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History lost to apathy, neglect

India is not making enough efforts to preserve its past

Do Indians have a sense of history? In ancient India, records were kept and references made to the past. The Mughals too did the same, with many of the emperors writing detailed autobiographies, replete with details about the empire and themselves. The British were, of course, meticulous. But increasingly in India, there is growing disconnect with history. Look at how citizens deface monuments. Even our museums are usually near-empty. Who is responsible for this, the State or the people themselves? It is difficult to pin the blame on one party.

A new example of this disconnect/disinterest comes from National Film Archive of India (NFAI), Pune. According to a report, 51,500 cans of film reels, and over 9,200 prints, "were not physically present" at the archives, and 4,922 cans containing 1,112 film titles, which are not listed in the NFAI's registers, were present in its vaults. The missing list includes the best of world cinema, including celluloid prints of films by Satyajit Ray (Pathar Panchali, its sequel Aparajito, Charulata), Mehboob Khan (Mother India), Raj Kapoor (Mera Naam Joker, Awaara), Mrinal Sen (Bhuvan Shome), Guru Dutt (Kaagaz ke Phool) and several other giants of Indian cinema. Prints of several international acquisitions were also missing.

Who is responsible for this mess? One would say the State and the NFAI but this disinterest is symptomatic of a lack of understanding of the value of institutional memory and a lack of plan on how to monetise this precious archival material, considering how expensive maintaining these items are. Most museums abroad have generate funds for their upkeep by selling merchandise, organising tours/talks and even letting out their premises for cultural dos. Why can't we go the same way? Despite a lack of interest in the rich cultural history, we often demand that artefacts of Indian origin must be brought back to the country. Before making such demands, we must try to evaluate whether we have the wherewithal to keep them safe and in good condition.

The message of inclusion must be carried forward

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's views on tolerance come at the right time

The recent statements from RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat seem to mark a welcome shift from some of the organisation's rigid positions of the past. Speaking to a gathering of 50 diplomats recently, Mr Bhagwat spoke of how Hinduism does not lay down food and dress codes. He said that RSS members were free to work in any political party. Whether these liberal views were for the benefit of the audience is a matter of debate but if we take him at face value, we can hope that this signals a progressive turn in the organisation's thinking.

However, Mr Bhagwat's message of inclusion and tolerance should trickle down to the rank and file who have often acted as though it has carte blanche to do as it likes. Mr Bhagwat's condemnation of trolling on the Internet also comes not a moment too soon. In recent times, the Right-wing trolls have launched no-holds-barred attacks on those who hold differing viewpoints. Often they take upon themselves the role of defending India's image using hatred and innuendo against anyone perceived to be liberal. If the RSS is serious about its opposition to such trolling, we can hope to see a drop in enthusiasm among offenders.

The RSS has over the years developed a reputation for having a largely single-point agenda, that of ushering in a Hindu rashtra. Mr Bhagwat's more inclusive words seem at variance with this. If this is a trend for the future, it is a positive step forward for the RSS. Mr Bhagwat's words should also send out a strong signal to other Hindutva forces like the Bajrang Dal and VHP, which have often taken cover behind the RSS when disseminating their sectarian views. So far the RSS seems to have nurtured a vision of homogenous India where everyone would fall in line with the majority's views and thinking. Mr Bhagwat's recent views mark a departure from this. And this comes at the right time when the nation is divided on so many faultlines, the most prominent being that between liberalism and intolerance.

More to bond over than bullet trains

India's vulnerabilities after Doklam and Japan's worry over North Korea will figure in the talks



SHYAM SARAN

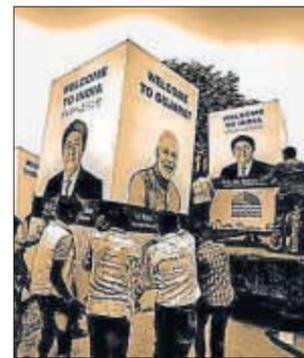
P rime Minister Modi and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe met in Ahmedabad on Wednesday, their fourth summit since the Modi government took office in 2014. In the past three years, India-Japan relations have been truly transformed. The most important demonstration of this was the successful conclusion of a Civil Nuclear agreement after difficult and sensitive negotiations. The agreement is unique since it is the first such agreement Japan has concluded with a country which has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). It was all the more remarkable coming as it did in the wake of the Fukushima nuclear disaster. Japan having been the only country in history against which nuclear weapons have been used, there was an acute sensitivity about the country engaging in nuclear cooperation with a country which had become a nuclear weapon state defying the NPT. India should recognise and appreciate this Japanese gesture.

The other important marker of the transformed India-Japan relationship is the proposed Ahmedabad-Mumbai bullet train

project which was flagged off by the two leaders at Sabarmati station. It is a 500-km project, financed by a Japanese credit of US\$17 billion payable in 50 years and carrying a nominal interest rate of 0.1%. The project promises to expose India to state-of-the-art technology in materials, electronics and sensors but also sophisticated management processes which running a bullet train network demands. There will be a very sharp learning curve but its impact will not just be on railways but in India's industrial economy as a whole. Let this not become yet another island of excellence insulated from the continuing underperformance of most sectors of our economy.

The third important initiative which reflects both strategic intent and resolve is the ambitious India-Japan Asia-Africa Growth Corridor. This US\$40 billion initiative, with Japan likely to contribute \$30 billion and India \$10 billion over the next several years to build connectivity between Asia and Africa, contribute to infrastructure, capacity building, agricultural growth and public health in African partner countries through bringing together their respective strengths and assets. This imparts an important global dimension to India-Japan collaboration and complements the agreement between India and the US, too, to work together on projects in Africa.

India-Japan defence relations have witnessed a quantum jump in the past decade. The focus of security cooperation is the maritime domain and bilateral naval exercises as well as multinational exercises under the



Workers carry a hoarding featuring Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Japanese PM Shinzo Abe, Ahmedabad

Malabar series are helping the two countries to build familiarity and comfort between their respective forces. Maritime security is one area where there are compelling reasons for India and Japan to work together and to reach out to South East Asian countries. Without their more active role in the region we may well end up, by default, with a Chinese-dominated security architecture.

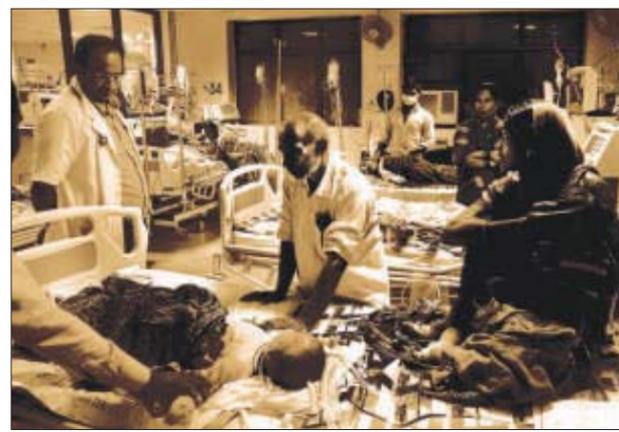
Abe's visit takes place under the shadow of two important developments in the region. For India, there has been the potentially dangerous confrontation between Indian and Chinese forces in Bhutan's Doklam plateau. While this has been defused for the present it has served to underscore India's vulnerability to pressures from an ascendant China. Japan,

too, has been facing such pressures and now has added the threat of a nuclear armed North Korea. It is unlikely that North Korea's nuclear weapon and missile delivery capability can be reversed though the US continues to provide a nuclear umbrella to Japan under its bilateral defence alliance. If there appears to be any doubt about the US commitment then there may be great pressure on Japan to acquire its own nuclear deterrent. It has recently been announced that Japan will reopen its Rokkasho Reprocessing Plant next year and this will make available additional fissile material to Japan. If Japan decides to go nuclear in the face of the grave security threat it confronts, what will India's reaction be? These are questions which could become unavoidable. For this reason, too, the two sides need to engage in serious conversations.

India-Japan relations have not yet acquired the balance and density which a true partnership demands. There is more progress in their security relations, less in their economic and commercial relations. Their bilateral trade, at US\$15 billion, continues to languish and has even declined over the past two years. It is only a quarter of India-China trade. Japanese investment has increased but Japan is only the third largest investor in India. We have not seen the kind of large scale and sustained Japanese investment which played such an important role in accelerating growth in China in its post-reform period after 1980. Despite strong cultural affinities, people-to-people relations remain thin and student exchanges have remained modest year after year. It is these areas which need serious reflection and remedy.

Shyam Saran is a former foreign secretary, senior fellow CPR and the author of How India Sees the World. The views expressed are personal.

UNHEALTHY TREND



A ward in the Baba Raghav Das Medical College Hospital, Gorakhpur, Uttar Pradesh. UP's infant mortality rate is similar to that of war-torn Afghanistan

Don't leave healthcare in the hands of private sector

The National Health Policy 2017 must aim to provide affordable care to the maximum number of people



Soumitra GHOSH

In Gorakhpur, more than 75 children have died since August 7 at the Baba Raghav Das Medical College Hospital. A closer look at the statistics related to the child mortality at the hospital speaks volumes about the successive governments' apathy towards health in UP. The infant mortality rate (IMR) at Gorakhpur is one of the highest in the world. The Annual Health Survey data records 66 deaths per 1,000 live births — similar to the numbers in war ravaged Afghanistan. UP's IMR is one of the highest in India. In fact, barring a few states, the rest of India is not very different from UP.

Governments have been promoting the private sector in health through various policies. India's tax-to-GDP ratio increased from 6% in 1950-51 to 17% in 2015-16 but the money has not been used to enhance the capacity of the public healthcare delivery system.

As the government had almost withered away in the health sector, private hospitals have devised ways of extracting money from hapless patients.

Earlier, doctors used to take decisions in the best interests of the patient. Now, they also serve the interests of their employers. Most corporate and large private hospitals

set revenue targets for their consultants, which then force them to pass it on to patients in the form of unnecessary clinical tests and surgical procedures. Crores of rupees is wasted each year due to over-diagnosis and overtreatment, even as millions of people still do not have access to medical care.

A leading contributor to many of the above mentioned issues is commercialisation of medical education, which has been pushed too far with the massive increase in the number of private medical colleges. Around 60% of the medical seats are in private medical colleges and the medical graduates passing out from these colleges pay "capitation fees" running into crores of rupees to get an MBBS degree. No wonder that they would be averse to the idea of practising in rural areas as their primary concern becomes the recovery of the capital they've invested in their education.

India's new National Health Policy 2017 has gone a step ahead with its call for strategic purchase of healthcare from the private sector with public money. It is worth noting that the key mechanism of strategic purchasing is insurance. The NHP envisages that purchasing should be separated from provisioning of healthcare, particularly for hospital care. It seems the architects of the NHP have faith in the market solutions for efficient allocation of resources, oblivious to the fact that the market fails because of problems such as information asymmetry and externalities inherent in the healthcare market.

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Find new ways to fight media-savvy terrorists

Pakistan-sponsored terror outfits in the Kashmir Valley have been using Facebook and Twitter to great effect



SWAYAM PRAKASH PANI

These days the social media seems to be a favourite haunt as well as tool of terrorist outfits. The Taliban, otherwise known to be an orthodox outfit, was among the first to start a Twitter account in 2011, followed by the al Qaeda, Al Shabaab of Somalia and the ISIS. All these have used social media as a medium for propaganda as well as recruitment. Pakistan-sponsored terror outfits, especially in the Kashmir Valley, have also taken to social media. Besides Kashmir, some videos of ISIS involving Indian fugitives in the erstwhile IS territory have also surfaced. Terror outfits' display of strength by uploading videos of gun-toting members or leaders' speeches has become quite conspicuous, hogging airtime as well as print headlines.

The beginning of this century saw Anwar al Awlaki's online propaganda leading to the creation of a brigade of Al Qaeda elements. The online edition of 'Inspire' magazine — a mouthpiece of al Qaeda — educated a whole generation of aspiring terrorists about technical aspects of bomb-making. Gradually such online propaganda turned ugly with ISIS releasing grotesque visuals of the slitting of throats of victims made to wear orange jumpsuits. Though the Valley-based terror tapes released so far are not half as gruesome, being largely confined to propaganda by way of sermons and explanations, internal squabbling among different elements in pursuit of self-aggrandisement may nudge them in a similar direction.

Besides propaganda, secure communication platforms offered by a host of Internet giants have posed major challenges for the law enforcement fraternity. As a flip side, the world wide web is a safe haven for and provides all that terror networks need to grow: anonymity, accessibility and a power to broadcast without a whip. A high degree of encryption as floated in the 'darknet' has

PRECIOUS LITTLE HAS BEEN ACHIEVED, ESPECIALLY IN COUNTRIES LIKE INDIA FOR PUTTING IN PLACE APPROPRIATE LEGAL OR TECHNOLOGICAL MECHANISMS TO DEAL WITH SUCH MISUSE OF CYBERSPACE

Swayam Prakash Pani is an IPS officer serving in Jammu and Kashmir. The views expressed are personal.

further complicated the task of detection. Consequently, terror outfits have run amok in uploading materials which otherwise would have not circulated as fast, with the entire globe as its audience!

Taking advantage of Internet technology, surreptitious communication flourishes: Several chat platforms are found spreading rumours, malicious campaigns and in many cases active terror conspiracies as well. In the Kashmir Valley, many such groups have been continuously detected and dealt with accordingly by investigational measures. However, sans the support of service providers, beyond a point, investigation suffers.

Unlike the western countries where technology giants provide a reasonable degree of cooperation, we are yet to join that league. As recently reported by The Economist, some of the Internet giants under a voluntary agreement with European regulators are reviewing the content flagged as hateful and xenophobic: Facebook has gone up from 50% on a day to 58%, Twitter from 24% to 39%. Interestingly, in the early days the policy of Twitter — a votary for freedom of speech — was very stringent in content regulation. The Nairobi Mall siege where Al Shabaab used Twitter as a platform for live broadcast of the mayhem it wreaked brought about a shift in policy leading to the suspension of accounts of those posting terror-related content. Although ISIS also extensively used Twitter handles, later, periodic evaluation accompanied by suspension of accounts by Twitter continued.

Even so, whether in the West or elsewhere, all the Internet giants have invariably concealed information behind the curtain of privacy clauses. As I put pen to paper, a debate on striking a fine balance between liberty and regulation is raging. Precious little has been achieved, especially in countries like India for putting in place appropriate legal or technological mechanisms to deal with such misuse of cyberspace.

Hence it is imperative that we come up with progressive legislation for regulating the social media. The existing IT act 2000, alone is not sufficiently equipped to deal with it. In the absence of such laws, dealing with the aforementioned crisis emanating from the cyber world, more often than not, results in "cyber curfew" as seen in coercive measures such as shutting down of Internet services. Such steps can at best, temporarily meet the demands of the situation. As a long-term policy, they are not tenable. The solution then lies in devising new laws backed by the right technology to handle the new media and stave off the rampant use of cyber space by terror outfits.

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innervoice

NATURE WILL RESPOND TO US IF WE ARE WILLING TO COMMUNICATE WITH IT

Mukesh Kwatra

With my wife unable to join me for the usual morning sojourns, these days the nearby Roshanara Club nursery is a magnet for lonesome nature lover like me.

My lonely thoughts are banished in the company of abundant plants and trees, scores of them planted by me. I talk to them as I walk around, occasionally touching their leaves. The relationship is slowly blossoming to an effect that I often share my life with them, confiding things I have never told any-

one. And truly, once I offload those thoughts which are buried deep in my heart, the feeling is so light. It is as if a mountain is off my chest. One feels light as a feather then.

Sometimes it's about a situation at work or home, where I am muddled with options. I helps to share such dilemmas with my green friends. And they respond! The leaves sway when I touch them and the message is transmitted across. Then, I am engulfed by years of wisdom accumulated within them.

Contrariwise, even they miss me when for some reason I break from my daily routine.

Ever since my chats with the green companions have intensified, the bloom and blossom is conspicuous.

I persuaded a friend who had planted a neem tree sapling a few months ago, to just touch the infant tree and simply ask "how are you?" Within a couple of weeks the tree grew splendidly as if basking in the affection showered upon by a mother's touch.

Anyone who has doubts, give it a try. (Inner Voice comprises contributions from our readers. The views expressed are personal.)