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# Ties go beyond border disputes

The Modi-Xi meet at Brics shows the way forward

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Chinese leader, Xi Jinping, seemed to have sensibly adopted the view that there is more to the larger Sino-Indian relationship than a border stand-off during their hour-long meeting on the sidelines of the Brics summit in Xiamen. They both agreed to treat Doklam and similar border incidents as problems that should be managed rather than treated as a fatal flaw in bilateral relations between the two largest Asian countries.

The Brics summit in China's Fujian Province was a symbol of how much larger the Sino-Indian relationship is than disputes over uninhabited bits of rock. The Xiamen summit continued the emerging economies tradition of laying out an international order which would give them a greater say in rules-making and institutional representation. It also incorporated a number of other emerging economies for the first time, signalling how the Brics concept is attractive to other players as well.

The surprise was the Chinese acquiescence to a mention of Pakistan-based terrorist organisations like the Lashkar e Tayyeba and Jaish e Mohammad in the joint statement. The statement does not denounce these groups or call for action against them, it merely expresses concern at these and other terrorist groups. Nonetheless, it reflects an evolutionary step upward in Beijing's attitude to terrorism. Namely, that while Pakistan remains its "all-weather friend," the former's use of terrorism to further its political agenda is a flawed policy that undermines a growing Chinese interest in regional stability. The joint statement was noticeable for speaking about almost every major international conflict that has a bearing on world stability. It is hard to see India and China ever becoming close friends but they need not become violent rivals. By getting through the Doklam crisis without a shot being fired and even high-level summitry being sustained, they have shown that as they both rise, the potential for cooperating more and confronting less remains considerable.

## Stop cities from choking on garbage

The recent disaster in Delhi must spur agencies to manage solid waste effectively

One of the big problems of massive urban agglomerations such as Delhi and Mumbai is waste management. Solid waste generated in a city the size of Delhi needs to be immediately reduced, reused, and recycled if we want to save our cities from becoming choked with garbage. The collapse in the Ghazipur landfill that led to the death of two people is a warning to all civic agencies.

This 70-acre garbage dump is situated in the middle of a densely-populated part of the city and has been a disaster waiting to happen for a few years now. It is estimated that about 3000 metric tonnes of garbage are dumped at the site everyday; in spite of the fact that it was supposed to shut down in 2002, when it was filled to capacity. The piles of unsegregated garbage lead to the formation of methane gas; that has caught fire in pockets, several times, putting at risk the lives of many of the ragpickers who work there every day. Delhi has learnt no lessons from Mumbai, where in March 2016 a massive fire had broken out in the Deonar landfill that took nearly 10 days to bring under control.

While half-hearted attempts have been made to segregate waste at source and to create waste to energy plants within these landfills, there has been no real change in the way that Delhi deals with the problem of waste management — be it e-waste, biodegradable waste or plastic. As HT has highlighted, 50% of the generated garbage is fit for composting and 30% is recyclable; which means that only 20% should reach the dump. Building new landfills is not the solution. Apart from the fact that they are dangerous cause leaching of hazardous chemicals into the soil, it would be unfair to citizens of that neighbourhood to export the city's garbage to their locality. What is needed is dedication and discipline from both the civic agencies and the citizens to effectively implement segregation of waste at source to reduce the amount of garbage that reaches landfills.

# PLA's growing power is worrying Xi

The party is ideologically adrift and depends on the army to sustain its political monopoly

BRAHMA CHELLANEY



The Doklam debate has missed one key element: The mutual withdrawal deal was clinched just after Chinese President Xi Jinping replaced the chief of the People Liberation Army's (PLA) joint staff department. This topmost position — equivalent to the chairman of the US joint chiefs of staff — was created only last year as part of Xi's military reforms to turn the PLA into a force "able to fight and win wars".

The Doklam pullbacks suggest that the removed chief, General Fang Fenghui, was an obstacle to clinching a deal with India and probably was responsible for precipitating the standoff in the first place. Fang was fired just days after he hosted America's highest-ranking military officer, General Joseph Dunford.

To be sure, this was not the first time that PLA belligerence in the Himalayas imposed diplomatic costs on China. A classic case was what happened when Chinese President Xi Jinping reached India on a state visit in September 2014. Xi arrived on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's birthday with a strange gift for his host — a pre-drawn Chinese military

encroachment deep into Ladakh. The encroachment, the worst in many years in terms of the number of intruding troops, overshadowed Xi's visit.

It is bizarre that the PLA would seek to mar in this manner the visit of its own head of state to a key neighbouring country. Yet Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's earlier visit to New Delhi in 2013 was similarly preceded by a 19-km PLA incursion into another part of Ladakh that lasted three weeks.

Such provocations might suggest that they are intentional, with the Chinese government in the know, thus reflecting a preference for blending soft and hard tactics. But it is also possible that the provocations underscore the continuing "disconnect between the military and the civilian leadership" in China that then US Defence Secretary Robert Gates had in 2011 warned about.

Xi's purges of generals and admirals and other reform-related actions have been designed to consolidate his authority over the PLA and ensure that it does not blindside the government. But as Fang's firing and other latest changes in the PLA leadership highlight, Xi is still working to bring the military fully under his control.

During his 2014 India visit, Xi appeared embarrassed by the accompanying PLA encroachment and assured Modi that he would sort it out upon his return.

Soon after he returned, the Chinese defence ministry quoted Xi as telling a closed-door meeting with PLA commanders that "all PLA forces should follow his



Former chief of the PLA joint staff department General Fang Fenghui

instructions" and that the military must display "absolute loyalty and firm faith in the party." He has conveyed that same message repeatedly since then, including recently on the 90th anniversary of the PLA's creation. Had civil control of the PLA been working well, would Xi repeatedly be demanding "absolute loyalty" from the military or asking it to "follow his instructions"?

Under Xi's two immediate predecessors, Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin, the PLA gradually became stronger at the expense of the party. The military's growing power has troubled Xi, a former military reservist whose present wife — folk singer Peng Liyuan — is a civilian member of the PLA, holding a rank equivalent to major general.

As part of his effort to reassert party control over the military and carry out defence reforms, Xi has used his anti-corruption campaign to ensnare a number of top PLA officers. He has also cut the size of the ground force and established a new command-and-control structure.

But just as a dog's tail cannot be straightened, asserting full civil control over the PLA is proving very challenging. After all, the party is ideologically and morally adrift and depends on the PLA to sustain its political monopoly and ensure domestic order. The PLA, with its soaring budgets and expanding role to safeguard China's overseas interests, sees itself as the ultimate arbiter of Chinese nationalism.

The structural change in China parallels what happened in Imperial Japan, which rose dramatically as a world power in one generation after the 1868 Meiji Restoration. Boosted by war victories against Manchuria and Tsarist Russia, the Japanese military gradually went on to dictate terms to the civilian government, with tragic consequences.

The PLA's increasing clout has led China to stake out a more muscular role, including resurrecting territorial and maritime disputes, asserting new sovereignty claims, and using construction activity to change the status quo. It won't be long before the PLA rekindles Himalayan tensions with a new encroachment.

China's internal politics clearly has a bearing on its external policy. China's prospective rise as a praetorian state will adversely affect the security of its neighbours.

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## COLLABORATIVE EFFORT



A flooded street in Chennai. The Smart City Mission can streamline decision-making to ensure better coordination between departments to tackle urban challenges

## Smart city templates can enhance local governance

The mission can provide civic authorities with stable leadership to improve administration and services



PERSIS TARAPOREVALA

The Smart Cities Mission (SCM) promises to bring India into the 21st century of governance and this is no mean feat given the negative perception of municipalities. The SCM requires each smart city to create a parallel institution called a 'Special Purpose Vehicle' (SPV), which is delegated the 'rights and obligations' of the municipality.

The two institutions are interrelated but the exact terms of their hierarchy are unclear. This ambiguity could hamper collaborative efforts between the bodies and democratic processes. Thus, it is imperative to ask: How can SCM create efficiencies in local governance while strengthening democracy?

An SPV is registered as a limited company and is composed of a small board of people. According to a study by the Centre for Policy Research, the board comprises bureaucrats, with a smattering of municipal-level elected representatives. The SPV is a powerful idea in boosting the efficiency of urban governance, however, without clarity on its relationship with the municipality and how citizens can hold it accountable, it risks failure.

First, the strongest asset the SPV offers is stable leadership. Indian cities are governed

by municipal commissioners who are transferred regularly. The lack of institutional memory in municipalities prevents projects from being implemented in a timely manner, even if the leadership changes. The SPV, however, will hire a CEO to implement the mission and could have more stable leadership to ensure that the plan is implemented better.

Second, the SPV has the liberty to develop new processes between people and departments and streamline decision-making to ensure better coordination between departments. Municipalities are often restricted from achieving similar forms of efficiency as they are encumbered by their size and propensity to work in silos. Third, most municipalities do not have strong finances while SPVs could generate higher credit ratings and allow cities to have greater access to funding, through fees and the debt market.

The SPV structure was created to circumvent the problems associated with municipalities and ensure greater efficiency in planning, implementing urban development projects and accessing finance in Indian smart cities. If cities utilise SPVs as a means of demonstrating to India the need for interactive departments, stable leadership and finances which could then be transferred to an elected official in the future, like a mayor, there is hope of ensuring that the 'rights and obligations' are utilised efficiently and smartly to better both urban governance and deepen democracy, both in value and practice.

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## JD(U) will benefit from unlikely caste coalition

The Muslim-Yadav combination will help Nitish Kumar craft a political formation of extremes with the BJP



SHAIBAL GUPTA

In the backdrop of the BJP's massive political spread in the Hindi heartland, the recent RJD rally in Patna with leaders from 12 parties was impressive. Though Lalu Prasad has been convicted of corruption and is now facing a slew of fresh charges from the CBI related to financial irregularities, he can still galvanise his core constituency of 'Yadavs' and 'Muslims'.

Earlier, by catapulting his two sons, Tejashwi and Tejpratap to Nitish Kumar's coalition cabinet, he had signalled his succession plan. The rally in Patna further scripted their 'hegemony' before a galaxy of leaders. Even though Lalu Prasad is still the mascot of the party, it was Tejashwi who had done the mobilisation of supporters for the rally in various districts and the blowing of the 'conch shell' was done by Tejpratap. This indicates the shape of things to come. Between the two sons, the quintessential vintage Lalu Prasad may turn out to be Tejpratap whose brief address was applauded rapturously.

If one deconstructs the present rally, it had a much smaller turnout in comparison to the earlier ones. Lalu Prasad's earlier rallies, 'Garib Rally' or 'Lathi Bhajawan Tel Pilawan', were organised in the backdrop of a Bihar whose economy was stagnant. After the liberalisation of the economy in 1991, most of the undeveloped states, including Bihar, were further disadvantaged. Later, with the vivisection between Bihar and Jharkhand, the public finance crisis in Bihar had reached a critical level. Productive 'capital accumulation' was practically absent. Poverty and misery got aggravated. Yet Lalu Prasad's political supremacy was intact and his rallies attracted a substantial congregation of the backward castes, thanks to the mesmerising appeal of the Mandal Commission. Even though the 'state' was in retreat, the subaltern had hoped to enter its 'sanctum sanctorum' on the basis of 'positive discrimination'. In the process, he became the leader of the broadest section of

THE RECENT RALLY IN PATNA HAD A MUCH SMALLER TURNOUT COMPARED TO THE EARLIER ONES ORGANISED BY RJD STRONGMAN LALU YADAV

the poor in Bihar. After the demolition of 'Babri Masjid', his stopping of LK Advani's chariot and controlling a string of riots, Yadav added a new constituency of the 'Muslims' to his fold. But with his involvement in the 'fodder' scam and the installation of his wife Rabri Devi at the helm after his arrest, his support system started dwindling. He became essentially a leader of his own caste. Further, during the Rabri period, the nefarious activities of his two brothers-in-law shrunk his support even more.

The two high-profile leaders in the 'social justice movement' from the 'socialist' rank, Nitish Kumar and Sharad Yadav, who revolted against Lalu Prasad earlier, ultimately combined to form the Janata Dal (U). It was a formidable combination. Even though Sharad Yadav was a rootless leader, his projection helped in providing a contrarian view away from Lalu Prasad's social base. In the parliamentary election, he could defeat Lalu in the Yadav-dominated Madhepura election. Even after the emergence of JD(U), Lalu Prasad could retain his core social support, because they thought their leader was merely 'implicated' in the scam, and he is not really an offender. But interestingly, in the present financial misdeemeanour which is an 'open and shut case' of individual accumulation, the support of his core constituency continues unabated.

However, the class complexion of this social base has changed. Contrary to the earlier multi-caste congregation of the poor, the RJD now draws its support from a relatively upward mobile youth of the same caste background. They have reaped the fruits of Bihar's double-digit growth in the last 15 years since 2005 under Nitish. They are 'bottom up' contractors, power brokers, entrepreneurs and financially empowered youth.

Lalu's rally, Sharad Yadav's exit and the perceived snub of the party in the recent cabinet reshuffle will not affect Nitish Kumar electorally. With Sharad Yadav in the RJD fold, the 'Yadav and Muslim' combination, as it has resurfaced now, may get further consolidated. But, this will also ensure a counter mobilisation and help Nitish Kumar in easily crafting a 'coalition of extremes' with the BJP. The proposed 'positive discrimination' in favour of the lower backwards by the Centre, a variant of the 'Karpuri Formula', will be the icing on the cake to stitch a coalition of upper castes, a section of the upper backwards, lower backwards, Dalits and a section of the Muslims. Thus Bihar may celebrate the authentic empowerment of its subalterns but it is yet to banish the brash criminalisation of the pre-2005 era from its world.

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WRITING IS A MEDITATIVE WAY TO KEEP LIFE AFLOAT DURING A SEVERE CRISIS

PP Wangchuk

Writing for peace of mind and to reflect life in order to showcase its plus points and failings is the endeavour of every writer. Every writer has to go through this 'mission'.

The other day, I was reading Henry Miller, on writing, and found that he too was more or less expressing the same sentiments: "The writer is the very symbol of life, of the non-perfect. He moves effortlessly, giving the illusion of perfection..."

You may raise many questions over Henry Miller's 'illusion'. After all, he is one of the most controversial writers who enjoyed being critical of all that is thought to be 'normal' for a smooth journey in one's life.

But one must admit that no author can be a successful one until there is a bit of abnormality in his thoughts and behaviour.

Therefore, I say, at times, writing is an instrument to seek solace in the difficult course of life that needs some 'crutches' for

survival. When you sit to write, you are lost in a world that may be real or illusory, and yet, for those moments, their utility in keeping you busy, and at times in sheer ecstasy, can't be undermined.

My meditation starts when I start writing or when I start thinking about writing. To me, writing is the propeller of life that never fails to conquer the tide.

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