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India-Japan ties go beyond profit

Bullet trains are part of a much larger power play afoot in Asia

India bit the bullet train in the latest round of the New Delhi-Tokyo strategic embrace. On Thursday, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe laid the foundation stone for the 508-km long Mumbai-Ahmedabad High Speed Rail project. While all eyes were on the Rs 1-trillion project, the summit between Mr Modi and Mr Abe gave rise to a number of other path-breaking proposals. One of them was for Japanese nuclear firms to work with Indian partners to build and develop reactor components, moving away from the practice of contracting to purchase entire reactors. The other was to look at co-developing defence equipment. Then there is the formal launch of a joint economic corridor in Africa. All of this comes on top of existing Japanese projects like the various multi-billion dollar industrial corridors and urban transport systems that dot the Indian landscape.

While these will generate commercial benefits for Japan, the latest offers further underline how much what New Delhi and Tokyo are doing is about geopolitics and not just the bottom-line. The offering of the crown jewels of Japanese technology and the willingness to break some of postwar Japan's strongest taboos cannot be explained by the need for sales and profits.

Over the past several years Japan has positioned itself as India's most important strategic partner. No other country has shown as much determination to change the trajectory of India's economic growth and sought to lay the basis for India to be a major geopolitical tender in Asia. Japan's deteriorating relationship with China is the most obvious reason for this policy, but so is Tokyo's concern that the Washington's presence in the western Pacific is becoming fatally eroded. New Delhi on the other hand is the strongest supporter for Mr Abe's plans to "normalise" Japan's defence and foreign policy. Bullet trains are only the shiny manifestations of a much larger power play on which the future security of India and Asia depends.

Choice, not biology, must define transgenders

A change in the law will be a step towards giving them their political rights

It could be a change for the better. If the Centre indeed tweaks the definition of transgender persons in the proposed Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016, it will be a step towards undoing some of the discrimination routinely meted out to them. The change in definition could empower transgender persons with an option to choose their gender independent of surgery or hormones. Reports suggest that the social justice ministry is examining whether to do away with a contentious definition in the bill which concentrates on the biological features of an individual rather than an individual's freedom to choose their gender.

The contentious clause in the Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Bill, 2016, defines a transgender as "someone who is neither wholly female nor wholly male, a combination of female or male or neither female nor male and whose sense of gender does not match with the gender assigned to the person at the time of birth." This definition fails to recognise that many persons are born with ambiguous sexual organs, whether external or internal, and identify themselves as male, female or transgender. The existing definition is at odds with that followed by the rest of the world, where transgenders have been granted the right to self-determine and to seek benefits according to such identity. Terming the existing definition "primitive and unscientific", the parliamentary standing committee on social justice has proposed a more nuanced definition of transgenders: "All persons whose own sense of gender does not match with the gender assigned to them at birth." Accordingly, they will include trans-men and trans-women (whether or not they have undergone sex reassignment surgery or hormonal treatment) genderqueers and other identities such as kinnars, hijras, aravanis and jogtas, etc.

An empowering piece of legislation could be a good beginning. It is time the government does away with a definition that most transgender people and a big part of the civilised world view as both outdated and outrageous.

beyondthebite

RAJDEEP SARDESAI



Silence is no longer an option for us

If English and vernacular journalists remain disunited, there will be more Gauri Lankeshs

The year 1993 was Mumbai's annus horribilis: The post-Babri demolition riots were followed by the ghastly terror blasts. What is perhaps less known is that that very year, a few journalists were attacked and their offices vandalised by the Shiv Sena. Rather than stay mute spectators, Mumbai's journalists showed courage in uniting to protest outside the Sena headquarters against any form of physical intimidation by the then all-powerful Sena supremo, Bal Thackeray and his foot soldiers. The few who did not join the protests were co-opted by the scent of power and handsomely "rewarded" (some even later became Sena or BJP MPs).

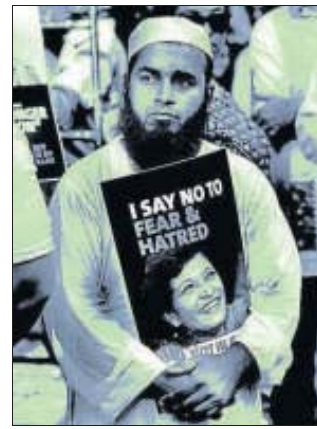
Contrast the unity shown by journalists in the pre-TV era with the sharp divisions that have surfaced now in the aftermath of the murder of journalist-activist Gauri Lankesh. It's almost as if the battle lines are being mirrored in the media too: Left vs Right, Hindutva vs secular, liberals vs sanghis, even "nationalists" vs "anti-nationalists"; it almost seems as if personal political agendas now shadow an unrelenting search for the truth. If for one side, Lankesh's death is an occasion to mourn and agitate, the 'other' side is busily pointing to the selective outrage of her supporters. If one news channel will condemn

Lankesh's killing as a Naxal hit job, the other will turn the gaze on Right-wing Hindu extremists. What should be a moment to join hands in demanding justice for a defenceless woman citizen of this country has been reduced to an ideological "war".

When the Press Club of India and other media groups held a condolence meeting last week, most Right-wing journalists chose to stay away. Even the politicians who came belonged to Left-liberal parties. There was no one from the BJP. When a reporter from a "nationalist" channel tried to take a sound bite, he was shunned by Left activists. Journalists were forced to take positions, when there was only one side to take: Arousing call for action against the forces of violence.

Yes, Lankesh was a "Leftist" in her political leanings and a strident critic of Hindutva politics. But surely when a woman is targeted in this senseless manner, her politics are immaterial. Or is a section of the media so trapped in the loud nationalist narrative of prime time TV that it has lost the capacity to think for itself, to separate right from wrong, to be able to rise above the noise and defend its fellow journalists?

Sadly, the media is being driven by an ominous "them" versus "us" binary pushed by a morally bankrupt political class: It's a systematic campaign of bilious hate that reflects



A protest march against the killing of Gauri Lankesh, September 7 RAVI CHOUDHARY/HT

in a growing intolerance of contrarian opinion and a constant manufacturing of "enemies" who must be targeted, if not in a TV studio, then on social media, and finally, on the street. In this bitterly polarised atmosphere, the space for an independent interrogation of facts is shrinking rapidly. For the cheerleaders of the ruling ideology, Lankesh was a "prostitute" and "libtard", demonised as a Naxal-sympathising "traitor", much like

Arundhati Roy, who a BJP MP called for to be tied to a jeep for her views on Kashmir. Legitimising any form of violence is the first step towards inciting the mob to take over.

That Lankesh was a woman journalist writing in her own language made her perhaps even more vulnerable. English language journalists are, to some extent, cocooned by the limited universe they operate in; a regional language journalist speaks to a much wider audience, which is more rooted in ground realities. There is a media elitism, which has left journalists in regional dailies/channels more exposed to threat, attacks on them rarely making headline news. Lankesh's death should be a turning point since she was a high-profile bilingual journalist. If we have failed to raise our voice as effectively as we should have in previous instances of violence against journalists, then the time to change that is now: If we stay silent and disunited, there will be more Gauri Lankeshs who will pay the price for our collective failure.

Post-script: In one of our recent conversations, Lankesh told me how she had come out of a TV debate feeling sick in the stomach. "I felt like I was being physically assaulted for the views I held", she said. When civilised dialogue is replaced by the dangerous violence of the mind, the sharp-suited anchor spewing venom on TV one day can only provide ammunition to a masked gunman the very next.

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ACT NOW



Demonstrators shout slogans as they take part in a protest against the treatment of Rohingya Muslims, New Delhi, September 13 REUTERS

Blaming Suu Kyi will not end the Rohingya crisis

World leaders must push Myanmar to expedite the citizenship verification process for the community



NEHGINPAO KIPGEN

The United Nations on September 8 said at least 270,000 Rohingyas have crossed the border since the Myanmar army launched clearance operations in the northern Rakhine State on August 25. The number roughly equals a third of the country's Rohingya population, although Myanmar has not released an official figure.

While the international community's criticism is targeted toward the Myanmar government in general, the de-facto leader of the National League for Democracy (NLD) government, Aung San Suu Kyi, has been singled out. This is unjustified. The power-sharing nature in Myanmar is such that the military can choose to ignore or not cooperate with the NLD-led civilian government.

Moreover, many don't seem to realise that Suu Kyi is no longer an activist or a human-rights advocate. Many also fail to understand that Suu Kyi, like many other politicians, wants to stay in power for now and in the foreseeable future, which necessitates her to take into account the sentiments of majority voters. One clear evidence was that the NLD did not field any Muslim candi-

date during the 2015 general election.

Instead of directing anger toward Aung San Suu Kyi and the NLD, the international community should put pressure on the Myanmar military leadership to end violence and work towards a solution.

Despite the apparent difficulties and challenges, Suu Kyi and her NLD government should work with the military, community leaders of both Rohingya Muslims and Rakhine Buddhists, and the international community to end violence and resolve the conundrum. All political stakeholders should work toward ending the simmering tension and the cycle of violence, to prevent further loss of lives (especially the civilians) and properties, to restore law and order, as well as to prevent any communal tension or violence from spreading to other parts of the country.

A long-lasting solution should focus on the implementation of the Kofi Annan-led state advisory commission's recommendations, including the removal of segregation or barriers between the Rohingya Muslims and the Rakhine Buddhists, and expedite the citizenship verification process for the Rohingyas.

Meanwhile, moderate leaders from both sides of the communities — Rohingya and Rakhine — should undertake all initiatives to build mutual trust and the spirit of peaceful co-existence.

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Democratic dynasties are not always a bad idea

Dynasts such as Rahul Gandhi and Bilawal Bhutto can stay relevant only by adding value to their family name

VINOD SHARMA



It isn't fashionable or politically correct these days to see political virtue in Rahul Gandhi. Much of it is of the making of his work style widely seen as lacking in constituency, the pluck and the fire people want in their leader.

He needs to develop the tenacity to stay the course, not let go of issues such as the farmers' cause he recently took up but did not vigorously pursue. He has to earn acceptability beyond Congress cadres; organise and lead movements on the ground. Those are the traits people search for in a leader-in-waiting.

But my defence of Rahul is restricted to his University of California, Berkeley speech and the question-answer session. In my reading, he didn't come across as transcending what the BJP would call the Lakshman Rekha. Yes, he was critical of the PM — but within the marquee of democratic debate that permits contrarian views and policy perspectives. Or else where's the need for the Opposition as an institution of import. And value.

The faintly 'personal' criticism of the PM happened when Rahul charged him with conducting an army of troll-minders to deconstruct and ridicule him 24x7. His observations on Kashmir, demonetisation, GST and the off-happening assaults on free speech and civil liberties were par for the course. Not acrimonious. In fact, Rahul's claim that the BJP's post-poll alliance with the PDP stultified the latter's ability to attract the Valley's youth to political mainstream needs serious study. There's proof aplenty of the power-sharing arrangement lacking socio-political sanction in Kashmir and in some measure the Jammu region.

That brings one to the Congress vice president's out-of-character spin on dynastic politics. His attempt to show it as commonplace trend across persuasions was in

DYNASTIES IRRIGATED BY BLOOD HAVE TO BE NURTURED BY SWEAT - AND DARING. LIKE INDIRA DID WITH NEHRU'S, BENAZIR WITH BHUTTO'S, SHEIKH HASINA WITH MUJIB'S AND SUU KYI WITH AUNG SAN'S

conflict with the puritanical approach he has had in the past.

There is no use hiding the truth that Rahul let realpolitik win — but why not? Wasn't his earlier stance a tad Utopian on the question that has dogged his family since the days of Indira Gandhi? But he could have cited better examples than Akhilesh Yadav, MK Stalin, Anurag Thakur and Abhishek Bachchan to drive the point home. Dynasts from same families are there in Congress and BJP. Certain entities are afflicted as much by parochial and religious oligarchies.

Elected or electable dynasts have been a norm in most parts of the world, especially South Asia. If India has the Gandhis, Pakistan has the Bhuttos, Sri Lanka the Bandaranaiques and Bangladesh the heirs of Mujib-ur-Rahman and Gen. Ziaur Rahman. They are democratic, relatively acceptable dynasties, unlike plutocracies of North Korean hue. What joins them is the leitmotif of assassinations and the role they played, with the exception of the Bhuttos, in their country's freedom movements. Nepal's Koirala clan isn't an exact parallel, but is anatomically dynastic. Even Myanmar's Aung San Suu Kyi's father Aung San, who fought the British, is hailed as the father of "modern Burma." He fell to an assassin — like paterfamilias and materfamilias of other dynasties in the region.

It isn't difficult therefore to detect reasons for the relevance of dynasties in our polity. They're galvanised by charisma, the ideas the leaders embodied and the tragic fate they met: a heady mix of hero-worship, hope and emotion. Example: Thousands who visit Indira's memorial in Delhi every day, testify her lasting legacy.

But dynasties irrigated by blood have to be nurtured by sweat — and daring. Like Indira did with Nehru's, Benazir with ZAB's, Sheikh Hasina with Mujib's and Suu Kyi with Aung San's. Each one of them added value to the inherited family name, creating legacies of their own. That's also the challenge of present generation dynasts — be it Rahul or Bilawal Bhutto.

The comparison isn't out of place. They both have their tasks cut out, of rebuilding parties against strong detractors in the polity and the deep State. The Congress is as moribund as the PPP; its cadres dispirited, support-base dissipating. Add to that the slanderous allegations of corruption.

A counter-narrative the Congress should've had in place three years into the NDA rule isn't there. The party isn't viewed as the solution. It remains the problem that caused its ouster in 2014. A big part of the blame lies at Rahul's doorstep. That's the crisis of his inheritance.

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WE'VE FORGOTTEN HOW TO LIVE IN THE TRUEST SENSE OF THE WORD



Pragati Sharma

We all have become a mechanic device, running after money, and more of it every day. Our day begins a noisy, cruel alarm and the machine starts — getting ready for office, looking for important documents, the half-way kind of breakfast, a hurried goodbye to the children, long working hours, sometimes overtime! After all this, one can only return home tired, with our battery dying. We recharge it as much as possible through the night, and the chaotic routine starts

again the next day.

Working to earn a living is important, but we mustn't let it eat into our very essence, health and life. In our quest and attempt to plan a luxurious future, we've forgotten how to live in the truest sense of the word. Like, start the day with a cup of coffee amid the dim light of sunrise. Shutting the eyes and stretching the arms, as we take a deep breath of the fresh, cool breeze. Or, letting your spouse know that you love him/her or what their presence in your life means to you. Spending precious time with your kids

that they'd cherish all day long, and every once in a while, sitting back to relax, and soak in life. We must aim at progressing in life while extending a helping hand towards those in need. These are the real joys of life.

More than that text message that tells you that your salary has been credited, it's the smile that you bring to others' faces that makes one happy. Live with that!

(Innervoice comprises contributions from our readers. The views expressed are personal)

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