

11 EXPLAINED

Grim signal from raids and online sales: flourishing trade in monitor lizard part

34 pairs of the hemipenis of the endangered species — sold as a lucky root charm — were seized recently

SOWMIYA ASHOK
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 13

ON SEPTEMBER 4, Union Environment Minister Dr Harsh Vardhan tweeted pictures of recoveries made during a joint operation by the Wildlife Crime Control Bureau (WCCB) and the Odisha Forest Department — 28 kg sambar deer antlers, four bear nails, and a rock python. Plus, 34 pairs of what is commonly referred to as "hatha jodi".

Peddled as a rare plant root in shady occult shops and on e-commerce sites, *hatha jodi* is claimed to possess magical powers that ensure prosperity for its owner. But as Vardhan said, the 34 pairs were in fact hemipenes — the forked male reproductive organ — of the monitor lizard, one of India's most threatened wildlife species.

Earlier this year, the WCCB issued an alert to Chief Wildlife Wardens and state Forest Departments about an increase in the *hatha jodi* trade. Six seizures have taken place in Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh and Odisha this year, in which 331 monitor lizard penises have been recovered, the WCCB told *The Indian Express*.

Buyers pay between Rs 1,200 and Rs 2,200 online under the mistaken belief that the penises are sacred roots. According to the WCCB, even fake *hatha jodis*, made of *atta*, sell for Rs 500 a pair.



The clandestine *hatha jodi* trade came to light in 2016 Photo Courtesy Wildlife Trust of India

harming them can attract jail terms of at least 3-7 years; authorities, however, do not treat violations involving them as seriously as those involving the bigger creatures.

In the latest raid in Odisha, one person was picked up, Vardhan tweeted. Activists, however, say a strong criminal network of hunters, middlemen, astrologers and dealers are involved in the business. And while the raid confirms at least 34 male monitor lizards were killed, the numbers are possibly much higher. Since it's hard to capture only the males, poachers trap or chase all lizards into nets, tie their legs, and dump them into sacks. The male lizards are separated only later.

"While the lizard is still alive, the area around the hemipenis is burnt, so that the organ protrudes further," said a WCCB official. The penis is then harvested with a sharp knife, two sticks are inserted to keep it from shrivelling, and it is dried in the Sun. The lizard's meat is eaten, its skin is used to make drums, and its fat is sold or boiled to extract oil, which too, is sold.

"Though there is considerable reduction in the online sale of contraband such as *hatha*

jodi, it is still offered on private trade portals," WCCB additional director Tilotama Varma said. "This indicates that the steps taken have not created the required deterrence among buyers, who continue to believe that such wildlife contraband are remedies to ailments."

Wildlife Trust of India (WTI), a Noida-based NGO, first alerted WCCB in 2016 about the *hatha jodi* trade. "More than a year ago, one of our informers brought us a *hatha jodi*, and asked us to guess what it was," said Prema Panwar of WTI. "One of my colleagues picked it up to take a bite to identify it from the taste, but was quickly discouraged by the informer."

At that time, Panwar said, *hatha jodi* was sold even on popular e-commerce websites, with sellers assuring the product could be shipped overseas. A coordinated effort, Operation Wildnet, was launched to sensitise enforcement agencies on the use of the Internet for illegal wildlife trade. The operation has since succeeded in getting the popular online marketplaces to

block and take down such listings. But Panwar and officials at WCCB point to a larger problem: 90% of wildlife cases, they said, started and stopped at the point of seizure. "Forest officials (or police) do not know how to investigate it or document it," Panwar said, adding that this poses a greater challenge in cases like *hatha jodi*, which is a "very new revelation".

"Those who hunt monitor lizards are not the ones trading them on the Internet," Panwar said. "The courier guys who transport the product also do not have a clue. We have to sensitise and build the capacity of the front staff, and also make lawyers and judges aware of the problem. Out of 50 cases before a judge, possibly one is related to wildlife. If he or she has just heard a case for a serious offence such as murder, how is he or she going to care if the next case is about a *chhipkali* (lizard)," she said.

A WCCB official said Delhi's Tis Hazari court is among those designated to hear cases filed under Special Acts. Rajasthan and Haryana have "green" courts. "CBI too can investigate specialised cases on wildlife," said the official.

Monitor lizard penises, however, are only one among the plethora of rare and threatened species that are easy to get hold of in the country, both online and offline. *Hatha jodi*, for example, is frequently bought together with *siyar singhi*, or a "jackal's horn", by people who believe it will sort out love lives and property disputes, and keep them free of court cases.

"The sea fan, sold online as '*Indrajal*', is believed to absorb negative energy if kept framed in the owner's house," said the WCCB official.

Panwar draws a grim conclusion. "Even if one per cent of the Indian population believes in such things, they are in a position to completely destroy the country's wildlife," she said.

Neolithic pot of joy promises to shine light on prehistory in Kashmir, beyond

In Sopore, archaeologists find first intact piece of pottery from a time about which very little is known

NAVEED IQBAL
SRINAGAR, SEPTEMBER 13

A 4,000-YEAR-OLD pot excavated in the Haigam area of Sopore earlier this year has been commented upon for its unusual name — the archaeological artefact has been christened 'Kim', after the American reality television star Kim Kardashian.

But there is much more to this truly unusual and significant find.

'Kim' is the first piece of Neolithic pottery in Kashmir that has been found entirely intact. Before this, said Dr Mumtaz Yattoo of the Department of Archaeology at the University of Kashmir, only stone tools, pieces of pottery, and some human remains had been unearthed. "We found bases or rims, and would then have to imagine the rest of the design. This is the first complete piece," said Dr Yattoo, whose research helped locate the Neolithic site where the pot was found.

According to Dr Yattoo, the pot dates back to a period in Kashmir's prehistory about which very little is known. "The early levels of the Kashmiri Neolithic sites date from the end of the fourth to the mid-second millennium BC. This is a critical period in the history of inner Asia, but only a handful of sites are known," he said.

The Neolithic sites are being documented under the Kashmir Prehistory Project (KPP). The discovery of the pot was reported in *The Journal of Archaeological Science* (Volume 11, 2017: 'New Evidence for Early Fourth Millennium BP Agriculture in the Western Himalayas: Qasim Bagh Kashmir').

Researchers are now searching for clues to determine if these sites played a role in transmitting knowledge of agriculture, particularly wheat and barley cultivation, from western Asia into China, where farm practices played a key role in supporting the early rise of the Chinese state.

"The origins of the Kashmiri Neolithic period are poorly understood. It is likely that they are part of an important early agricultural complex that until now has remained hidden behind the mountains and valleys of the Pamirs, the Hindu Kush and the Karakoram ranges," Dr Yattoo said.

Alison Betts, an adjunct Professor at Kashmir University and Professor of Silk Road Studies at the University of Sydney, said there is evidence in Kashmir of its links with eastern Central Asia, and hence the Valley is a key location for the study of the earliest cultural contact between China and the rest of Asia.

"Wheat and barley were first domesticated in western Asia while rice and millet were domesticated in central China. From these early centres of domestication, cereal farming spread eastwards and westwards until wheat/barley and millet cultivation met in the middle around 5,000-6,000 years ago in the Tian Shan, Pamir and western Himalayan regions of Central Asia. The Neolithic people of Kashmir were early adopters of cereal agriculture and their practice of using deep underground storage pits has preserved this evidence very well," Dr Betts said by email.

Findings like that of 'Kim' also provide a

PAPER CLIP
FLAGGING INTERESTING RESEARCH
ARCHAEOLOGY
A KEY FIND IN KASHMIR
Published in *The Journal of Archaeological Science*, Volume 11, 2017



Kim: named out of 'sheer joy'

Kashmir University archaeologist Professor Mumtaz Yattoo said that while digging at the site, the archaeologists first stumbled upon just the neck of the pot. "We thought that it was probably just the neck, but then we found the whole piece. When we found the entire piece intact, out of sheer joy, we named it 'Kim' after the popular celebrity. This, Dr Yattoo said, is the first archaeological find in the region to have been named after a celebrity, and that archaeologists would not "probably do it again". The pot has now been placed in the Central Asian Museum at the Kashmir of University.

Why China can't solve the N Korea problem

IT IS asserted frequently that China could solve the seemingly unsolvable North Korea problem if only it wanted. President Donald Trump's views have swung wildly: from "North Korea... have been 'playing' the United States for years. China has done little to help!" (March 17) to "I greatly appreciate the efforts of... China to help with North Korea... At least I know China tried!" (June 21); and back to "I am very disappointed in China... They do NOTHING for us with North Korea, just talk... China could easily solve this problem!" (July 30). On September 3, he returned to tweeting, "North Korea is... a great threat and embarrassment to China, which is trying to help but with little success".

Presidents George W Bush, Barack Obama and Trump have invested their hopes in China coming to the rescue. The hope rests on three assumptions: that outside pressure could persuade Kim Jong-un to curtail or abandon his weapons programmes; that China can actually bring about such pressure; and that Beijing will do so once it is properly cajoled or coerced.

What China can and cannot do

If China complied with every US request to cut trade, it could devastate North Korea's economy. But repeated studies have found that sanctions, while effective at forcing small policy changes, cannot persuade a government to sign its own death warrant. North



On a TV screen at Seoul railway station last week, Presidents Donald Trump and Moon Jae-in. The signs read "Need sanctions on North Korea." AP

Korea sees its weapons as essential to its survival, and tests as necessary to fine-tune them.

When sanctions aim at forcing internal political change, they often backfire, hardening their targets in place. In the 1960s, the US imposed a total embargo on Cuba. Fidel Castro went on to rule for half a century, even surviving the loss of Soviet support.

So when Americans rage at Beijing for failing to toughen sanctions, the Chinese re-

sponse is, 'Because they're not going to work.'

Venn diagram without overlap

Pyeonggang, in fact, may be especially resistant to such pressure. Even a total trade ban would impose less suffering than what North Korea has already proved it can endure. In the 1990s, when Russian subsidies disappeared, a famine killed up to 10% of the North's population. But Pyonggang neither collapsed nor

opened up to the outside world.

Overriding its calculus, then, would require imposing costs greater than destruction or famine but short of war, which would risk a nuclear exchange. That may be a Venn diagram with no overlap.

The leverage of weak states

China's reticence toward North Korea is often portrayed as a matter of will — which is, Beijing could technically inflict harsher pain, but it does not care enough. However, when the US looks at its own options, it understands that they are useful only if they can be used.

For sure, Pyongyang could be flattened overnight. But this would spark a conflict risking millions of Korean, Japanese and American lives. If Washington declines such an option, it is because it is unusable, not because it lacks the will. China faces similar constraints.

Beijing has, indeed, tried to cut off trade or impose limited sanctions. These efforts have changed little or have backfired.

The alliance trap

Beijing may simply be trapped. Each North Korean provocation risks war on its border, invites a US buildup in its backyard, and pushes South Korea and Japan further into American arms. Its sticks and carrots all having failed with North Korea, China worries that increasing pressure will cut off what little influence it has.

THE NY TIMES

PROJECTING SOFT POWER

How India is restoring cultural symbols beyond its shores

The 12th c Ananda Temple Modi visited in Myanmar isn't the only one that India is helping renovate. There are others too, in Laos, Vietnam, SL, Nepal, Cambodia

DIVYAA
NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 13

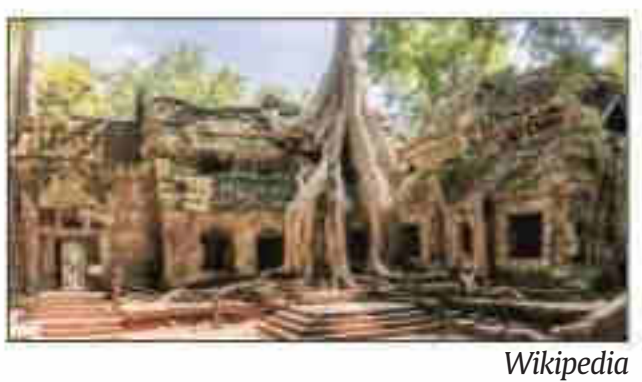
DURING HIS visit to Myanmar last week, Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited the historic Ananda Temple in Bagan, which he described in a tweet as "beautiful & blissful". In two subsequent tweets, posted on September 6, he said, "It is a matter of immense pride that ASI [Archaeological Survey of India] has carried out structural conservation and chemical preservation work of the Temple", and that "ASI has been undertaking many major conservation projects across Asia".

The Prime Minister offered prayers at the Bagan temple, and did a *parikrama*, during which ASI representatives explained the restoration process. The Buddhist temple, a masterpiece of Mon architecture, was built around 1105 by King Kyansittha of Burma. In 2010, India and Myanmar signed a restoration agreement, and New Delhi allocated Rs 20 crore for ASI's effort. The project is near completion, and ASI has, in addition, restored several murals and pagodas that were damaged in an earthquake last year.

India has deep cultural ties with south-east Asian nations, and from time to time carries out restoration work at temples overseas. Funds are released through the Ministry of External Affairs as part of India's diplo-

matic outreach to these nations. The ASI, under the Ministry of Culture, is the implementing agency. Work can go on for decades, and is often monitored by third-party agencies such as the UNESCO World Heritage Committee. Costs include that of deputing ASI staff and artisans, and the MEA releases funds, through the local Indian mission, based on utilisation on the ground. The countries where the ASI works sometimes pitch in with help on the board and lodging of the restoration team.

ASI AT WORK OVERSEAS



TA PROHM TEMPLE, Angkor, CAMBODIA (above)
Estimated cost: **Rs 34 crore**

Restoration work was initiated in 2004, project is currently in its third phase. ASI has so far taken up work at nine important sites in



Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the Ananda Temple in Bagan, Myanmar. PTI

the complex. IIT-Madras has provided back-end support. Significant is the work on the Hall of Dancers.

CHAM MONUMENTS VIETNAM

Cost over five years: **Rs 14.21 crore**

In 2010, as part of an India-Vietnam cultural exchange programme, a two-member ASI

team visited Vietnam to make a preliminary assessment of the task to conserve the Cham monuments, including the UNESCO World Heritage My Son group of temples constructed by the kings of Champa between the 4th and 14th centuries AD. An MoU was signed in October 2014, and execution of the project began with three group of temples.

THIRUKETEESWARAM TEMPLE Mannar, SRI LANKA

Tentative cost: **Rs 13.35 crore**

The project to extensively restore the temple dedicated to Lord Shiva was commissioned under a India-Sri Lanka bilateral agreement, and ASI carried out a study in August 2010. The stones for the *mahamandapa* were carved by craftsmen in Mamallapuram.

WAT PHOU TEMPLE COMPLEX LAOS

Estimated cost: **Rs 18.5 crore**

Work on restoring the Northern Quadrangle of the complex has been on since 2009. The first phase of the project was executed last year; work on the second phase is currently

on. An MoU to extend the project by another 10 years may be signed soon.



PASHUPATINATH TEMPLE Kathmandu, NEPAL (above)

Estimated cost: **Rs 24.26 crore**

Following the Prime Minister's return from Nepal after attending the 18th SAARC Summit in 2014, the MEA announced a mega plan to restore and conserve the Pashupatinath temple. A draft MoU between ASI and the Pashupatinath Temple Trust was drawn up, and an ASI team visited the temple complex to make an assessment of the work and requirement of funds. The MoU mentions a grant of Rs 24.26 crore, and work is expected to start as soon as funds are released.

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Inglorious uncertainty

Government is getting a free pass on the economy, which remains vulnerable to voodoo interventions



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

IN TIMES WHEN violent political intimidation, social polarisation and moral pathology have, rightly, become overriding preoccupations, it is hard to focus on the listlessness of the Indian economy. BJP president Amit Shah was reported as explaining away India's economic slowdown to 5.7 per cent, as one due to "technical reasons." It is hard to know what that means.

It could be of a piece with the government's contempt for "technical reasons," or it could mean, we don't care to explain and neither should you ask too insistently. Fortunately for the government, other than a few "technical" people, no one is asking about the economy too insistently. And that should worry us.

The economy now seems to be locked in a realm of inglorious uncertainty. By common consensus, India needs to grow at least 7 to 8 per cent a year, and it is now, as T.N. Ninan, pointed out, six years since we crossed that average. Several indices like private investment, index of industrial production, continue to disappoint. We draw some consolation from macro-economic stability, but whether these great macro-economic achievements are a precursor to growth or signs of a comatose economy is not entirely clear. But if any other government had generated the kind of numbers this government has, its feet would have been held to the fire. The fact that it is not being done requires diagnosis.

The government is getting a free pass on the economy. First, there is still a sense that the economy is in the doldrums because of the astonishing banking and regulatory mess bequeathed by the previous government. This government is slow in untying the knots, particularly around the relationship between big capital and the banking system. But the previous regime still gets a fair degree of blame for this logjam. And the inability of the Opposition to muster more credibility makes it a non-starter on the issue.

Second, this government has, for the most part, managed inflation well and except for a few items, food inflation. It seems that the old adage, that low inflation mitigates political worries, still holds true. Growth is about future prospects; lack of jobs affects those who are unemployed. But inflation probably still remains the great psy-

chological measure of economic discontent that affects large sections of the population; and the government is reaping some benefits of low inflation.

Third, a big ticket reform item like the GST, notwithstanding its expected teething problems, allows the government to signal that it is serious about major structural reforms. So there is still an air of expectancy about the future.

Fourth, there is a sense in which the government is capitalising on a general political discontent with "technical knowledge." This is a global phenomenon in many ways. But it has blunted the edge of technical critiques of the economy. A lot of people have come to believe that economic growth is less about templates, more about fortuitous conjunctures. While many economists had pointed out the dangers to the economy post 2009, there is a sense that we misdiagnosed why we were successful in the period leading upto 2008, and therefore failed to anticipate the big structural slowdown that followed. So, trust in economic diagnosis has faltered.

Fifth, there is diminishing faith in the private sector. Capital in India has never been a voice of independence or reform. It was only in a brief period, 2011-2013, that it became a vocal critic of government, becoming almost alarmist, raising the spectre of everything from capital flight to virtual economic stagnation. That voice, and the material support that came with it, was instrumental in helping the revolt against the Congress. Indian capital now faces a deep crisis of credibility. Its record of hubris, bad judgment, governance problems and bad debt means that the government has got Indian capital by the scruff of its neck. If Indian capital had been half as vocal about ill-thought-through policies like demonetisation, as it was about capital flight under the UPA, the government would have felt under more pressure.

Finally, there is demonetisation. Most observers seem to agree that relative to the costs it imposed, it was a failure. What it might manage to achieve in the future, could have been achieved by other means and at far less cost to the poor. The full politics of demonetisation is yet to unfold; a lot of the discontent around it is not finding organised outlet. But

in retrospect, the political support for demonetisation does not bode well for the economy. This is not in the sense that the people are wrong; they can judge their interests best. But in retrospect, the political support for demonetisation is also reflective of deep economic pessimism: We have convinced ourselves that we have not much to lose by ill-thought-out total mobilisations of this kind. The confidence in government was a consequence of the low nadir to which the economy has reached. In a dynamic economy, we would have felt there was more to lose.

The government is aggressively invested in the narrative of its own success. This will prevent it from considering one factor in the current economic slowdown. The full story of the current slowdown is complex: Institutional logjams, export growth slowdown, adjustment to GST, may have all have played a part. But demonetisation had a major impact. The impact is not just direct, in the disruption it inflicted on the economy. The indirect psychological effect it had, whose power has been underestimated, is this.

Demonetisation converted thinking about the economy into a moral crusade rather than an exercise informed by a sophisticated and just practicality. The more government remains invested in the narrative of its success, the more it is going to send a signal that the economy will remain vulnerable to voodoo interventions. Private investment is not picking up for a variety of reasons: Bad debts, excess capacity etc. But surely part of it is psychological: No one is quite sure when the need to show success of demonetisation on black money will turn into another disruptive crusade.

The lack of focussed intellectual and political outrage at what is at best a very modest economic performance should be worrying. It is of a piece with the government's constant success in trapping us in an air of unreality. It also means that the political pressure to deepen the politics of polarisation will continue. The invisible "technical reasons" behind the slowdown will have to be masked by the visible and intimidating reasons of political polarisation.

The writer is vice-chancellor, Ashoka University. Views expressed are personal

SPECIAL FRIENDS

PM Abe's visit is about acknowledging progress in India-Japan ties, thinking more boldly about the future

FEW OF INDIA'S bilateral relations have advanced as much in the 21st century as the ties with Japan. Central to that progress has been the annual summitry between the prime ministers that helped set a new agenda of cooperation and push the famously slow bureaucracies in Delhi and Tokyo to move. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's visit to Ahmedabad for this year's summit is about acknowledging the progress made across a broad front as well as thinking more boldly about the future. That the meeting is taking place in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's home state, Gujarat, indicates how the personal and political have come together in making Japan a critical actor in the modernisation of India's infrastructure, revitalising its regional economic policy, and rediscovering Tokyo's centrality for peace and stability in Asia.

If PM Modi's special interest in Japan grew out of his "economic diplomacy" during the stewardship of Gujarat, PM Abe's focus on India emerged out of the tales he heard from his grandfather, Nobusuke Kishi, who served as Japan's Prime Minister in the 1950s and was deeply touched by Jawaharlal Nehru's refusal to isolate Tokyo after World War II. The foundation stone that Modi and Abe will lay for the high speed railway link between Ahmedabad and Mumbai is an important testimony to the personal energy they have brought to the partnership. Without Modi's badgering, the Indian Railways would have never bought into the project. Without the very generous financing package that Abe put together, India's first high speed rail link would never have taken off. If the new link heralds a potentially dramatic transformation of Indian Railways, Abe's success in getting parliamentary approval for the controversial civil nuclear agreement with India opens the door for Tokyo's participation in India's atomic energy programme.

Modi and Abe are expected to unveil a joint vision for bilateral strategic economic cooperation in the Subcontinent, and more broadly the Indo-Pacific littoral. At a moment when China is dazzling the region with its Belt and Road Initiative, Modi and Abe are likely to offer an alternative model for infrastructure development that is more sustainable over the long term. Bilateral defence cooperation, including a closure to the long stalled talks on the Indian purchase of Japanese amphibious aircraft, is likely to figure prominently in the talks between the two leaders. Even more importantly, the two leaders are likely to deliberate upon the unfolding geopolitical change in Asia and the need for deeper security cooperation between India and Japan for promoting stability and equilibrium in Asia. A stronger partnership between Delhi and Tokyo has become a critical imperative amid Beijing's assertiveness and the growing political dysfunction in Washington.

TAMIL TWIST

AIADMK factions joining hands to project collective leadership is a radical step in the long term

THE FACTION WAR in the AIADMK took a new turn with the party's general council on Tuesday expelling Sasikala Natarajan from the post of interim general secretary and ratifying an earlier resolution removing her nephew, T.T.V. Dinakaran, as deputy general secretary. The general council declared the late J. Jayalalithaa as "eternal general secretary" and empowered an 11-member committee headed by the former chief minister, O. Panneerselvam (OPS), to hold the powers of general secretary. Dinakaran, who claims the backing of 21 AIADMK MLAs, has declared that he will pull down the government led by Edappadi Palaniswamy (EPS), who, ironically, was chosen by Sasikala when she decided to replace OPS as CM. The OPS and EPS factions have since buried their differences, reportedly at the behest of the BJP leadership, while turning against Sasikala and Dinakaran. The re-united AIADMK, with 113 MLAs, stands a good chance of retrieving the party's two leaves symbol, frozen by the Election Commission after the warring factions staked claim in April.

The move to entrust a committee with the general secretary's powers is a radical step for the AIADMK. Since its formation in 1972, it has been a leader-centric and leader-obsessed party. Both the AIADMK founder, MGR, and his successor, Jayalalithaa, demanded total submission from the party's rank and file. Sasikala looked destined to follow the same model until OPS mounted his dramatic revolt. Since the AIADMK legislators and functionaries lack the charisma and pan-state profile of MGR and Jayalalithaa, the party may benefit from projecting a collective leadership. Cadres could seize this opportunity and institutionalise the new leadership format. It will call for the leaders to square their personal ambitions with the collective goals of the party and learn the art of taking decisions through consultation. In fact, the DMK, the mother ship of the AIADMK, under its founder-leader C.N. Annadurai, took pride in being a movement with a collective leadership. The AIADMK could retrace its steps to Anna and reinvent the party as a movement-centric outfit with inner-party democracy and a collective leadership.

An immediate challenge for the party, however, is to ensure a majority in the assembly — the Opposition claims that the official AIADMK lacks the numbers. The Sasikala-Dinakaran faction and the main Opposition party, the DMK, have separately petitioned the governor for a floor test in the assembly. The DMK has also moved the Madras High Court for a direction on its plea for a floor test. The governor, however, has so far refused to intervene. An early resolution to this dispute is necessary: A government can't remain in office with its majority under a cloud.

STAR TREK

The Cassini probe is one of the last heroes of the age that celebrated technology and exploration

ON FRIDAY, THE Cassini probe will plunge to self-styled doom in Saturn's atmosphere. Since its launch 20 years ago, the joint mission between NASA and the European Space Agency (ESA) has travelled a distance of 7.9 billion km, discovered six named moons. The vast volumes of data it has collected have spanned nearly 4,000 scientific papers. For the first time in a long while, the world is celebrating a triumph of technology: A 22-foot high machine is not part of a dystopian narrative, its intelligence (and of the man behind it) is from a time when machines represented the ingenuity of intellectual labour, not its demise.

The Cassini-Huygens Mission was conceived in the late 1980s — at the height of "star wars" — by NASA, the ESA and the Italian space agency. Its launch in 1997, though, was well after the fall of the Berlin Wall and yet its bold "mission to go where no man has gone before" would have made Gene Roddenberry (the liberal, pluralist creator of Star Trek) proud. It represents all that the European Enlightenment held dear, without the baggage that came with it — exploration without colonialism, a pursuit of knowledge made possible by the wealth of nations but not directly for commercial gain. Today, technology and the discourses around it are not so optimistic. The machine will not free us, lead us to new frontiers. AI will take over, and scientists warn of doomsday caused by climate change.

It is Cassini's celestial partner — Saturn's largest moon, Titan — that will cause its final demise. The probe was using Titan's gravity to slingshot around Saturn to gather information, and that force will now be used to direct the probe to a safe destruction, away from moons that hold water, and hence the possibility of life. At least near the ends of our Solar System, technology and life still care for each other.

AN UNBECOMING COMPROMISE

On the Rohingya, Aung San Suu Kyi lets political expediency dominate principles



KARAN THAPAR

IT WAS inevitable that once Aung San Suu Kyi became Burma's ruler and was no longer just a Nobel Peace Prize laureate who had spent 15 years under arrest, she would fall from the pedestal on which she had been placed. But her collapse is more dramatic than anyone could have envisaged.

I've known her since I was five, when she was an undergraduate at Lady Shri Ram College. A keen sense of idealism and an unrelenting commitment to her principles was the most defining quality of her character. An incident in Oxford in the 1970s captures the sort of person she was and how she would react to any hint of racial prejudice. I was babysitting her younger son, Kim, when I cracked a joke about the Chinese people. Unthinkingly, I referred to them as "chinks". "You can't use that word", she sharply interrupted. "It's not acceptable even in humour." Her tone left me in no doubt of her seriousness.

This is why I find it so surprising that today Suu, as I've always called her, is unable to express concern and sympathy for the Rohingya. I realise she has to walk a careful line between offending her country's majority Burmese population and expressing concern for the Rohingya minority they despise. When I interviewed her, in September 2015, just before the election that brought her to power, I questioned her silence. Her explanation was this is the only way of ensuring

she would be seen as impartial by both sides. Silence gave her the opportunity and credibility to act impartially when she came to power. Her aim was reconciliation and condemnation would get in the way. It would fan the flames, not douse them.

She was speaking three years after the Rohingya issue first flared in 2012 but long before October 2016 and August 2017. So I had no reason to doubt her.

Yet, this was a test she knew she had to face sooner rather than later. The Rohingya problem is an old one that goes back to the 1940s, when they sided with the British against the Japanese, who had the support of the majority Burmese people. Indeed, immediately after independence, the Rohingya tried to form a breakaway Muslim nation. Therefore, the bitterness between the Rohingya and the rest of the country was waiting to explode. Suu has always known this.

Now I also know she's not president and internal security lies in the hands of the army who thwarted her claim to the top job. Criticising them could endanger the limited power she exercises. She has to tread carefully and speak cautiously. Hers is not a position of absolute authority. She has to compromise to survive.

Yet, not for a moment did I think the compromise she would strike would be so tilted in favour of retaining power and influence

whilst forsaking her own principles.

Today, if she speaks, it's about Rohingya terrorism and the killing of security personnel. She has nothing to say about the innocent men, women and children who have been killed in their hundreds and rendered homeless in hundreds of thousands. Does political expediency dominate her principles so completely that she cannot even express compassion? Is she so fearful of the army that she's forgotten her own values? I didn't expect her to defy the army or endanger Burma's fledgling democracy but I also did not expect her lips to remain so firmly sealed.

This raises a disturbing question: Was her silence on the Rohingya issue before the elections impartiality, as she claimed, or seeking favour with the Burmese majority, whose support she would need? Was it pragmatism or opportunism?

In the interview in September 2015, she described herself as "a pragmatic leader". At the time that adjective conveyed a sense of careful balance. Today it suggests a cover for unbecoming compromise. When I asked if she was ready for the challenge of ruling Burma, she answered: "It's a daunting challenge. I hope it brings out the best in me." I wish I could say it has.

The writer is president of Infotainment Television and a TV anchor

SEPTEMBER 14, 1977, FORTY YEARS AGO



BANSI LAL IN THE DOCK THE ONE-MAN CAPOOR Commission, inquiring into alleged excesses committed during April 1974 in Rewasa village in Bhiwani district of Haryana, is likely to submit its report to the Haryana government in the first week of October; it was reliably learnt here on Tuesday. Former Defence Minister Bansi Lal has been summoned by the commission to appear before it on September 17 in New Delhi. Lal was the chief minister when the alleged excesses took place. The commission has accepted the plea of Lal's advocate that his client was a heart patient and could not undertake the journey to Chandigarh because of medical advice. Bansi Lal denied that

he was responsible for arresting or detaining certain persons connected with the Rewasa incident during the Emergency.

BATTLE AGAINST MNCs HOME MINISTER CHARAN Singh came out in opposition to the import of multinational corporations' capital into India. Addressing the Janata parliamentary party, he said that multinationals had no place in the Indian economy and no permission should be given to them "except in very exceptional cases". Singh, who spoke for nearly two hours to the Janata MPs, pointed out that already too many collaboration agreements existed with multinational corporations. He scoffed at the

agreements entered with multinational corporations for producing such items as shaving soap and toothpaste and justified the government's recent decision on Coca Cola.

GAMBLING IN PUNJAB PUNJAB PLANS TO ban gambling in clubs shortly. The state cabinet would soon give consideration to this question, which has been hanging fire for some years. Though the previous regime had also announced its decision to clamp restrictions on clubs, no steps were initiated to implement the plan. A number of social organisations have been putting pressure on the government to put an end to gambling.

13 THE IDEAS PAGE

The case for alliance

Rise of China and uncertainty over America's role in Asia has brought Japan and India closer. Modi and Abe can overcome the bureaucratic inertia that limits the relationship's possibilities



C. RAJA MOHAN

THAT JAPAN WAS the only nation to extend public support to India during the Doklam confrontation with China is symbolic of the extraordinary transformation of relations between the two Asian powers over the last few years. Two decades ago, in the aftermath of India's nuclear tests, Tokyo was at the forefront of the international condemnation and the imposition of collective economic measures against Delhi.

Today it is quite tempting to suggest that Japan has come closest to being India's natural ally in Asia. Purists will certainly question the idea of an "alliance" between India and Japan. India's international identity, after all, has long been articulated in terms of "non-alignment". Japan, in contrast, swears by its lone alliance with the United States.

The emerging Asian dynamic, however, suggests that Delhi and Tokyo must necessarily draw closer. Whether the relationship between Delhi and Tokyo will eventually approximate to an alliance is likely to be determined less by tradition and more by the current convulsions in their shared Asian and Indo-Pacific geography.

Two factors are threatening to unravel the post-war order in Asia. One is the rapid rise of China and the other is the growing uncertainty over America's future role in Asia. Nearly 40 years of accelerated economic growth has helped China inch closer to the aggregate GDP of the United States. Purposeful military modernisation over the last few decades has given Beijing levers to contest US military dominance over Asia.

As China closes the gap with the US, the imbalance between Beijing and its Asian neighbours has grown massively. Rising China has dethroned Japan as the number one economic power in Asia. It has also shattered the broad parity with India that existed until the 1980s. China's GDP is now five times larger than that of India. Beijing outspends Delhi and Tokyo on defence by more than four times. According to the London-based International Institute of Strategic Studies, China's defence budget (\$216 billion) is more than twice that of India (\$56 billion) and Japan (\$46 billion) put together. As they wake up to strategic diminution vis-à-vis China, India and Japan are also buffeted by the unprecedented political turbulence in the United States. President Donald Trump is challenging the two foundations of America's post-war primacy in Asia — the willingness to act as the market for Asian goods and bearing the main burden of defending its allies in the region, including Japan.

There is undoubtedly much resistance from the establishment in Washington to Trump's heresies on free trade and Eurasian alliances. But the tussle in Washington has begun to induce both Delhi and Tokyo not to take America's political trajectory in Asia for granted. As they cope with China's assertiveness, India and Japan also worry about the consequences of a potential American retrenchment or a deliberate decision in Washington to cede more space to Beijing in Asia.

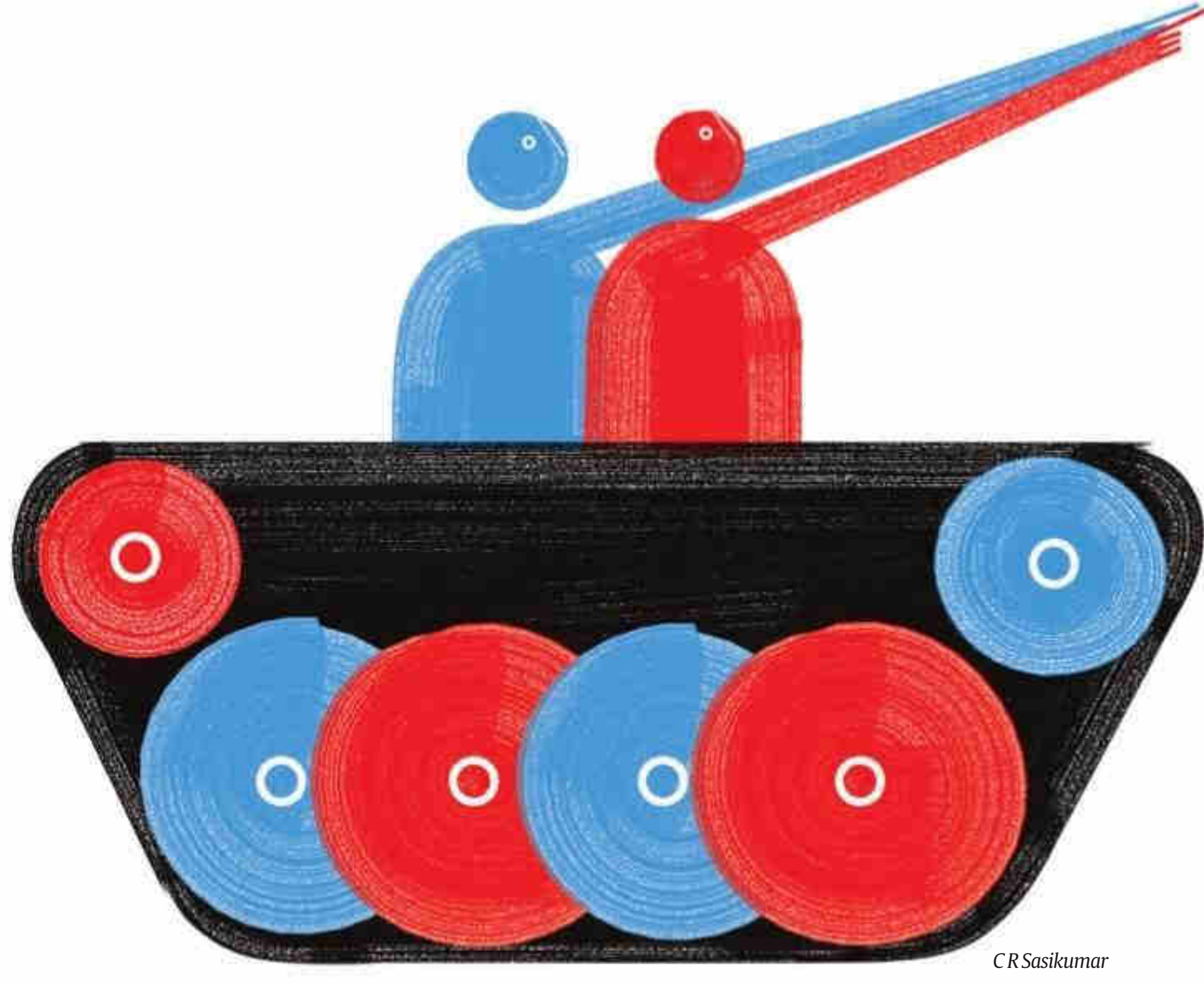
While they hope for an enduring American role in stabilising Asia, Delhi and Tokyo also need to insure against wild oscillations in US policy. One way of doing that is to move towards a genuine alliance between India and Japan. America may have no objections to such an alliance. It has, in fact, actively encouraged closer cooperation between Delhi and Tokyo.

A potential alliance between India and Japan can neither replace the American might nor contain China. As Beijing's neighbours, Delhi and Tokyo have a big stake in a cooperative relationship with Beijing and at the same time a strong incentive to temper some of China's unilateralism through a regional balance of power system.

While the objective case for an alliance is evident, can Delhi and Tokyo overcome their strategic inertia and take the necessary subjective decisions? To be sure, Delhi and Tokyo have come a long way since the tensions over India's nuclear tests in the late 1990s. But there is much distance to go before they can showcase at least an alliance-like relationship.

Successive prime ministers in Delhi and Tokyo contributed to this transformation. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who is in Ahmedabad this week for the annual summit with the Indian PM, deserves special credit. During his brief first tenure as PM during 2006-07, Abe outlined the broad framework for a strong strategic partnership with India.

Luckily for India, Abe has had a rare second shot at leading Japan since late 2012. He achieved the near impossible by getting the Japanese bureaucratic establishment to negotiate a civil nuclear cooperation agreement with India and the political class to approve it. The conventional wisdom until recently was that Japan's "nuclear allergy" will never



C R Sasikumar

Although military exchanges between Delhi and Tokyo have expanded over the last few years, the two sides are far from a credible defence partnership that can shape the regional security architecture in the coming decades. That negotiations on India's purchase of Japanese amphibious aircraft, US-2i, have been stuck for years underlines part of the problem. The time is now for Modi and Abe to demonstrate that they can overcome the bureaucratic inertia that limits the defence possibilities between India and Japan.

allow Tokyo cooperate with India on atomic energy. On his part, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had put Japan at the very top of his foreign policy agenda. Like Abe, Modi continuously nudged the Indian establishment to think more strategically about cooperation with Japan — from high speed railway development to the modernisation of transport infrastructure in the Northeast.

Under Abe and Modi, Tokyo and Delhi have expanded their maritime security cooperation, agreed to work together in promoting connectivity and infrastructure in third countries in India's neighbourhood. They are pooling their resources — financial and human — to develop the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor.

While all this is impressive, sceptics will argue that without a significant defence relationship, the talk of an alliance between India and Japan remains meaningless. Although military exchanges between Delhi and Tokyo have expanded over the last few years, the two sides are far from a credible defence partnership that can shape the regional security architecture in the coming decades.

That negotiations on India's purchase of Japanese amphibious aircraft, US-2i, have been stuck for years underlines part of the problem. The time is now for Modi and Abe to demonstrate that they can overcome the bureaucratic inertia that limits the defence possibilities between India and Japan. Modi and Abe have certainly raised the expectations for a potential alliance between Delhi and Tokyo. But they can't afford to fall short on implementation amidst the current geopolitical churn in Asia.

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

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

"Angela Merkel's suggestion echoes the rational voices in the international community that the DPRK nuclear issue should be resolved through peaceful consultations."

—CHINA DAILY

Bite the bullet

Nirmala Sitharaman will need to be resolute and creative in order to energise the defence sector



ARUN SAHNI

THE APPOINTMENT OF Nirmala Sitharaman as India's defence minister created ripples on more counts than one. She is the first full-time woman minister who occupies the hallowed office. Her appointment confirmed the resolve of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to respect merit and performance, more so as she is a relatively junior politician. In the hope that indirectly reinforces Modi's commitment towards women's empowerment and gender equality, I read urgency in seeking a "hands-on commitment" for addressing the challenges faced by the armed forces. Progress on this front, a focus area of the present government, has been slow. The government made the right noises and initiated baby steps to mitigate the existing deficiencies in ammunition and shortfall/upgrade of critical weapon systems. It also took steps to facilitate a vibrant "defence ecosystem", a pre-requisite for achieving self-sufficiency in the manufacture of big ticket items, including guns, submarines and aircraft. The previous defence minister did a great job despite his political compulsions. But good intentions were subsumed by archaic procurement processes, apathy and a lack of understanding in the bureaucracy.

The apprehensions voiced regarding a woman steering the tradition-steeped and formal armed forces are totally misplaced. History is replete with examples of unprecedented military successes achieved with women at the helm. In our case, we have the success story of the 1971 Indo-Pak conflict that resulted in the birth of Bangladesh. Yes, the armed forces will take some time to get used to a woman defence minister. The minister too has her task cut out. Going by the ethos of the armed forces, she will have to take the first step and prepare the environment for interactions with the uniformed fraternity. Seeing her frank and free approach to discussion, however, I see this issue being resolved amicably.

What needs to be looked at more closely are the challenges she is likely to face in running the defence ministry. Her methodical approach, perseverance and capacity for hard work, reflected in her handling of the commerce ministry, are a big plus. Her real task, however, will be to appreciate the

complexities of the three services and the interplay of OFB-DPSUs-DRDO (Ordnance Factories Board-Defence Public Sector Units-Defence Research and Development Organisation) in India's quest for self-reliance and indigenisation in weaponry. The focus on the MoD is such that decisions taken or not taken could go viral on social or visual media and create pressures. The defence minister will have to retain the dexterity and informality to be empowered by periodic briefings on evolving situations along the active borders with Pakistan and China, internal security commitments in Jammu and Kashmir and the Northeast, and so on. The TRP-driven visual media will create emergencies across myriad spectrums. Unfortunately, a majority of the senior bureaucrats in the MoD, including the defence secretary, are also recent inductees. This may have a bearing on the time taken by the new minister in settling into her job.

Unlike in other ministries, experience in dealing with matters military is necessary for bureaucrats to develop trust and appreciate the nuances in the functioning of the armed forces. If they differ on perceptions regarding priorities, it could cause impediments in the smooth running of the ministry. Structural and procedural issues already plaguing the ministry could also have a negative impact. The reforms announced by the outgoing defence minister amount to a new paradigm. They have financial overtones and their implementation may be time consuming. Therefore, changes must be initiated only after workable alternatives are found.

Hopefully, a minister whose sole responsibility is the running of the defence ministry will ensure that issues are addressed in a holistic and timely manner. Patience and an eye for detail are necessary to review the existing procurement processes and measures to give shape to the "Make in India" initiative. There is a need to be disruptive in thought and action as the efforts in this direction till now have been sub-optimal. Simultaneously, the private sector needs to be re-assured that there is space and place for them in nation-building. The government must convey its resolve that a level-playing field will be provided to them vis a vis the DPSUs. She will have to be dogged in both intention and attitude to break the existing barriers and accelerate the changes promised by the government. The importance of the defence industry needs no emphasis for it will enhance our security imperatives, provide jobs and inject a feeling of national pride.

The writer is a former General Officer Commanding in Chief, Indian Army

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

UNFAIR ON IAS

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Agenda for the Raksha Mantri' (IE, September 13). The author has come down heavily on the civilian bureaucracy, especially the IAS for the problems of the Ministry of Defence. But he judges the scenario from the perspective of the armed forces and hence provides an one-sided picture. Civilian bureaucracy has financial constraints in a poor country. Many times, political leaders operate through the bureaucracy. The civil-military relationship is important for national security and a blame game, as resorted to by the author, will only jeopardise national security.

Suchak D. Patel, Ahmedabad

PARTIAL TRUTH

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'The guest lecturer' (IE, September 13). First let's give credit where it is due: Congress Vice President Rahul Gandhi has accepted that his party has not only become arrogant but alienated itself from the grass roots — though his admission came quite late. It is also heartening that he has accepted that PM Narendra Modi is better communicator than him. But it is sad that he believes that most of our country runs on dynastic lines. He has forgotten that it is the discretion of our people to chose their leader, irrespective of dynasty. When he says that he is ready to become the Congress president and the next prime ministerial candidate, he has not acknowledged the fact that it is the Gandhi who are the biggest problem for the Congress.

Bal Govind, Noida

SCHOOL TO BLAME

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Death of a student' (IE, September 12). The brutal murder of a second grader has exposed the loopholes in the administration of an elite Gurgaon school. The school administration and teachers inability to convince the kid's parents displayed their callousness. It is a matter of shame that an elite school did not

have CCTV cameras and separate toilets for students and employees. The school administration also committed a blunder by not verifying the antecedents of the alleged murderer. It's appalling that children are not secure in schools despite the exorbitant fees which do not follow the protocols set by the government.

Janga Bahadur Sunuwar, Jalpaiguri

WRONG PRIORITY

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'Why India needs a bullet train' (IE, September 12). Only the upper middle, rich and elite classes have access to developments in technology — the bullet train for example. The poor and lower middle class in India do not need a bullet train but health facilities at government hospitals, enough grants for public universities and schools to run and employment opportunities.

Manavpreet Singh, Patiala



TELESCOPE

BY SHAILAJA BAJPAI

Bashful Rahul, feisty Nimki

Congress vice president could borrow some telegenic spunk

YES, THERE IS television before, during and after the news but first, some quick takes.

Congress Vice President Rahul Gandhi was absolutely right: Narendra Modi is a far superior communicator than him. The PM combines rhetoric with pithy catchphrases; Rahul relies on a bashful boyishness, engaging in coffee table "conversations", inadequate at the high table of governance.

His interaction at Berkeley on Tuesday, lacked powerful, meaningful messaging so necessary in these contentious and media cluttered times. And, as German Chancellor Angela Merkel has proved, if you aren't particularly charismatic, you must be solid and substantive.

TV reporters at Ryan International School, Bhondsi walked that extra mile to cover the murder of a young school boy last week; they took us on a virtual walking-talking geographical tour of the school/premises. So, the NDTV 24x7 reporter showed us the victim's classroom, his entry point into the school, the distance between his class and the toilet where he was later discovered, his exact movements that morning.

Now, while our reporters/anchors are blown away by their own hyperbole, CNN's reporters in Florida were swept off their feet by the wind. Rather than "Singin' in the rain", they were soaking in Irma's downpour —

didn't their mothers teach them they would catch (a) cold? Surely, the dangers of such hurricanes can be captured without reporters drowning in a sea of words?

On to Star Bharat, the spanking new channel. It celebrates an odd coupling of realism with predestination, a sanyasi with polygamy.

So there's the devotional song contest, *Om Shanti Om* a la Bollywood; a man married to not one, not two but to five women in *Kya Haal, Mr Paanchaal* — soon after *Pehredaar Pya Ki* (Sony) was sacked following protests over its absolutely shameless attempt to exploit love and marriage between a 10-year-old boy and a woman at least twice his age.

There's also a feisty village lass who wants to takes on everyone (*Nimki Mukhiya*); a Robin Hood straight from the Amitabh Bachchan school of hero-anti hero (*Saam Daam Dand Bhed*); and finally, a young boy haunted by his brutal murder in an earlier life (*Ayushman Bhava*).

Speaking of Bachchan, he's back (*Kaun Banega Crorepati*, Sony), selling dreams, jio digital payments and several government schemes.

First, Baba Ramdev. He's not just a guru but a Mahaguru on *Om Shanti Om* which is devoted to "divine voices" — the contestants — who sing devotional songs. Ramdev ji is

his usual spry self, willing to fool around in the spirit of things. He also sings. Ahem: His vocal chords could use a few stretching exercises. Sonakshi Sinha, Shekhar Ravjiani and Kanika Kapoor "judge" the 14 youngsters.

How do you make devotional disco? With sets from the interior of *Baahubali*'s palace and contemporary costumes/dances as in other talent shows. Also, extend devotion to fulfill his mother Kunti's preposterous requirements in his wife, courtesy Lord Shiva, you're aghast at the results: Five simpering women vying for his attention. Is this Hindu dharma? Is it even legal? Puerile, morally and otherwise offensive, *Kya Haal, Mr Paanchaal* should join *Pehredaar* in oblivion.

Nimki, a carefree, spunky, self-absorbed brat who always gives better than she gets, is delightful (*Nimki Mukhiya*). A taxi driver father and two younger siblings cannot control her wildest longings — or her tongue. Everything from gender issues to Swachh Bharat trip off her tongue guilelessly.

Meanwhile, local elections in the village involve her with local politician Teetar Singh's family politics. Winsomely satirical,

watch it.

A rollicking poor-boy-rich girl romance with mafia dons and distasteful politicians sees Robin Hood Vijay as the right-hand man of local strongman Pankaj who is the chief minister's lackey (*Saam Daam Dand Bhed*). His good guy brother, Prabhbat, is pitted against Pankaj as MLA of Kausalpur — Vijay is caught between the two. Meanwhile, he has fallen for the CM's daughter.

A powerful, realistic serial not without humour or violence, explores the seamier aspects of Indian grassroots politics. Just one question: Why is everything and everyone in the show, the colour orange tangerine?

A question worthy of *KBC* (Sony) into its 17th year, along with Bachchan. Somethings old, somethings new. Old: Contestants still tend to belong to rural or second tier cities like Hisar, Phoolpur, Sikar — why are metros discriminated against? And there's the gushing adulation for Bachchan — very embarrassing. New? A Rs 7 crore jackpot, an extra lifetime and digital payments. Also, questions are more topical: Demonetisation, GST, Swachh Bharat, President Kovind, voices of Amit Shah, Jayalalithaa mingle with Hindu mythology and culture. Hmm. Ninety minutes of this and you long for Nimki.

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