



Beauty, strategy: the importance of Pangong Tso

An 'incident' involving Indian and Chinese troops took place last week on the banks of the Himalayan lake made famous by Aamir Khan's *3 Idiots*. Why is this long, thin finger of breathtaking beauty contested so fiercely by the two countries?

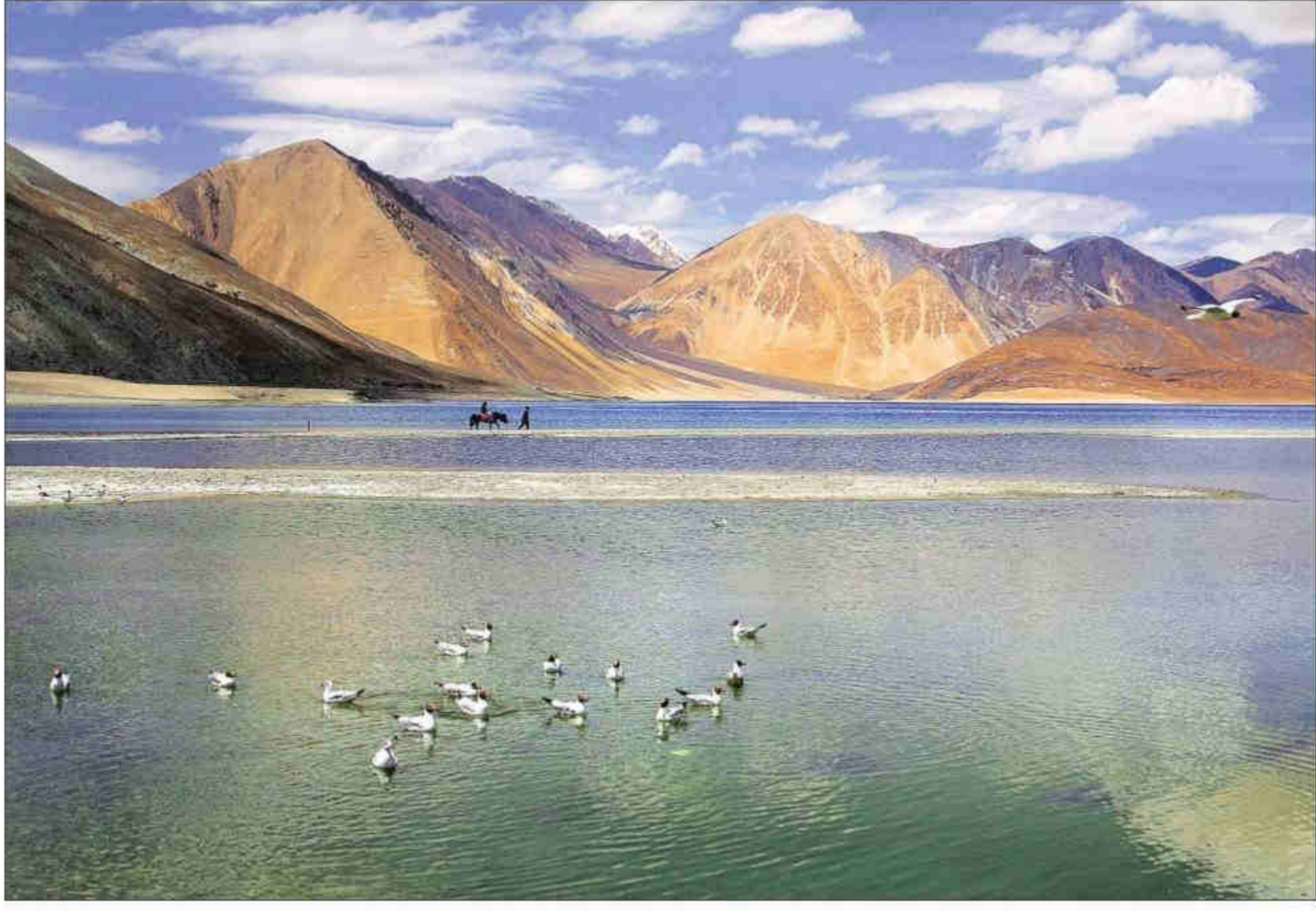
SIMPLY PUT
BY SUSHANT SINGH
EXPRESS EDITORS INTERPRET

THE VIDEO of the alleged scuffle between Indian and Chinese soldiers on the banks of Pangong lake in eastern Ladakh, posted online by Lt Gen Prakash Katoch (retd) on August 19, was visual confirmation of what had been reported about the incident that took place on Independence Day morning.

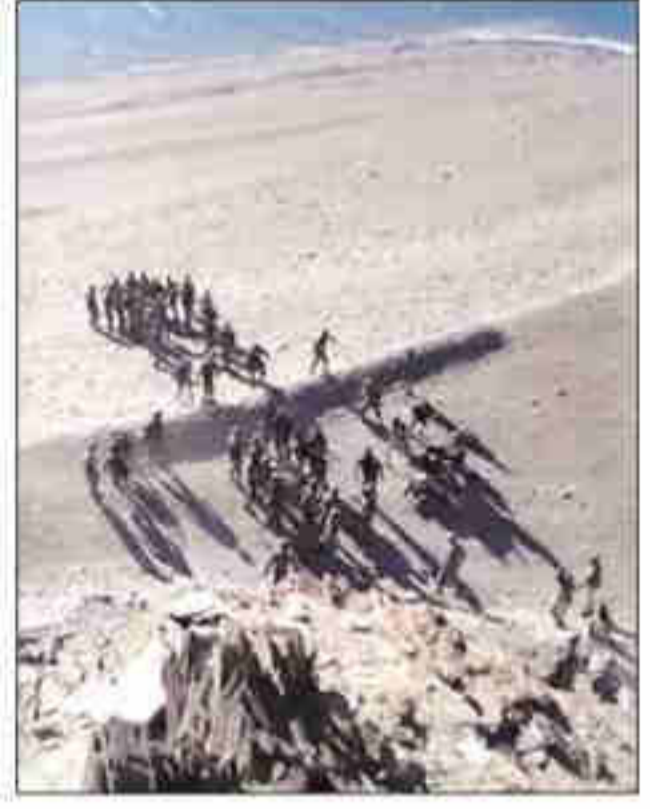
A day before the video surfaced, the spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs had confirmed "an incident", without going into details. The video, which the Army is yet to officially authenticate, shows unprecedented physical violence between the two sides — including kicking and punching, the throwing of stones, and the use of sticks and steel rods, leading to severe injuries.

In normal course, the two patrols, after coming face to face, would have engaged in a "banner drill", displaying a banner asking the other side to vacate its territory. This drill could last a few minutes to an hour — but barring some occasional jostling, the two sides would disengage quietly. That the Chinese chose to initiate violence against the Indians this time, can be linked to the state of heightened tensions between the two armies due to the two month-old standoff at Doklam on the Sikkim border.

But why did this incident take place at Pangong Tso, 1,300-odd km west of Sikkim? What is Pangong Tso, and why is it important to the two sides?



The stunning Pangong Lake in Ladakh, a part of which is controlled by India, the rest by China. Manish Swarup/AP File photo



(Top) A grab from the video of the alleged clash posted online by Lt Gen Prakash Katoch (retd); file photo of Indian soldiers on the banks of the lake during the 1962 war Express Archive

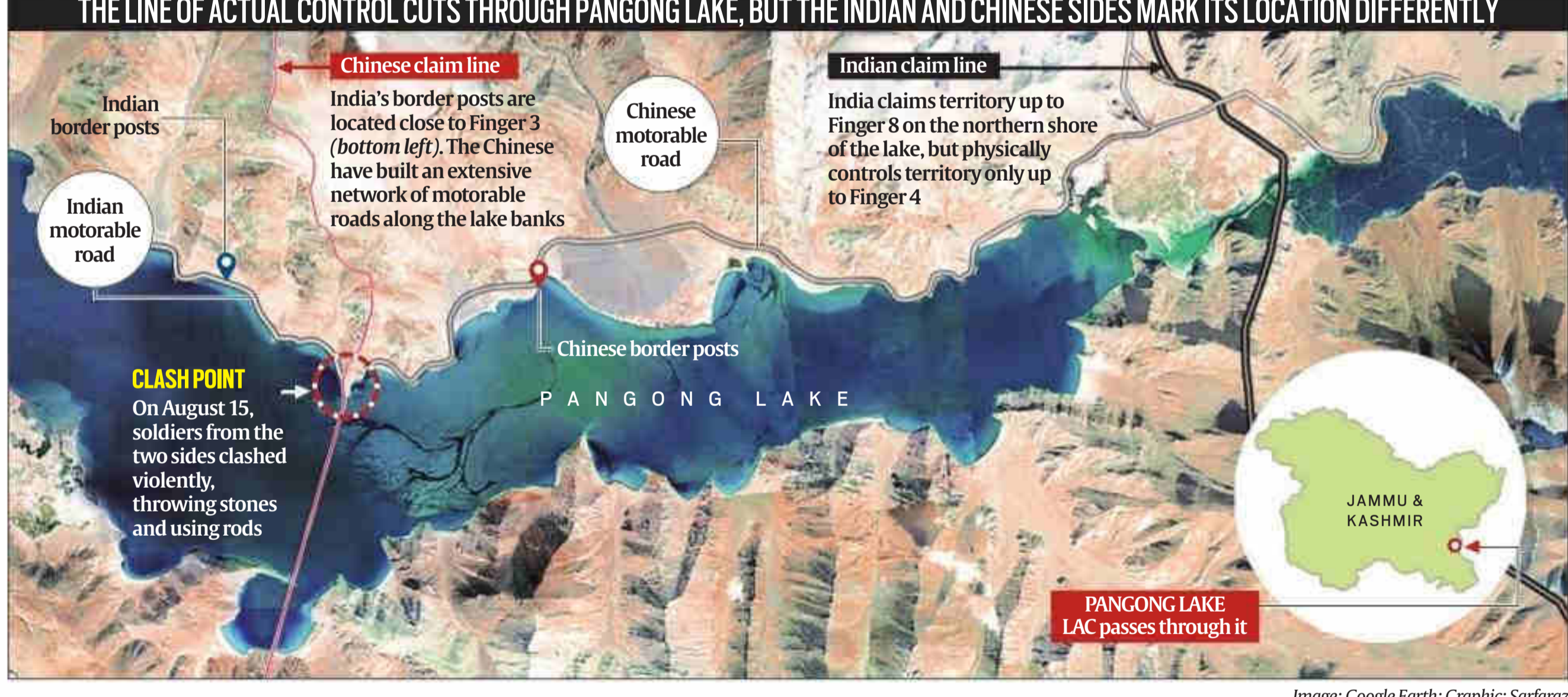


Image: Google Earth; Graphic: Sarfaraz

In the Ladakhi language, Pangong means extensive concavity, and Tso is lake in Tibetan. Pangong Tso is a long narrow, deep, endorheic (landlocked) lake situated at a height of more than 14,000 ft in the Ladakh Himalayas. The western end of Pangong Tso lies 54 km to the southeast of Leh. The 135 km-long lake sprawls over 604 sq km in the shape of a boomerang, and is 6 km wide at its broadest point.

The brackish water lake freezes over in winter, and becomes ideal for ice skating and polo. The legendary 19th century Dogra general Zorawar Singh is said to have trained his soldiers and horses on the frozen Pangong lake before invading Tibet.

The Line of Actual Control (LAC) cuts through the lake, but India and China do not agree on its exact location. As things stand, a 45 km-long western portion of the lake is in Indian control, while the rest is under China's control. Most of the clashes between the two armies occur in the disputed portion of the lake.

By itself, the lake does not have major tactical significance. But it lies in the path of the Chushul approach, one of the main approaches that China can use for an offensive into Indian-held territory. Indian assessments show that a major Chinese offensive, if it comes, will flow across both the north and south of the lake. During the 1962 war, this was where China launched its main offensive — the Indian Army fought heroically at Rezang La, the mountain pass on the southeastern approach to Chushul valley, where the Ahir Company of 13 Kumamon led by Maj. Shaitan Singh made its last stand.

This was made memorable in Chetan Anand's 1964 war film, *Haqeeqat*, starring Balraj Sahni and Dharmendra.

Not far away, to the north of the lake, is the Army's Dhan Singh Thapa post, named after Maj. Dhan Singh Thapa who was awarded the country's highest gallantry award, the Param Vir Chakra. Maj. Thapa and his platoon were manning Sirijap-1 outpost which was essential for the defence of Chushul airfield. The award was announced

posthumously for Maj. Thapa, as reflected in the citation, but he was subsequently discovered to have been taken prisoner by the Chinese. He rejoined his unit after being released from the PoW camp.

Over the years, the Chinese have built motorable roads along their banks of the Pangong Tso. At the People's Liberation Army's Huangyangtan base at Minningzhen, southwest of Yinchuan, the capital of China's Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, stands a

massive to-scale model of this disputed area in Aksai Chin. It points to the importance accorded by the Chinese to the area.

Even during peacetime, the difference in perception over where the LAC lies on the northern bank of the lake, makes this contested terrain. In 1999, when the Army unit from the area was moved to Kargil for

Operation Vijay, China took the opportunity to build 5 km of road inside Indian territory along the lake's bank. Last Tuesday's skirmish took place in this area. The 1999 road added to the extensive network of roads built by the Chinese in the area, which connect with each other and to the G219 Karakoram Highway. From one of these roads, Chinese positions physically overlook Indian positions on the northern tip of the Pangong lake.

The mountains on the lake's northern bank jut forward in major spurs, which the Army calls "fingers". India claims that the LAC is coterminous with Finger 8, but it physically controls area only up to Finger 4. Chinese border posts are at Finger 8, while Indian border posts are located close to Finger 3.

On the water, the Chinese had a major advantage until a few years ago — their superior boats could literally run circles around the Indian boats. But India purchased better boats some five years ago, leading to a quicker and more aggressive response. Although there are well-established drills for disengagement of patrol boats of both sides, the confrontations on the waters have led to tense situations in the past few years. The induction of high speed boats has ostensibly provoked the Chinese, who have responded by increasing the number of transgressions in this area in recent years.

Finally, if you go as a tourist to see the lake that the climax scene of Aamir Khan's *3 Idiots* made famous, will you be able to travel up to the Chinese border?

No, because tourists are only allowed up to Spangmik village, around 7 km into the lake. In fact, tourists were not allowed at all at Pangong Tso until 1999, and even today, you need to obtain an Inner Line Permit from the office of the Deputy Commissioner at Leh. Scenes of Indian and Chinese soldiers allegedly clashing on the lake or on its banks will per force have to be limited to videos posted by retired generals.

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BACKSTORY

Who is Lt Col Purohit? How is he linked to Malegaon, other blast cases?

RAHUL TRIPATHI describes the former Army officer's role in the attack, and locates him in the larger puzzle of alleged Hindu extremist terror in India

AFTER NINE years in prison, Lt Col Shrikant Purohit got conditional bail from the Supreme Court on Monday. Purohit, along with Sadhvi Pragya Singh Thakur, were among the key accused in the 2008 Malegaon bombing case, in which seven people were killed.

Within a month of the arrests of Purohit and Thakur, Hemant Karkare, head of the Maharashtra Anti-Terrorism Squad (ATS), which was investigating the Malegaon attack, was killed by Pakistani terrorists in Mumbai on 26/11, throwing the probe out of gear. The alleged involvement of several rightwing extremists resulted in the case turning intensely political — with the then union Home Secretary R K Singh releasing a list of suspects who were associated with the RSS, the BJP's parent organisation. Singh is now the BJP MP from Arrah in Bihar.

What was Lt Col Purohit's alleged role in the 2008 Malegaon blasts?

On September 29, 2008, a bomb concealed in an LML Freedom motorcycle went

off opposite the premises of Shakil Goods Transport Company, killing at least seven people and injuring 79 others. Following initial investigation, the Maharashtra ATS arrested Pragya, Purohit and retired Maj. Ramesh Upadhyay. Purohit, perhaps the first serving officer to have been arrested in a case of this kind, claimed at the time that he had infiltrated the Pune-based rightwing group Abhinav Bharat as an intelligence operative, and had kept his seniors in the loop.

Purohit was chargesheeted by the Maharashtra ATS in 2009 and by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) in May 2016. In its chargesheet, which absolved Sadhvi Pragya for lack of evidence, the NIA said, "Purohit had proposed theory for a separate constitution for Hindu Rashtra with separate flag (Bhagwa flag) the constitution of Abhinav Bharat, and discussed about the formation of Central Hindu Government (Aryawart) against the Indian government and put forth concept of forming this government in exile in Israel and Thailand."

The chargesheet also said, "It was also dis-



On September 29, 2008, a bomb concealed in an LML Freedom motorcycle went off opposite the premises of Shakil Goods Transport Company, killing at least seven people and injuring 79 others. Prashant Nadkar/Express Archive

cussed (during a meeting in Faridabad on January 26, 2008) that they will eliminate the persons who oppose their ideologies..."

The NIA recorded the statements of seven Military Intelligence officers who said they were not aware of Purohit's alleged under-

cover operation to infiltrate Abhinav Bharat, the group that Purohit registered in 2006, giving his profession as farmer.

Investigators recovered messages allegedly sent by Purohit to Upadhyay, his Abhinav Bharat colleague. He was later accused of diverting Army supplies of RDX, some of which was allegedly used in the Malegaon bomb. As per documents obtained by investigators, and the statements of MI officers recorded by the NIA, Purohit operated independently, without clearance from his bosses. MI is not mandated to infiltrate civilian groups in non-conflict zones, and there was no sanction from the government or any of its agencies to infiltrate Abhinav Bharat or similar rightwing groups.

Is there a link between the 2008 Malegaon attack and the Samjhauta Express and Ajmer Dargah bombings of 2007, which too have been blamed on rightwing Hindu extremists?

The Samjhauta bombings killed 68 people, mostly Pakistanis, as the train was on its way to Lahore. Suspecting a larger conspiracy, the UPA government clubbed all blasts cases allegedly involving rightwing extremists, and asked the NIA to investigate in 2011. The agency filed a chargesheet against five alleged rightwing extremists

in the train blasts case. Purohit was not among them.

The NIA approached the Supreme Court seeking Purohit's custodial interrogation, not just in connection with the 2008 Malegaon blast, but also to investigate his possible role in the Samjhauta, Ajmer and Malegaon 2006 attacks. However, after a protracted legal battle, the apex court rejected NIA's plea for custody.

Two key accused, Sandeep Dange and Ramji Kalsangra, who are suspected to be the key to the jigsaw, couldn't be arrested. A red corner notice was issued and a reward of Rs 10 lakh was announced for each man.

The Ajmer Dargah blast of October 2007 killed 3 persons and injured 15. A local court earlier this year acquitted Swami Aseem-anand and six others, while holding three RSS workers including Sunil Joshi, who was shot dead in Dewas, Madhya Pradesh, in December 2007, guilty. While there are no direct links between Purohit and the Ajmer blast convicts, investigators suspect he knew Kalsangra and Dange, who were close associates of Joshi.

The NIA has said that the long gap between the incidents and the handing over of the cases to it has made it difficult to check fully the evidence collected by the agencies that had carried out the investigations earlier.

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

IN AMMA'S NAME

AIADMK factions merge, but uncertainty about the government's stability keeps a state on edge

THE WARRING BREAKAWAY groups of the AIADMK called a truce and merged on Monday. By evening, OPS or O. Panneerselvam, the leader of the AIADMK (Puratchi Thalaivi Amma), was sworn in as deputy chief minister and another MLA from his group was inducted as minister. EPS or Edappadi Palaniswamy, who had replaced OPS as Tamil Nadu CM in February, stays in office. OPS and EPS together, as convenors, will now lead the AIADMK and together keep a watch on a third group that owes allegiance to V.K. Sasikala, J. Jayalalithaa's long-term aide now in prison, that wants to oust both OPS and EPS. What must worry the ruling group is that the Sasikala faction, led by her nephew T.T.V. Dinakaran, has enough MLAs to pull the plug on the government. If the DMK, the main Opposition in the 233-member House, moves a no-confidence motion, the EPS-OPS government will fall, unless Dinakaran obliges his rivals. Such uncertainty in government does not bode well for the state.

On Monday evening, OPS pledged to work with EPS to fulfill Amma's dreams. He had invoked Amma's wishes in February as well when he rebelled against the official group that had decided to replace him as CM. Thereafter, he alleged that the EPS government, still under the guidance of Sasikala, was corrupt. EPS was no less sharp about OPS as the two fought bitterly for Amma's legacy, her party and the government. The assembly election last year was won by Jayalalithaa and hence, the merger can be said to validate the mandate. However, it could also be argued that the morality play OPS launched at the Jayalalithaa memorial in February deserved a more convincing closure. Over the months, he had whittled down his grievances against the official AIADMK to just two demands: A CBI probe into Jayalalithaa's death and the expulsion of Sasikala from the party. Last week, the EPS government announced a state probe into the former CM's death and on Monday, a spokesperson said the general council of the unified party will expel its "general secretary". Earlier, such demands had triggered the public spectacle of MLAs being bussed to a beach resort ahead of a controversial floor test and launched a bitter campaign for a bypoll that had to be aborted following cash-for-vote allegations.

Tamil Nadu deserves better than a ruling party preoccupied with the clash within. Going ahead, there will also be the looming question: Did the BJP play a role in the AIADMK merger? Last week, OPS admitted that he had briefed Prime Minister Narendra Modi about developments in the party. Tamil Nadu sends 39 MPs to the Lok Sabha and the BJP, surely, would prefer to have a Dravidian party as an ally in the 2019 general election.

CLEAR THE TRACK

Action against senior Railway officials after Utkal Express tragedy must be followed by systemic changes

INSTITUTIONAL ACCOUNTABILITY, to be meaningful, must be a multi-pronged and sustained process. The Railway Ministry's decision to suspend four officials and send three others — including a member of the Railway Board — "on leave" is welcome. Twenty people died following the derailment of the Kalinga Utkal Express on Saturday. This is the first time that a member of the board, a secretary-level post, has been held responsible for an act of negligence that cost lives. Punitive action alone, however, is not enough. Lack of safety in one of the largest railway networks in the world must be systemically addressed. The frequent accidents are an indictment of the railway system as a whole, and it is only through a wider response that the challenge can be met.

About 53 per cent of the 586 accidents in the last five years occurred, like the Utkal Express tragedy, due to derailments. In December 2016, after a series of accidents, most notably the death of 150 people after the derailment of the Indore-Patna Express on November 20, Railway Minister Suresh Prabhu emphasised "going back to basics" in a video conference with general managers of the Railways. He stressed, "no fittings can be missing and integrated blocks will have to be taken for maintenance work of overhead equipment, signalling and tracks." Prabhu also pointed to the need for caution boards and overhead number plates and that they be retro-reflective. In the Utkal Express tragedy, it appears, prima facie, that the accident occurred due to negligence during track maintenance and because the Permanent Way Inspector did not place warning signals for on-coming trains. It is clear that the urgency for following "the basics" that Prabhu emphasised as recently as last year has not trickled down to where it matters.

According to an analysis by IndiaSpend, there has been a 56 per cent increase in the daily tally of passenger trains over 15 years — from 8,520 in 2000-01 to 13,313 in 2015-16. The number of freight trains increased by 59 per cent in the same period. But the running track length for all these trains increased by only 12 per cent. Maintenance continues to fall short of the requirement. The sheer pressure on railway tracks makes accidents more likely. Then there is the fact that despite being the largest employer in India, the Railways continue to face staff shortages in critical areas. The action against senior officials sends a strong message: Laxity will not be tolerated when it comes to the lives of passengers. Minister Prabhu must now follow up by implementing the sustained systemic changes he has himself flagged in the past.

A DREARY GAME

There is reason to worry about the decline in quality of international cricket

WHAT A DREARY Sunday of cricket it was. West Indies capitulated to a defeat of mammoth proportions against England — by an innings and 209 runs, and Sri Lanka tumbled to a one-sided loss to India. Two island teams with a glorious past, one a powerhouse champion and the other a charmer punching against its weight, collapsed so meekly that it yet again raised questions about the quality of international cricket.

The decline of West Indies harks back to the late '90s, much before the advent of T20 cricket which only exacerbated its fall. The economies of numerous small islands that constitute one cricketing nation couldn't keep up with the rest of the sporting world, and the slide began. Also, importantly, the bricks of anti-colonialism that kept the islands together began to break away, and the time was ripe for T20 to swoop in for the money kill. It's no surprise that cricketers began to value Test cricket less and less. For decades, Sri Lanka produced outstanding cricketers from a small population but with the decline of school and club cricket, the quality began to ebb.

The slow fall into mediocrity was met with a shrug of indifference by the international cricket body, whose eyes were glued to the fattening purses of T20 leagues. The attitude of the administrators is affecting other teams as well: Australia, for instance. Consider the recent fracas between players and the board. It was a sobering spectacle for the rest of the world about how money matters can blind even mature cricketing nations. That's why this dreary Sunday was no surprise, and what's more, it could be the template for the near future. The Indian cricket board is in courts, the Australians are in a civil-war of sorts, England are being pulled and dragged by counties who demand their pound of flesh, top South African cricketers aren't too chuffed with international cricket, Pakistan don't play at home. International cricket might well slip into coma if something isn't done soon.

Doklam foretold

India's future global status will be determined by its competition with China



D.S. HOODA

THE DOKLAM STAND-OFF was inevitable. It may be resolved peacefully but it is a manifestation of the larger geopolitical contest that is playing out in Asia between India and China. How do we respond? Economically, it is a no-contest because it is only in 2030 that India will reach the size of China's 2014 GDP. Perhaps the answers lie in geography.

Expanding from its peripheries, China has economically secured its borders. Trade with the five Central Asian republics has risen from \$1.8 billion in 2000 to \$50 billion in 2013. Northward, the Han Chinese have moved into inner Mongolia and invested heavily in underground metals in Mongolia. About 90 per cent of Mongolian exports go to China. The Chinese population in its Northeast region is also slowly creeping across the border into the Russian Far East. In Southeast Asia, the economies of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are closely tied to China. The total trade volume of ASEAN with China is projected to increase to \$1 trillion by 2020.

Chinese presence in Afghanistan and its massive investment in the China Pakistan Economic Corridor has enabled China to effectively skirt the Himalayan barrier and come to India's northwest, a region to which India has been historically sensitive because it was the main invasion route into the Subcontinent.

Moving into South Asia, China has become the largest trading partner of Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Myanmar. It is developing the Gwadar port in Pakistan, has taken over the operation of Hambantota in Sri Lanka and operationalised the gas and oil pipelines from Myanmar's Kyaukpyu port to Kunming.

However, the Chinese also have major geographical weaknesses in the maritime domain. Along its Pacific coast, China is hemmed in by Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines and Indonesia. The East China Sea and South China Sea are bitterly contested and there is a strong US Navy presence with its "Freedom of Navigation" operations.

China has not been a traditional naval power but clearly understands that it can no longer remain continental. This is reflected in

With confusion about Trump's strategic focus and uncertainty over the US rebalance to Asia, ASEAN countries are going to look towards India and Japan to provide a counterweight to China. However, to be considered a serious player in this region, India must enhance its credibility. The India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, conceived in 2002, has already missed its scheduled date and is now expected to be completed by 2020. Such instances don't inspire confidence in Indian capability.

the shift in China's strategy to also encompass "far seas" protection in addition to "near sea" defence. The primary "far sea" is the Indian Ocean, across which flow not only Chinese oil but raw materials sourced from Sub-Saharan Africa.

India is also constrained by geography. It is hemmed in from the north by the Himalayas and the west by a hostile Pakistan. East and south are the only natural gateways and that should dictate our strategy.

A serious push has to be given to India's "Act East" policy. The Chinese influence in Southeast Asia looks extremely strong but there are signs of cracks due to a rising anti-China sentiment. Ethnic tensions have led to the Chinese leaving Malaysia. According to the home minister of Malaysia, of the 56,576 Malaysians who renounced their citizenship between 2006 and 2016, 49,864 were Chinese. Tiny Singapore, fearful of Chinese domination, has the highest military expenditure in ASEAN. Infrastructure projects in Myanmar and Thailand have been stalled or delayed on environmental concerns. There are maritime disputes in the South China Sea with the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei.

With confusion about Trump's strategic focus and uncertainty over the US rebalance to Asia, ASEAN countries are going to look towards India and Japan to provide a counterweight to China. However, to be considered a serious player in this region, India must enhance its credibility. The India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway, conceived in 2002, has already missed its scheduled date and is now expected to be completed by 2020. The Imphal-Mandalay bus service, which had a trial run in 2015, has not started because of poor road connectivity. Such instances don't inspire confidence in Indian capability.

It could be argued that India stepping into China's area of influence could exacerbate tensions but it is clear that the seriousness of India-China rivalry is a reality and has to be faced. In any event, with China showing little concern to Indian sensitivities in South Asia, there is little need to defer to China.

The Indian Ocean is another area where

India and China will vie for supremacy. The Indian Navy needs to be significantly strengthened. We should turn the Indian map upside down and look more towards the Indian Ocean where, unlike China, there is no neighbour to contest Indian supremacy. The three services also need to put aside their differences and provide sufficient resources to the Andaman and Nicobar Command, which will be in the frontline of future Indian strategy.

A flashpoint along the Himalayan border is not impossible. We could see military action but the difficulties of geography rule out a decisive engagement in this area. Of course, the poor infrastructure along the border needs immediate attention if we are not to be distracted in our geostrategic approach with Depsang, Chumar and Doklam type of incidents. The air force needs strengthening, not only with aircraft but radars for warning and a strong air defence cover, both of which are almost absent along the northern borders.

With the establishment of the Strategic Support Force in late 2015 it is clear that the PLA is set on integrating space and cyber tools as an integral part of warfighting. We have to immediately put in place structures and capabilities to counter this threat. An almost total reliance on foreign hardware and software, lot of it Chinese, puts us at grave risk.

All this will require a long-term strategic push and an enhancement in defence expenditure. According to the IHS Jane report of 2015, China's defence expenditure could grow to \$233 billion by 2020 while Indian projections are at \$64 billion. With major military shortfalls in almost all areas, the current allocations are just not sufficient.

India's future global status will be determined by its competition with China. A successful trading relationship cannot overcome the reality of this competition. India must not only secure her troubled borders but also be ready to challenge China in those areas that offer opportunities to us. This will require both a clear geopolitical vision and resources to convert this vision to reality.

The writer retired as general officer commanding-in-chief of the Indian army's Northern Command

MORE THAN TOILETS

Swachh Bharat Mission is about behaviour change vis a vis sanitation



PARAMESWARAN IYER

IN 1937, GANDHIJI, replying to a letter received from Birbhum, Bengal, wrote, "An ideal village will be so constructed as to lend itself to perfect sanitation." Having just celebrated the 70th anniversary of Independence, this is a good time to take stock of how the prime minister's flagship programme, the Swachh Bharat Mission (SBM), is progressing towards Gandhiji's dream of a clean India with all its villages becoming open defecation free (ODF).

Launched in October 2014 and scheduled to culminate by October 2, 2019, the 150th birth anniversary of Gandhiji, the SBM is close to completing three years. Overall, progress is good, with rural sanitation coverage having gone up from 39 per cent to 67 per cent in three years and over 230 million people in rural India have stopped defecating in the open. Five states, 186 districts and over 2,31,000 villages have been declared as ODF.

The major achievement, however, is not a spurt in the construction of toilets, but the focus on behaviour change, and the rapidly spreading public awareness of the need for sanitation and usage of toilets. The most significant policy shift in this regard has been the move from outputs (number of toilets built) to outcomes (ODF villages), since ODF signifies the entire village unit makes this commitment. There is increasing realisation in rural India that, in addition to the violation of dignity, especially that of women and girls, open defecation significantly adds to the disease burden, especially of children

below the age of five.

It is one thing to build physical infrastructure like roads, bridges and power plants and quite another to engage 550 million people to fight against the centuries-old practice of open defecation. The SBM seeks to carry out one of the largest behaviour change campaigns in history, mainly through effective information, education and communication (IEC). At one end of the IEC spectrum is the use of mass media: Print and electronic, using celebrities like Amitabh Bachchan leading a "Darwaza Bandh" (on open defecation) campaign. At the other end is the use of interpersonal communication, where trained grass roots level motivators, or swachhagrahis, work under an incentive-based system to "trigger" behaviour change by stimulating community-level demand for toilets. Involving locally elected representatives, grass roots-level organisations, NGOs and school students in spreading awareness on sanitation is also a key aspect of the SBM's approach to IEC. The SBM ambitiously aims at having at least one trained grassroots-level swachhagrahi in each village in India, of which over 1,50,000 are already in place.

Once a village declares itself as ODF, verification of the latter status becomes key for which the SBM guidelines provide for a 90-day window from the date of ODF declaration. The verification process also allows for any gaps or errors in ODF status to be rectified. Currently, verification of ODF villages

stands at around 56 per cent. To accelerate the verification process, the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation has recently issued policy guidelines that state governments will be eligible for release of the second instalment of central funds only if they have fully verified all their ODF villages. The programme also has a fairly robust system of verification at district and state level. At the national level, the Ministry of Drinking Water and Sanitation, carries out separate checks as well as third party sample surveys by independent organisations. A national 1,40,000-household survey, carried out by the Quality Council of India during May-June 2017, found that national usage of toilets was 91 per cent.

The emphasis on sustainability is what differentiates SBM from previous sanitation programmes. Post ODF-declaration, it is possible that the village may witness some "slip back" into open defecation due to old habits.

It took courage and conviction for the PM to publically commit to make India open defecation free in a span of five years, a goal which many thought was impossible to achieve. There is still a fair way to go but, given the progress made so far, the acceleration expected over the coming 12-15 months and the active engagement of millions of people, the goal is definitely achievable.

The writer is secretary, Ministry for Drinking Water and Sanitation. Views are personal

AUGUST 22, 1977, FORTY YEARS AGO

REPEALING MISA

JANATA PARTY PRESIDENT Chandra Shekhar told a PUCI meeting that all political prisoners must be released. Minister for Industry George Fernandes then called upon the people to start a systematic campaign for repeal of MISA. Fernandes said he was opposed to MISA even for black-marketers and hoarders. The object of MISA was to suppress insurgencies during war-time. It was later expanded to suppress political dissent and even Jayaprakash Narayan was not spared, he said.

GLORIFYING GODSE

THE PUNE CITY District Congress Committee adopted a resolution which said an attempt

was being made to glorify Gandhi's assassin Nathuram Godse. The resolution said on August 14, five or six bicycle processions were taken out in the city and their participants shouted pro-Godse slogans. Similar slogans were heard some days ago from a section of a gathering assembled in a college compound. The resolution said: "These incidents are politically significant. They provide yet another indication of the fact that the success of the Janata Party has directly led to the dangerous resurgence of the reactionary forces throughout the country."

JP ON INDIRA'S FUTURE

JAYAPRAKASH NARAYAN SAID in an inter-

view he believes that Indira Gandhi's political career is over. "I don't foresee any comeback," he is quoted as having said. "And if the Congress Party doesn't remove her from leadership, then I don't think the Congress also will have a chance."

SAVING TAMILS

THE DMK APPEALED to Prime Minister Morarji Desai for his intervention to safeguard the Tamils in Sri Lanka. In a telegram, DMK president M. Karunanidhi said, "On behalf of the DMK, I request your personal, immediate intervention to safeguard the lives and interests of Tamilians in Sri Lanka who are subjected to untold sufferings."



15 THE IDEAS PAGE

Beware the Trump effect

India does not need a tryst with Trump. Why the two 70 year-olds should not meet



BHASKAR CHAKRAVORTY

THIS IS A tale of two septuagenarians; I hope they never meet. One is the country of India as an independent democratic nation. The other is the American president, a reminder that independent democracy provides no guarantee for its product. When Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Washington DC, he extended an invitation to the Trump *parivaar* to visit India. Ivanka Trump accepted right away and recently the details of her visit have been re-confirmed by the official medium of this White House — over a tweet. While Ivanka's appearance would be harmless enough, it would be best if Daddy chooses to stay away.

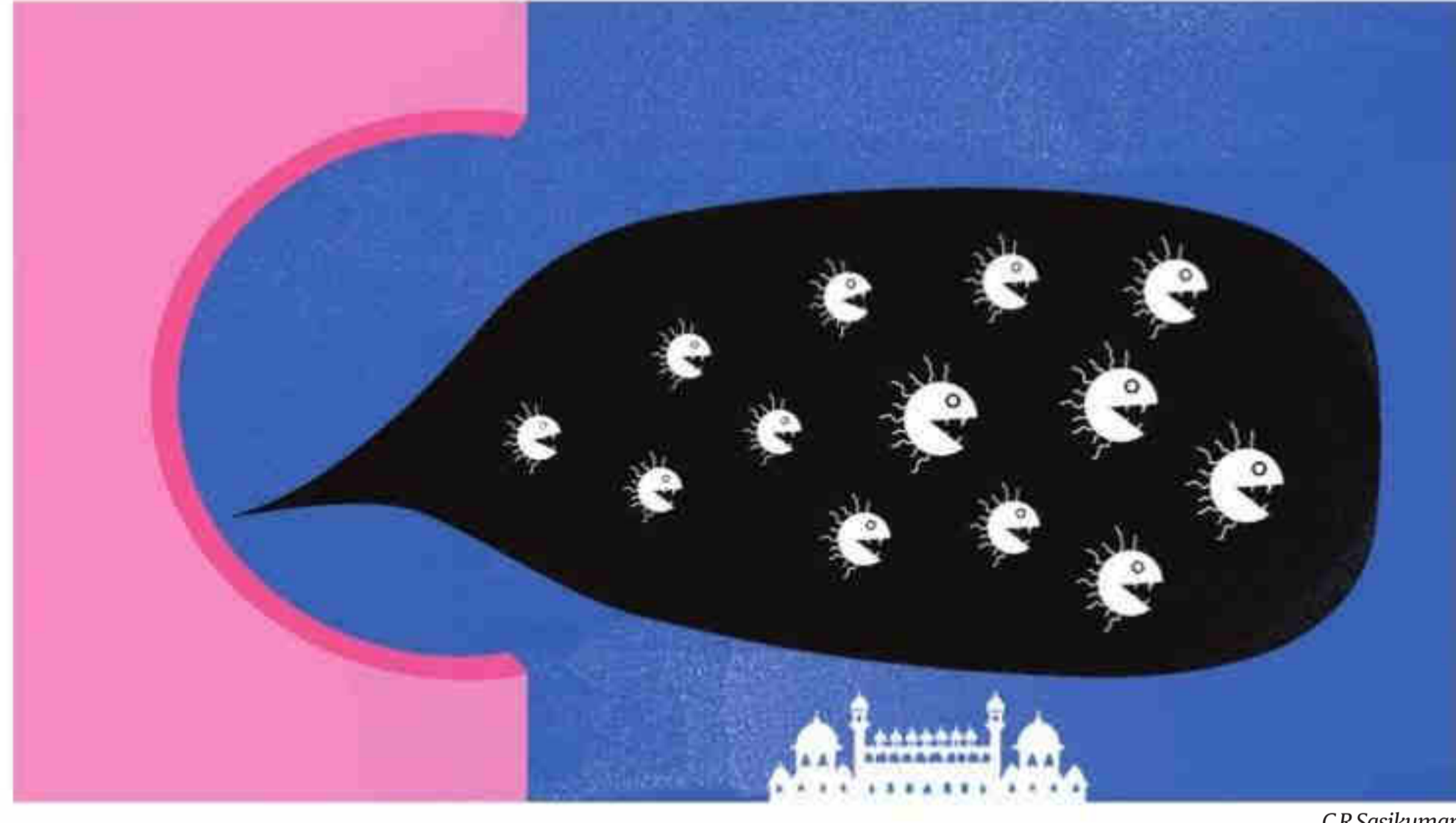
Daddy's appearances elsewhere have followed a worrisome pattern: Wherever principles of tolerance and civility are already under attack, Daddy's appearance tips the balance, making a bad situation worse. The craziest elements feel empowered to do crazier things. Given that the kettle of intolerance is coming to a boil in India, a Trump senior visit would not be a good thing. Consider three theatres of activity: America, Saudi Arabia and Poland. Each is a country where civil society was already under siege before Trump stepped on to the stage.

In keeping with the slogan, consider America first. The US has been struggling with growing tensions involving race relations, deep political divisions and anti-Islamic rhetoric, and much of it had been nearing a tipping point in the years since Obama's election. Enter Trump; his election rallies unleashed the beast within. Hateful speech and action became de rigueur at Trump rallies. Intolerance has mushroomed around the country. A telling statistic comes from Trump's home base, New York City, right after his election.

In an interview last November, New York's police commissioner cited a 31 per cent increase in hate crimes when compared to the same time from the previous year. He specifically pointed out that crimes directed at Muslims more than doubled, while anti-Semitic crimes had gone up by 9 per cent. In recent days, the historic college-town of Charlottesville, Virginia, was the scene of white supremacists running amok, emboldened by the ascendance of Trumpism; of course, the fact that Trump took his own sweet time to lay the blame squarely on racist bigotry helped re-affirm to the bigots that he has their backs.

For a feel for the Trump effect on regional tensions, let's fast-forward to his first foreign visit: Saudi Arabia. The itinerary is marked by much bonhomie and revelry, including a traditional Arab *ardah*, a dance with sabres in which Trump participated but seemed out of step with his hosts given the unfamiliar rhythm. However, the synchronicity returned with the real sabre-rattling that followed. Saudi Arabia along with several other countries, including the UAE, Yemen, Egypt and Bahrain got busy after the visit to cut ties with Qatar, precipitating a crisis in a region that is in no need of fresh crises.

The UAE Foreign Minister confirmed that Trump's visit was the trigger. To show, no doubt, that he was dancing in step, Trump tweeted a day later: "During my recent trip to the Middle East I stated that there can no longer be funding of Radical Ideology. Leaders pointed to Qatar — look!"



CR Sasikumar

Fast-forward again. We are now a month into the Qatar crisis. Trump is in a different part of the world, Poland, where the populist Law and Justice party mastermind, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, shares his fondness for authoritarianism. The party has also bussed-in people to ensure a rapturous crowd for Trump's speech in Warsaw's iconic Krasinski Square. Trump reads his tele-prompted speech pitting the West against the barbarians everywhere else, moves on and the party autocrats move in: The government passes legislation that would give politicians absolute control over the judicial system. Supreme Court judges would be required to step down, giving the justice minister the power to decide who should stay on; politicians would control who sits on the council that nominates the Supreme Court judges; the justice minister would select and dismiss judges in lower courts at will. The catalyst? Once again, the rascals pointed to Trump and his professed admiration for the ruling party's autocratic ways.

Now let's talk about India. It has been 70 years of the Indian experiment and, sadly, there has been a resurgence of the intolerance that accompanied India's Independence. Far from "Incredible India", news headlines internationally suggest "inedible India". The worst aspects of humanity or its lack thereof that were on full display during Partition are slowly but surely making their way back into the mainstream. Today, the traces of that historic inhumanity are still evident as stories of beef lynchings and mob attacks on Muslims have taken the place of stories that should be about an emerging nation with the greatest potential for growth in its history.

The Modi administration has presided over more than 60 incidents of cow-related mob violence. While there has been some *tsk-tsk-ing* from the prime minister's office about this, what is one to make of the elevation of the warrior-priest, Yogi Adityanath, according to whom India's more than 170 million Muslims are "a crop of two-legged animals that has to be stopped"?

It has been 70 years of freedom from colonial rule, but freedom of expression appears to be back on the endangered list. The raid on the NDTV founders, ostensibly, for an unpaid bank loan, is only the tip of the proverbial iceberg. The documentary, *The Argumentative Indian*, featuring the Nobel laureate who shall not go quietly into the night, has words such as "cow" and "Gujarat" deemed a tad too argumentative by the censors. Of course, not all expression is suppressed by Indian authorities. BJP MP and actor, Paresh Rawal, can attest to that after being forced to delete a tweet

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suggesting that Arundhati Roy, novelist and *bête noire* of Hindu chauvinism, be tied to the bonnet of a jeep.

It has been 70 years since India's tryst with destiny; yet today India ranks fourth out of 198 countries on a "Social Hostilities Index" created by the Pew Research Center that analyses many indicators, including crimes motivated by religious hatred, mob and communal violence, religion-related terrorist groups, using force against certain religious groups, the harassment of women for violating religious dress codes and violence over conversion.

To be sure, it takes far more than a mere 70 years to eradicate intolerance and bigotry and social division. After all, these have all been part and parcel of the complex history of the Subcontinent for millennia. It is frustrating to note that the "new normal" of India as promised back in 1947 as a secular democracy dreamt of by idealists has been transformed into a new normalisation of intolerance.

Now imagine a visit from Donald Trump, maybe even a speech from the ramparts of the Red Fort. Imagine crowds bussed in from Yogi Adityanath's UP — borrowing a page from the Polish playbook — and ceremonial sabre-rattling dances with tridents instead of Arab swords, with due credit for the idea to the Saudis, despite the fact that the tridents would probably be pointed at their fellow Muslims. Just imagine the licence the Trumpian imprimatur would provide to those who are already itching to do more mischief, much like what just transpired with white supremacists in Charlottesville, Virginia.

Trump and independent India might share a 70 years-plus life span. However, the latter can still right itself; it is on track to soon be home to the world's youngest population, and one can hope that the youth can transcend history and dream of a different — truly tolerant and secular — future, one with more opportunities for social and economic mobility. Let the young democracy celebrate its 70 years free from the 70 year-olds, Trump and other poisoned politicians, who carry the burden of bigotry of the past with them. If Ivanka — and even her hapless brothers — visit, I think that would be just about as many Trumps that India can currently handle.

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WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Spain has been a model of solidarity in the three days since the terror attacks that killed 14 people in Barcelona and Cabrlils."

—THE GUARDIAN

How China gained from Partition

Geopolitical legacies of the division remain the biggest drag on India's global aspirations



RAJA MANDALA

BY C. RAJA MOHAN

THE OCCASIONAL REFLECTIONS on the tragedies of Partition rarely include the consideration of its geopolitical consequences. The sundering of the political space in the Subcontinent gets a lot less attention in the narratives of independent India's international relations than the sentimental accounts of Delhi's non-alignment and moralpolitik.

Even today, it is not easy for the Indian elites to recognise that the geopolitical legacies of Partition remain the biggest drag on India's larger global aspirations. None of it more important than the fact that China has turned out to be the biggest long-term beneficiary from the division of the Subcontinent.

Nothing illustrates the different geopolitical evolution of India and China since the mid 20th century than the simple question of territorial consolidation. Consider the following: India was divided in 1947 and China was united in 1949. The Subcontinent's great partition locked the successor states — India and Pakistan — in a perennial conflict. China overcame an era of fragmentation to come together as a strong nation.

If the British Raj emerged as a powerful state by generating a measure of political and administrative coherence to the Subcontinent, its dissolution accompanied by division resulted in the strategic diminution of its successor states, India and Pakistan.

The combination of British power and the massive resources of an undivided Subcontinent created what came to be known as the "India Centre" that dominated the geopolitics of Asia and the Indian Ocean. Indian capital and labour, its armies and administrative systems were central to political stability, economic globalisation and the spread of modernising ideologies in the eastern hemisphere.

Before Partition, India's energies — economic and military — radiated outwards. After Partition, the Subcontinent's energies turned inward in defence of the new political borders. If the Anglos are widely seen as the main villains behind Partition — the British for their divide and rule tactics and the American integration of Pakistan into the Cold War politics — it is hard to see how the West benefited from Partition.

The Anglo-American initiatives to replace the India Centre with such new regional security structures as SEATO and CENTO flopped. For there was no real possibility of effective regional security without the participation of India. The efforts by Washington and London to mediate between India and Pakistan in order to generate a more coherent bastion against international communism, for example in the wake of the 1962 war between India and China, did not succeed either.

To make matters even more interesting, the communist giants, Russia and China fell apart at the turn of the 1960s and opened the door for the American strategic partnership with China that would contribute enormously to Beijing's rise as a great power. China was not only good at exploiting the great power conflicts to its own benefit, its leaders also clearly saw the strategic implications of Partition. They also saw the opportunities to probe independent India's limitations in sustaining primacy in the Subcontinent and the Indian Ocean that it had inherited from the Raj.

In the early decades after Partition, China seemed relatively marginal to South Asian geopolitics. India's energies were focused on opposing the Anglo-American cocoon of Pakistan into the Cold War alliance system and the supply of Western arms to the Pakistan military. India bet that it could manage the inherent contradictions with China through a conscious befriending of Beijing. But the outcomes abound in paradoxes.

Given the anti-Communist orientation of CENTO and SEATO, you would have thought China would view Pakistan with suspicion and embrace an India that chose to remain non-aligned and refused to support the Cold War alliances. China, however, found it hard to reciprocate India's love — wrapped in the slogans of Panchsheel and Asian solidarity against Western imperialism. Instead Beijing built an all-weather partnership with Rawalpindi that would grow from strength to strength and remain the one constant feature of the Subcontinent's international politics.

If India could not stop seeing China through an ideological prism even after 1962, Beijing consistently viewed Rawalpindi through a geopolitical lens. For one, the Chinese leaders saw no real contradictions with Pakistan, despite its pro-Western orientation. Beijing also rightly assessed that ideological slogans are not adequate to overcome major disputes over territorial sovereignty with Delhi.

Even more important, China understood that strong support to Pakistan was a critical element in limiting any future challenges from India. Hence the bilateral deal with Pakistan on Kashmir in the early 1960s, nuclear cooperation in the 1970s and 1980s following India's first nuclear test in 1974, the transfer of missile technology in the 1990s, and the effective integration of Pakistan's structures into China's own military planning on defence production, interoperability and power projection over the last two decades.

For China, Partition is a gift that continues to give. Meanwhile, its growing economic resources, military capabilities and political influence have dramatically improved Beijing's ability to exploit India's difficulties with its smaller neighbours as well. Whether it is trade and investment, creation of infrastructure or the supply of armaments, it is China the looms large over the Subcontinent. After years trying to limit Western influences in its neighbourhood, India now finds halting China's penetration of the Subcontinent will need a lot more political will and strategic purpose.

The writer is director, Carnegie India, Delhi, and contributing editor on foreign affairs for *The Indian Express*

LETTER TO THE EDITOR
POLITICS AND VALUES
THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Winner takes all' (IE, August 21). More than six decades of our electoral experience shows that though we have been able to extend franchise to the last citizen, we have failed to inject the culture of "political fairness" in our broader election matrix. The Election Commissioner's opinion is an exposition of what has been an entrenched phenomenon of electoral politics. Now, common citizens must apprise political parties and their managers that just the number-narrative of democracy with no deference to fairness doesn't quite wash with them.
Bibhuti Das, New Delhi
DATA LEAKS
THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Who owns my data?' (IE, August 21). Various browsers and social media giants create meta data based on the private information they get access to given the clauses hidden in the lengthy and small-sized fonts of their license agreements. This issue of "detailed targeting" by the social media advertisements has been raising an alarm as to how the advertisements of products we see is the same or related to what we had earlier searched for.
Ashutosh Pandey, New Delhi
SECULAR NORMS
THIS REFERS TO the article, 'A thana coloured saffron' (IE, August 19). UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath has
crossed all secular norms by comparing the recitation of namaz at public places with the act of turning a police station into a religious body. The BJP government in UP, and also that at the Centre, should not indulge in acts of "Hinduising" the Indian society that is known for its secular image the world over. It will only disintegrate the country.
R.K. Kapoor, Chandigarh

The Word and its meanings

Muslims can interpret the Quran without questioning its divine authorship



A. FAIZUR RAHMAN

IT MAY HAVE been an attempt to take forward Ramesh Venkataraman's debate on religious reforms ('Let's talk to the Book', IE, July 15). But Javed Anand's 'Islam's reform: Way to go' (IE, July 19) reads more like an imploration to Muslims to start questioning the authorship of the Quran and their belief in its infallibility. This is evident from the question, "how do you 'read past' any verse of the Quran if as a believing Muslim for you it is an absolute article of faith that the Quran is the Word of Allah?"

The presumptions here are: Reform in Muslim societies is possible only if the Quran is not considered a divine book, and Islamic reform means a rejection of Quranic verses that are "bad". The second presumption is, in fact, based on the premise that there are bad verses in the Quran. A little reflection would reveal that scriptural content and its authorship are different issues. Belief in the divine authorship of books falls in the realm of dogma and, therefore, it would be pointless to challenge the notion unless one has the time for unending polemical parleys on what Richard Dawkins called "the spectrum of theistic probability". On the other hand, the suitability of a religious text for mod-

ern times can be determined through objective analysis without reference to its author because identification of the author. The text can be anonymous for all it matters. Put differently, the reform of any religious dogma or practice can be undertaken without going into the provenance of the scripture that supposedly justifies it.

Anand's arguments — which are based on the articles he has quoted — are nothing more than problematic interpretations of a few Quranic verses. He seems to think that there is no other way of understanding these verses and that wrong interpretations of the Quran negate its reliability as a source of divine guidance. If this method of reasoning were to be generalised, any person can be discredited by attributing to him a distorted version of his own statement. And this is exactly what some of the authors Anand approves of seem to have done unwittingly.

For instance, Farid Esack (quoted by Anand) problematises the concept of *qawaama* mentioned in verse 4:34 saying it renders the wealthier gender superior. The idea of *qawaama*, which is inherent in the word *qawwamoon* in 4:34, is derived from the root

qaama whose meanings include; to stand up for, to manage, to conduct, or to make things straight. And "superiority" is not among its meanings in any Arabic lexicon. How did Esack miss this fact?

Anand is a victim of a similar misunderstanding in the case of *zaraba* too. The truth is that this controversial term in 4:34 continues to be wrongly translated to justify wife-beating. Out of the 50 times it occurs in the Quran, *zaraba* has been used 31 times to mean "to explain by giving an example". It has been used only 10 times to mean "to strike" but mostly to describe the prophet Moses "striking the rock" or the sea, and angels "striking the faces" of sinners. As the context of 4:34 is spousal rape, *zaraba* would take the meaning "explain to them" and not "beat them".

Those initiated into the study of the Quran from its Arabic text would know that the aforementioned explanations are not "liberal apologetics" but the most probable interpretation in the light of its own lexicology.

Surprisingly, almost all the authors quoted by Anand, rather than conducting their own research, have relied on medieval commentators to conclude that "the Quran is far from

the human rights or gender equality document that Muslim apologists make it out to be." This is akin to Islamophobes asserting the correctness of the ISIS understanding of Islam to demonise Muslims. They seem to be oblivious to the fact that Muslims in the past did not suspend their belief in divine authorship of the Quran to interpret its verses.

The seeds of hermeneutic flexibility and interpretive freedom are within the Quran itself. Verse 39:18 states that those who "listen to the Word, and follow the best (meaning) in it" are "divinely guided" and "people of understanding".

There is no reason for Muslims to accept that the Quran is not the Word of God, so as to "unashamedly cherry-pick from among the Quranic verses, accepting the good ones and rejecting the bad". Why would Muslims do that when they know incorrect translations do not render the verses of any scripture bad or its divine authorship questionable?

The writer is an independent researcher and secretary general of the Chennai-based Islamic Forum for the Promotion of Moderate Thought