, adapt, publish, translate, publicly perform and publicly display such content."

Beyond ownership over the content, there are issues of data protection relating to data that identifies you (personal data) and data that describes you (which may have been created by observing you, your content and your activities). These platforms assert that information, such as "your name, mailing address, phone number, email address, contact preferences, and credit card information about you" may be shared by these platforms with their affiliates, strategic partners or other service providers.

There is an urgent need to create a technology framework to ensure that the data owners have full control on their data and every entity which holds and uses the data follows the broadly accepted principles of notice, choice and consent, collection limitation, purpose limitation, access and correction norms, disclosure of information norms, security, openness, and accountability.

when the Internet of Things (IoT) becomes ubiquitous. Who owns the data collected by smart wearables, transport and energy systems and billions of other connected devices, is going to be a very complex question. As the numbers of stakeholders in the process of generation, collection, storage and processing increase, the question of ownership and responsibilities among them shall become very complex.

Unfortunately, what has happened is the entities in the value chain have assumed full ownership of this data, while the "real owner" does not seem to have any right on the same. The privacy policies of many such entities (typically the device manufacturers or portals on the internet) shift the balance in favour of these entities to such an extent that the owners' rights on the data are extinguished completely.

Therefore, there is an urgent need to create a technology framework to ensure that the data owners have full control on their data and every entity which holds and uses the data follows the broadly accepted principles of notice, choice and consent, collection limitation, purpose limitation, access and correction norms, disclosure of information norms, security, openness, and accountability.

Similarly, there is a need to create a policy framework which should recognise and formalise the ownership, rights and responsibilities of various entities in the value chain. It should also create analogous frameworks for data as in the case of normal properties, such as those dealing with inheritance.

There is an urgent need to create a citizen-centric data eco-system that empowers individuals with control and visibility over their data.

The writer is chairman, TRAI. The views expressed are personal

AUGUST 21, 1977, FORTY YEARS AGO



GROUCHO MARX DEAD GROUCHO MARX — THE moustachioed, cigar-chomping comedian, whose barbed wit and slapstick antics brought laughter to millions around the world — died in a Los Angeles hospital. He was 86. He died of complications following a mild form of pneumonia which developed months ago after his surgery.

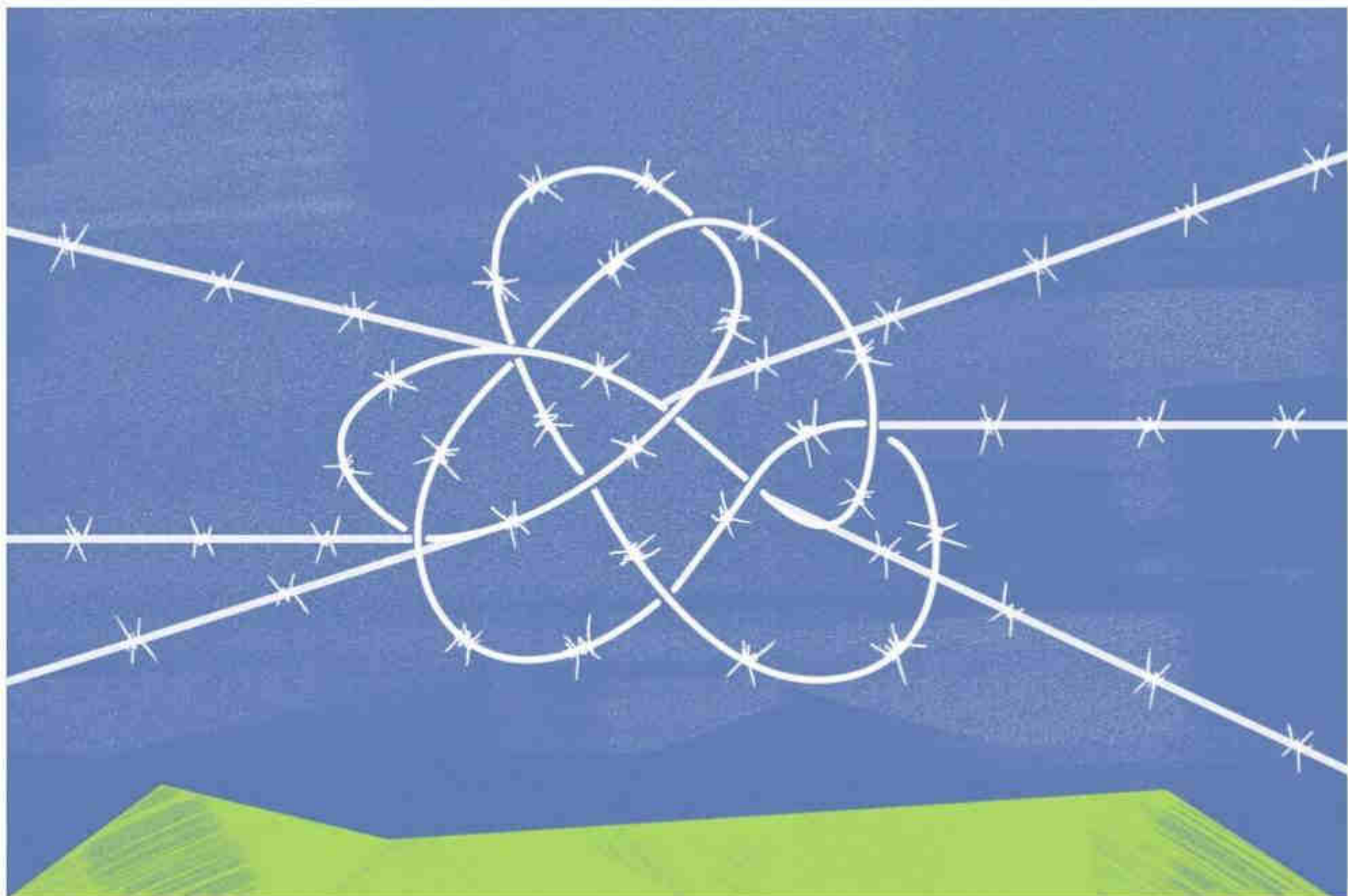
JP'S TOTAL REVOLUTION JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN EXHORTED the adherents of the Sarvodaya Mandal at the Bihar Sarvodaya Conference to throw themselves into the movement for total revolution, taking advantage of "the congenial atmosphere" created by the installation of the Janata Party in power.

tion, taking advantage of "the congenial atmosphere" created by the installation of the Janata Party in power. He said many problems were crying for a solution but the most important of them was the uplift of the "depressed and exploited classes".

JANATA CAN'T AGREE THE JANATA PARTY Working Committee, which has been holding discussions for three days, failed to come out with its promised economic policy. A 15-page document submitted by the panel the working committee had set up to draft a resolution on economic policy was rejected. Home Minister Charan Singh and several others are reported to have said the resolution was hardly different from those passed by the Congress.

FAILED PROMISES NOTED JURIST V.M. Tarkunde called for early release of all political prisoners, immediate abrogation of MISA and repeal of the 42nd amendment. He was inaugurating a convention organised by the People's Union for Civil Liberties and Democratic Rights. He regretted that the Janata government had done nothing about its commitment to repeal MISA. The release of all the political prisoners was a matter of faith in human nature.

# 13 THE IDEAS PAGE



CR Sasikumar

## Seize the Doklam crisis

India must use this moment to announce a set of long-term measures to improve military readiness vis-a-vis China

JACQUELINE DEAL, STEPHEN ROSEN AND SHIVAJI SONDHI

EVERY CRISIS IS an opportunity, and the current stand-off in Doklam is no different. Our aim in this piece is to suggest modest, incremental ways in which India can respond to the current impasse that will leave it better positioned going forward. These steps are made possible by the resolve demonstrated by the Indian leadership and military to date, which appears to have caught Beijing off guard. China's persistent effort to nibble away at the border has now given way to explicit threats. Delhi's refusal to be intimidated offers a promising opening for strategic steps that will promote stability over the longer term.

We begin with our general framework, which we laid out in three pieces published in this newspaper in 2012. We asserted that, one, India has a China problem, which flows from the accumulated asymmetry in power that will improve only slowly as India's growth rate overtakes a declining Chinese growth rate; two, in the meantime, Chinese elites are not sympathetic to India, and their ambition will continue to increase as Chinese power increases; three, there is a large list of potential Chinese actions over this period that India will find problematic, and so a strategic Indian response is warranted instead of tactical responses to each new development; and finally, four, redressing the balance in military power and preparedness is both possible and highly desirable.

The current crisis has an immediate tactical level that involves force dispositions relevant to a potential conflict, diplomatic moves attempting to identify a local resolution, and the steps that would be needed to get to such a resolution. On such matters, we suggest that the more visibility there is on Chinese actions in the border area, the more likely it is that China will refrain from risky behaviour. To that end, we suggest that all actions to improve surveillance of the border be taken, and to the extent possible India should "shine light" upon the pressures it faces on this front. Ideally, India will succeed in getting an effective restoration of the status quo ante in the area — an outcome more likely if other major powers come to see Doklam as emblematic of a growing Chinese unilateralism, that is destabilising.

But even if this proves not entirely feasible, India can still come out of the crisis having improved its bargaining position for future crises. The key to this is to use the crisis to announce a set of long-term measures to improve Indian military readiness vis-a-vis China. Such announcements would have multiple advantages. First, they would signal immediate resolve without risking tactical danger. Second, they would make clear to China and other Asian nations and the United States that irrespective of the resolution of the crisis, India is committed to do what it takes to retain its strategic autonomy. Third, it would allow the Indian government to use the crisis to initiate a set of reforms that have proven difficult to execute in "peace time."

Important steps can be taken by the Indian government on its own. These are modest near-term measures that keep India on a long-term path towards a position from which it can defend its sovereignty against

the kinds of threats now being made by the Chinese spokesmen. The Naresh Chandra Committee proposed measures to improve the capacity of India's armed forces to work synergistically, most notably by asking for a dedicated and effective Chairman of the Chief of Staffs Committee, which would also create an effective joint command of the critical installations in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. It also suggested professionalising the personnel of the defence ministry. Prime ministerial instructions to overcome roadblocks and to implement these proposed reforms should be issued. There is the possibility of announcing consultative measures in concert with friendly governments to discuss the increasing Chinese propensity to upset the status quo on its periphery.

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Finally, the Indian government should also continue with its careful, incremental programme to explore ways in which India and friendly countries such as the United States can pursue mutual interests in the Indian Ocean region. Much progress has been made, spanning three US presidential administrations, and the two countries should stay the course, despite efforts by China to derail them.

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NEXT DOOR NEPAL BY YUBARAJ GHIMIRE

## Deuba's diplomacy test

The prime minister's India visit will be closely watched by China

PRIME MINISTER SHER Bahadur Deuba has refused to heed suggestions that he postpone a five-day official trip to Delhi beginning August 23, in view of the floods. At least 150 people have died in the floods and a large area, especially in the Tarai, which is the granary of the country, is under water. Parliament has asked Deuba to tell India that its unilateral construction of about 15 embankments — some of them less than 12 km away from the border — has caused the devastation. The House sentiment is that India must be held accountable for the destruction.

Deuba had earlier told leaders of various parties that he would firmly ask India to honour its commitment and execute past agreements, including finalising the Detailed Project Report (DPR) of the 6,000 MW Pancheshwar hydropower project that was signed some 20 years ago. Deuba, incidentally, was the PM then and had taken the initiative on the project. India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj apparently assured Deuba during her recent visit that India was keen to finalise the DPR soon. But the political parties that were together when the agreement was signed do not see eye to eye on many issues now. It may not be easy to

get them agree on the DPR. Politically and strategically China and Nepal do not concede any more that India has the "first right" over Nepal's water resources. And, Nepal considers it has "special relations" with both its neighbours, not just India.

Deuba's Delhi visit takes place in the background of the Doklam standoff. China wants Nepal to have a neutral stance on the matter. Deuba has also unleashed propaganda, which claims to expose Indian activities that undermine Nepal's sovereignty. The Delhi visit will be a real test in diplomacy for Deuba. China was furious with him after he shared the stage with the prime minister of the Tibetan Government in Exile at an India Foundation seminar in Goa last year. This time Deuba is visiting India as prime minister and at a time when relations between India and China are at a low. He, surely, will be under watch.

China's vice premier, Wang Yang, who visited Nepal shortly after Swaraj, expressed the hope that China and Nepal can work together. During his meetings, he was candid and expressed concern about the "political instability" in Nepal, which may have some impact on Chinese projects and Beijing's expanding strategic interest.

Interestingly, Wang Yang had a one-on-one with K.P. Oli, former prime minister and chairman of the Communist Party of Nepal-United Marxist Leninist. Wang's closed-door meeting with Oli, who is perceived to be pro-Chinese by the Indian establishment, is seen as a brazen diplomatic response to Swaraj heaping praise on Deuba and CPN- Maoist Centre leader Pushpa Kamal Dahal. Their alliance, she had said, contributed a lot to building democracy in Nepal.

During the 11 years when it supported the radical political agenda in Nepal, India gradually lost the trust and respect of the many actors it worked with, starting with King Gyanendra and supporters of the traditional political forces and lately, the Madhesi leaders. The post-earthquake economic blockade also saw the non-Maoist left groups, including the CPN-UML, distancing from India. That India has had to pin its hope on Deuba and Dahal, both heading weak and divided parties, reveals much about the influence India currently wields in Nepal.

In contrast, the clever propaganda of China, carried out through multiple channels, points at all that it has avoided doing in Nepal. This way it highlights what India does

in Nepal. Sure, China does not encourage or support "anti-state activities or insurgency or regime changes", but there is a clear message directed somewhere else. Recently, Beijing sponsored the trip of a delegation of the "Greater Nepal Group" that occasionally raises claim over vast territory including Uttarakhand that Nepal lost to the British East India Company during 1814-15 war.

Deuba has also been asked by politicians and diplomats to raise the issue of Lipulekh on the Nepal-China-India tri-junction, which China and India had jointly agreed to develop as a bilateral trade route two years ago, when he is in New Delhi.

Swaraj apparently has asked Deuba to prepare a "wish list" as well as suggest one "mega project to be gifted by India". Past record, the prevailing trust deficit between the two countries and Nepal's divided politics, however, are likely to hold him back. But Deuba will be doing a great service if he takes up the issues flagged by the Nepali actors with India. Nepal-India ties are better served if these grievances are addressed and not pushed under the carpet.

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## WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Charlottesville, and Mr Trump's shameful response, has encouraged some communities to settle the fate of Confederate monuments without rancor."  
—THE NEW YORK TIMES

## No Mughals in Maharashtra

Because no academic discipline frightens an authoritarian government more than the history of its own country



SARAH FAROOQUI

THE MAHARASHTRA GOVERNMENT has decided to revise the state curriculum in history textbooks for Class VII. The most notable revision is the omission of the Mughals in India and Muslim rulers before them, such as Muhammad bin Tughlaq and Razia Sultana, while keeping Shivaji as the focal point of the medieval period.

A simple way to bring a long-term ideological shift in a country is to alter the curriculum in school textbooks. However, removing the Mughals from textbooks has deeper meanings.

Mughals represent Muslims in India, and in the current political climate, Muslims are the "other" who do not fit in with the majoritarian idea of India. Take the Citizenship Amendment Bill 2016 that seeks to award citizenship on humanitarian grounds to persecuted minorities from six countries on the basis of religion — excluding Muslims and Jews. There are instances of the police arresting consenting adults on the basis of their religious identity for committing a "crime" called "love jihad". There are lynchings of Indian citizens on the basis of religion and instead of aggressive reassurance and tighter law and order enforcement, one observes a stoic silence or token condemnation by the current leadership.

A government whose mandate was pegged to "sabka saath, sabka vikas" often finds itself clashing with the idea of the "other" — anything that differs from its definition of Indian identity. Erasing the Mughals from India's past is delegitimising the history of Muslims in India, and invalidating its impact on the broader contours of the country. It is an attempt to whitewash the ramifications of an era, seen scattered across Indian cities in the form of monuments, heard in the lilt of Dilip Kumar's Urdu dialogues in vintage Bollywood movies, tasted in flavours of Indian wedding cuisines.

This state government's decision was defended on the grounds that it looked at history from a "Maharashtra-centric point of view". A similar argument was made by the Rajasthan government in 2015, when it dropped the writings of progressive Urdu writers such as Ismat Chughtai from the school curriculum.

The problem with this justification is two-pronged. While local and regional discourses should be a part of state and central curriculum, the purpose of education — especially the humanities and social sciences — is lost if it focuses only on the local

just to stay within the confines of context. Second, the influence of the Mughal era is not limited to a single state, but has contributed to shaping contemporary India. It represents a period spanning centuries and excluding it on the ground that it is irrelevant to Maharashtra is flawed.

The attempt is to rewrite history through selective representations, ignoring significant periods and protagonists, and re-shaping ideas of nationalism, patriotism and identity. Instead of exposing students to the diversity of India's past, and to the intricacies that make its people, it is easier to focus on a linear narrative that fits with the political ideology of a ruling party.

Nations led by an identity-obsessed dispensation often erase and rewrite their past or highlight certain events over others. An authoritarian leadership attempts to obliterate the contributions of historical figures whose ideology and politics is dissimilar. This is seen in Turkey, where the government recommended changes to the curriculum in textbooks to reduce the focus on the political principles of the country's secular first president, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, while erasing Atatürk's successor, Ismet İnönü. Both were responsible for separating the state from religious affairs, and bringing a secular ethos into Turkey after the end of the Ottoman Caliphate.

Additionally, the government removed the theory of evolution from textbooks because it opposed religious Islamic values.

Russia too is no stranger to the fear of history textbooks, and having them rewritten to support a political agenda. Stalin was known to commission and use history textbooks for narrative control, propaganda and to airbrush enemies out of photographs. In 2013, President Vladimir

Putin ordered an official account of Russia's history, under guidelines laid out by historians chosen by the president. The guidelines celebrated Putin as a great leader, omitted mentions of protests or opposition, and were considered soft on Stalin.

An unbiased retelling of an event or a period pegged to facts opens it up to the bedrock of democracy — debate, critique and analysis. Each topic in this discipline brings with it counter points of view and differing schools of thought. Therefore, no academic discipline frightens an authoritarian government more than the history of its own country.

Instead of training school children to critique a significant period and understand the complex personalities who helped shape it, the Maharashtra government wants to wish it away. Instead of owning India's rich and complicated past that eventually led to it becoming the largest democracy in the world, it is content with writing insular textbooks.

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## LETTER TO THE EDITOR

### PRICE RISE MATTERS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Don't be cautious, RBI' (IE, August 18). A standard criticism of the RBI is that it is too aggressive about interest rates and inflation. Inflation-tempering is its uncompromising objective while economic growth, much of which is influenced by the monetary policy, is beyond its mandate. This contradiction is one reason for the lack of a symbiotic relationship between interest rates and real growth. Despite a low inflation scenario, the RBI lacks the resolve to make the repo rates comfortable to ensure sustainable borrowing. That said, the economy is also bedeviled with other problems and it is incomprehensible how softer rates will help if these long-standing issues are not resolved.

Bibhuti Das, New Delhi

### DD'S CRIME

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Censoring Sarkar' (IE August 17). It's ironic that a chief minister doesn't have the "freedom" to broadcast his speech on a day when the country got its freedom. The media's role is to facilitate a constructive mechanism that keeps the other three pillars of democracy in check. It's really unfortunate that public broadcasters like Doordarshan and AIR blocked Tripura Chief Minister Manik Sarkar's broadcast.

Akash Mehta, Rajkot

### SOFT DIPLOMACY

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Falling

### LETTER OF THE WEEK AWARD

To encourage quality reader intervention, The Indian Express offers the Letter of the Week award. The letter adjudged the best for the week is published every Saturday. Letters may be e-mailed to [editpage@expressindia.com](mailto:editpage@expressindia.com) or sent to The Indian Express, B-1/B, Sector 10, Noida-UP 201301. Letter writers should mention their postal address and phone number.

THE WINNER RECEIVES SELECT EXPRESS PUBLICATIONS

out of love' (IE, August 17). Indo-Nepal relations have hit an all time low. The Nepali government has been angered by Delhi's interventions during the Madhesi agitation. Delhi has refuted these allegations. But China has used its economic might to generate goodwill in Nepal. China has showed the effectiveness of its "soft diplomacy" while Delhi has failed miserably.

Nishith Mehta, New Delhi