

8 EDITORIAL



Back on track

India and China must address bilateral issues in a sustainable way, pursuing the BRICS spirit

By putting up a united front at the BRICS summit, and proposing a revival of the Panchsheel principles of peaceful cooperation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping have signalled they are trying to put the bitterness of the past few months behind them. The tenor of the meetings between the two leaders was particularly remarkable given that the long Doklam military stand-off was resolved just a week ago. In fact, their agreement that Doklam-like situations must not recur is an indication that India and China are looking for new mechanisms to strengthen the border defence agreements that have held in the past. It is also significant that both countries expressed similar views about resisting economic protectionism of the kind that the Trump administration in the U.S. has been espousing; the BRICS countries have together committed to an “open and inclusive” multilateral trading system. Another area of welcome consonance was the North Korean nuclear tests. All five countries, Brazil, Russia and South Africa being the other three, condemned them unequivocally, while advocating dialogue and not the use of force. The messaging that emanated from both the Indian and Chinese delegations at Xiamen smoothed the interactions between Mr. Modi and Mr. Xi, and allowed for a productive BRICS declaration that belied fears that bilateral tensions would overtake multilateral concerns. The government’s determination to hush any triumphalism over the Doklam outcome certainly helped. China’s nod to the inclusion of the Lashkar-e-Taiba and the Jaish-e-Mohammed among the terrorist groups threatening regional stability, and its choosing not to speak of the contentious Belt and Road Initiative at the summit suggested it was heading India’s concerns.

With the BRICS meet concluded, it is doubly important that Indian and Chinese officials re-engage in a sustained manner to address all areas of discord which led to the charged situation at Doklam. They must, for starters, review where the border defence standard operating procedures failed. Second, the two countries must convene the delayed meeting of the Special Representatives, and add the latest claims and counter-claims over the Sikkim boundary and the India-China-Bhutan tri-junction to the agenda for discussions. It is necessary to see that the much-acclaimed BRICS language on terrorist groups like the LeT and JeM is translated into actionable points as a show of good faith. Beijing will have an early opportunity to do so in October when the issue of designating JeM chief Masood Azhar as a global terrorist comes up at the UN Security Council and when the UN’s Financial Action Task Force takes stock of Pakistan’s actions against the LeT. It is imperative that the gains of the BRICS summit in terms of the India-China bilateral atmospherics are optimised.

Breaking the bank

The mega bid for IPL media rights further shifts the centre of gravity towards the BCCI

The Indian Premier League is the high point in the international cricket calendar. Since 2008 the annual summer staple has dished out gargantuan pay cheques, nail-biting contests and massive sixes. The player auctions often witness franchises breaking their respective banks. Despite the initial squeak of the former Australian wicket-keeper Adam Gilchrist that he felt like ‘cattle’ up for sale to the highest bidder, or the 2013 spot-fixing scandal, the IPL is here to stay. For a brand which in its formative years Rahul Dravid succinctly described as “a domestic tournament with an international flavour”, the IPL has quadrupled its growth and in the future could perhaps challenge the International Cricket Council’s global events, be it the World Cup or the World Twenty20. The league features the world’s leading cricketers, with the unfortunate exception of Pakistani players, and it gained a further financial fillip this week when Star India offered ₹16,347.5 crore to acquire the media rights for the next five years. It dwarfed the ₹8,200 crore Sony paid for the TV rights in the previous 10-year contract. That a broadcaster is willing to stake so much is confirmation of the traction the IPL has gained among television audiences, and the lodestone it remains for corporates and advertisers.

The successful bid also reiterates the plain truth that India is cricket’s commercial hub. The trend of staggering money on offer for anything that is cricket-related in India has been evident over the last few years. The enormous bids Chinese phone manufacturers Vivo (₹2,199 crore) and Oppo (₹1,079 crore) made for the IPL title sponsorship and the Indian team’s sponsorship, respectively, earlier this year drive home the point. The new media rights deal will considerably bolster the annual income of the Board of Control for Cricket in India, 15.4% of which came from the IPL according to its annual report for 2015-16. The cash flow reinforces the BCCI’s uncontested status as the wealthiest and most powerful governing body in world cricket. Star India’s winning bid also highlights the rapid growth of the game’s shortest version. It translates, approximately, to ₹54.5 crore a match, greater than the ₹43 crore currently paid for an India home international (Test, ODI and T20). The club versus country debate will rage again, specifically when the player auction takes place in February 2018 and the league runs its course in April and May. Cricketers aren’t complaining, though. Tests remain the acme of cricket but with venues largely sporting empty stands, the five-day game needs its conveyor belt to be oiled by the commerce that the IPL and by extension the BCCI gifts to the game at large. More importantly, the confirmation of the commercial and administrative clout of the BCCI must underline yet again the need to continue the reform and clean-up of the way cricket is managed in India.

There is a Rohingya in all of us

By contemplating deportation of the hapless refugees, India undermines itself



SHIV VISVANATHAN

The timing could not have been more immaculately disastrous. At a time when Rohingya are being forced to flee the violence in Myanmar’s Rakhine state, in the Supreme Court this week the Centre refused to revise its stand on deporting Rohingya migrants in India. It was in effect adhering to its position taken on August 9, when the Minister of State for Home Affairs informed Parliament that 40,000 Rohingya were to be deported. With that, the idea of India, the India of democracy and hospitality disappeared in a single stroke. A dream of India disappeared in a single moment. The marginal life of the Rohingya became a greater nightmare. The Government of India has returned to an idea of hard state, dropping its dreams of compassion, care and civility. Behind the tragedy of the decision will be a nit-picking bureaucracy and the security think tanks, convinced that an aspirational India does not need a defeated people like the Rohingya.

Most persecuted minority
In many ways, the Rohingya represent “the last man” of international society that Gandhi talked about. They are the world’s most persecuted minority. They are Muslims, belonging to the Sunni sect, scattered mainly over the Rakhine state of Myanmar. Harassed by the Myanmar Army and forced to serve as slave labour, they have also been systematically persecuted by the Buddhist majority. The persecution of the Rohingya also highlights the silence of Aung



San Suu Kyi, destroying another myth of ethics and human rights. A woman whose campaign for human rights won her the Peace Nobel now stands embarrassingly silent in case her broader political strategies are affected. The dispensability of the Rohingya is clear and so is the callousness of the nation state. India can no longer criticise the West for being hostile to Syrian and Sudanese refugees.

One thing is clear. No Nehruvian state, or even regime of Indira Gandhi, would have made such a decision. Both upheld the principle of hospitality, of the openness of borders. Jawaharlal Nehru was open to Tibet and courageously invited the Dalai Lama to make a home here, and Indira Gandhi played host to refugees from the then East Pakistan, ignoring the threats of tough people such as Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon.

The Rohingya situation has been bleak for years. The turning point was the attitude of the Burmese military junta which cracked down on them in 1982, contending that Rohingya as late comers were not part of the original ancestors of Burmese society. Denied an autonomous cultural status, they

lost all claims to the entitlements of citizenship. They were denied not only access to health, education but also any claim to the idea of citizenship.

A slow exodus

Persecuted by the army and the Buddhist majority, they began a slow exodus over India, Bangladesh, spreading to States such as Rajasthan, Jammu and Kashmir, moving as far as Tamil Nadu and Kerala. Their exodus has once again a cynical side to it as agents arranged for their travel. These touts of international suffering arranged for their travel at exorbitant rates. The Rohingya became temporary boat people as Bangladesh shut its borders on them piously condemning them as drug peddlers. The Rohingya then attempted to cross into Malaysia, Thailand and Indonesia only to realise that fellow Islamic nations had little sympathy for them. The no-welcome sign was clear and categorical. Each state would react piously, claiming to have fulfilled its humanitarian quota. It was also realistically clear that unlike the Syrians, the Rohingya, as a tiny speck of the refugee population would hardly be front page news

for a sufficient length of time. At the most their memories would survive in a few PhD theses in international relations. The refugee has always been an enticing topic for PhDs.

In fact, Pope Francis’s statement that the “campaign of terror” against the Rohingya must cease fell on deaf ears. Sadly, India missed the leadership and compassion of a Mother Teresa. She would have stepped out and offered some care and relief to them, stirring the Indian middle class into some acts of caring.

The odd thing is that the genocide, the vulnerability of such a people is often lost in bureaucratic issues of legal and political status. It is not clear whether Rohingya are refugees or illegal migrants. As refugees they are entitled to some care; as illegal migrants they become subject to harassment and exploitation. Refugees become a target for an informal economy of bonded labour.

Union Home Minister Kiren Rijiju already sounded the warning signals in response to a question in the Rajya Sabha. He was clear that the Rohingya were illegal migrants. He was cited as claiming in an interview that the Rohingya “have no basis to live here. Anybody who is an illegal migrant will be deported.” Yet one wonders whether in terms of humanitarian law and the conventions of the UN, Mr. Rijiju is right. This is a group that is threatened with continuous persecution, whose homes are unsafe, whose livelihoods have been destroyed. To be forced to return to Myanmar would only subject them to harassment, ethnic persecution and a genocidal future.

Being human

One is grateful that the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC), which often plays the Rip

Van Winkle of human rights, responded quickly. On August 18, it issued a notice to the government over its plan to deport Rohingya staying illegally in India, asking the government to report in four weeks.

The Commission added hopefully that the Supreme Court had declared that fundamental rights are applicable to all regardless of whether they are citizens of India. Yet such appeals to rights and humanitarianism cut little ice in today’s bureaucracy which is obsessed with security issues and content to raise the bogey of terrorism and law and order when it comes to such a helpless people. The NHRC came up with a memorable line that Rohingya refugees “are no doubt foreign nationals but they are human beings.”

It is clear that the everydayness of Rohingya life must be miserable. They face the challenge of survival and the prospect of persecution if they return to Myanmar. One need not hide under legal excuses. What India confronts is a case of ethics, a challenge to its understanding of citizenship and freedom. If we abandon the Rohingya, we abandon the idea of India as a home of refugees and hospitality. A country which offered a home to the Parsis, the Tibetans, the Afghans and the Jews cannot turn a little minority of helpless people back. One hopes civil society protests, challenging the indifference of the state. It is not just a question of saving a beleaguered people, it is question of saving the soul of India. The idea of India is being threatened today. Should civil society remain mute and indifferent? There is a Rohingya in all of us.

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Staring down censorship

Why did Beijing risk a backlash from the China studies community?



SONIKA GUPTA

Last month, the *China Quarterly* (CQ), the most reputed academic journal of China studies in the world, published by the Cambridge University Press (CUP), was asked by the Chinese government to block hundreds of articles in China. The censorship was sought with retrospective effect going back to the first issue in 1960. Most of the articles were on Tibet, the Cultural Revolution, Tiananmen Square protests, Taiwan independence, Falun Gong, Xinjiang, democracy and human rights.

This was an unprecedented move of academic censorship in China. It is common practice that foreign scholars excise ‘sensitive’ information from their work published in Chinese on the mainland. This protects Chinese citizens associated with a particular piece of research and also guards against the possibility of visa denials for subsequent visits by scholars. However, the CQ censoring raised the stakes as this actively targeted the work of China scholars in English published outside China. The academic community reacted swiftly with stinging criticism. It

criticised the CUP for its failure to stand up for academic freedom. This backlash worked and within three days the CQ reinstated the banned content in China.

Defending the ban, an editorial in the *Global Times*, the mouthpiece of the government, termed the ban a “matter of principle” and asked the “West” to fall in line with Chinese laws to do business with the vast Chinese market. It also stated that academic freedom is a western value.

Facilitating dialogue

CQ has over six decades built a reputation for upholding the highest standards of research on China, with defining conversations on Chinese politics, economy and society. It has created a well-informed discourse on China that is itself open to critique and discussion. This censorship would have prevented Chinese scholars from participating in this conversation. Further, CQ is equally valuable to Chinese and non-Chinese scholars. Its censorship was hardly likely to produce an affirming consensus around the Chinese government’s view of its own politics within the Chinese academic community. As an English language journal, its readership in China is limited to the social sciences academics. Therefore, this censorship was not likely to have had a major impact on widespread Chinese efforts to control its popular mediascape. Why, then, did China risk a global



political backlash from some of the most well-informed people on China?

It appears that there now is a broad policy of censoring academic debate in China. Following the CQ censorship, Lexis-Nexis, another widely used legal and academic database, revealed that it has been forced to pull two of its databases out of the Chinese market because of censorship. The *Journal of Asian Studies*, another top journal was also asked to remove content. While censorship is not new in China, its expansion to academic content in English is an alarming sign.

Internet sovereignty

The Chinese panopticon has evolved from party units at the workplace, neighbourhoods, professional organisations, media and academia to the more omnipresent monitoring regime online. China

has successfully bent global companies and its own citizens to its will in operationalising its panopticon. The latest casualty in this are the virtual private networks (VPNs) used by Chinese and foreigners on the mainland to access banned content. Apple, the global technology giant, was complicit in this exercise, removing an app last month from its online store that allowed users to access VPNs. While the panopticon has served the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) well, it remains the Achilles heel of the party requiring constant political investment and tight operational control. To deal with this challenge, China is now trying to control the global conversation on the Internet and change the rules of how the Internet functions globally as a discursive space. China’s articulation of ‘Internet sovereignty’ is to territorialise cyberspace giving national governments greater control over access and content. This is philosophically opposed to the vision of the Internet as global space built of and building communities over and above territorial borders.

The attempt to censor the CQ is an outcome of this regressive policy. CQ was sought to be censored because it does not conform to the regime’s attempts to revise Chinese history, purging it of critical reflection on Chinese politics. Chinese universities and research institutes have always functioned under tight political boundaries. It appears that the government

wants to narrow these boundaries further by preventing access to critical material on China’s contentious politics over race, sovereignty, political citizenship, and elite politics. The upcoming CCP Congress has also contributed to the attempts to sanitise Chinese cyberspace of any politically subversive content. However, even as that may be a catalyst for the CQ ban, the political provenance of the ban resides in the revisionism of Chinese history to bolster the legitimacy of the party.

The reliance on brute force of the market to censor is likely to create an undercurrent of resistance rather than an informed consensus in favour of the CCP’s vision. China overplayed its hand here and clearly underestimated the resolve of the China scholars’ community in standing by their life’s work. The CUP’s decision to reinstate its content provides a contrast to the capitulation by global corporations such as Apple, to the lure of the Chinese market. Evidently, it is the university and not the market that will produce a resistance to oppression and stand by what is worthy of a fight for all peoples. Precisely why nationalistic regimes the world over today are trying to turn universities into uncritical factories to churn out loyal foot soldiers of the state.

Sonika Gupta is Associate Professor, IIT-Madras China Studies Centre, Chennai

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Cabinet rejig

The Narendra Modi government must be credited for choosing an outspoken Minister as the new Defence Minister. It’s a matter of great pride for all women in the country. Nirmala Sitharaman has made her mark in ‘Start Up India’, ‘Make in India’ and GST. One hopes that the government will now take steps towards enabling full-fledged women’s empowerment and act on the issue of reservation for women in Parliament.

JANGA BAHADUR SURI, Bagrakote, Jalpaiguri, West Bengal

■ The motive behind the recent cabinet reshuffle is said to have been to reward performers and show the door to underachievers. Since two-thirds of the term of the present government is already over with hardly any credible achievements to its credit, what can we expect in the remainder of its term, and by simply bringing in talent from outside its

ranks? How will there be any visible change possible at this late stage after setting high and impossible expectations?

V. PADMANABHAN, Bengaluru

The secure babu

The government seems to have taken a practical and tactical decision to protect its bureaucrats from hackers and data breaches (“Top babus given secure mobiles”, September 5). Compromised telecom equipment can quickly cripple a nation’s civilian and military infrastructure. It doesn’t take much for a programmer to plant code into a router, even if he/she works overseas. Real security does not come with closing doors. The imperviousness and the privacy that a typewriter can offer are still unmatched but modern technology is here to stay. The Internet, e-mail and cell phone technology, though a great boon, can still be hacked

and massive volumes of data leaked with miniature devices from any corner of the world. India has to be ready for the “blend of the criminal actor, the nation-state actor, and the terrorist actor”, which will be the trend ahead.

H.N. RAMAKRISHNA, Bengaluru

NEET impact

First of all, we must consider the reality in the Indian educational system before jumping to conclusions. MBBS aspirant A. Anitha’s death is the end result and symptomatic of an already ailing educational system; a system that has failed its own user. Public anger should be directed towards educational policy and reform. Every board demands a different kind of knowledge. Perhaps the State Board is ill-suited for the knowledge that NEET demands. Before the government seeks to democratise exams and processes, it should evince

equal interest in democratising learning at all levels. Otherwise, it wouldn’t be fair play.

MADHURE AKILLA C., Chengalpattu, Tamil Nadu

Mission failure

A technical issue may have ended another successful ISRO launch but there is nothing to worry about. ISRO has had a long and successful history of launches and this setback is an opportunity to learn one more crucial lesson. Science has to be precise and there can be no room for errors (Editorial - “Down but not out”, September 5).

P.S.V. PRASAD BABU, Bhadrachalam, Telangana

To be carried with you

Though vehicle users in Tamil Nadu will have to accept the court directive as far as original driving licences are concerned, there are other equally serious areas of concern which have been ignored (“Original driving licence

must from tomorrow”, September 5). Not wearing helmets, wrong driving techniques, gross violations in motor carriage, high speed and reckless driving, parking violations, drunk driving and minors driving vehicles are a few of many serious instances that go unpunished. There is also no control over vehicular exhaust emission standards.

V. LAKSHMANAN, Tirupur, Tamil Nadu

Readers’ views

I feel that readers’ views should get top preference, while personal views, media practices and the RE’s experiences abroad come next (“The reader in mind?” - “Letters to the Editor”, September 5). The Readers’ Editor is the channel of communication between *The Hindu* and its readers. There must be a good and healthy exchange of views as well as an acknowledgement of them. A reader should feel that he is a major part of this unique column as no

other newspaper in India even thought of starting such a forum as the RE’s Office.

J.P. REDDY, Nalgonda, Telangana

Fognini issue

Fabio Fognini swearing at a woman umpire at the U.S. Open and his consequent disqualification from the tournament after three days adds insult to injury to those players who lost to him in the earlier rounds. One wonders why there was an inordinate delay in handing out the punishment to Fognini. He could have been banned from participating in the next ATP tournament or the U.S. Open or even the next Grand Slam. Introducing the card system, as in football and hockey (red, yellow) will go a long way if thought of. Is it fair to throw a player out for his or her first-time offence?

A.V. NARAYANAN, Tiruchi

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THE WEDNESDAY INTERVIEW | SACHIN PILOT

'Issues define the narrative, not political parties'

The president of Rajasthan Congress on the party's strategy for the next Assembly and general elections, demonetisation, and Opposition unity

SMITA GUPTA

Ever since Sachin Pilot became the president of Rajasthan Congress, and especially after his party lost power at the Centre, he is rarely seen in the national capital. Rajasthan is a key battleground State where the Congress hopes to wrest back power in the 2018 Assembly elections. On a visit to Delhi this month, with a portrait of his father Rajesh Pilot dominating the office and another large photograph of his father walking with Rajiv Gandhi looking down from another wall, he spoke about the challenges he and his party face. Excerpts:

What are the Congress party's prospects and what is your strategy in next year's Assembly elections in Rajasthan?

In the last four years, from 21 seats out of 200 in the last State elections (in 2013) and 26% behind the BJP in Parliament – and I must give credit to all the party workers and leaders – we have been able to establish a vibrant alternative in Rajasthan. The Congress has been working consistently not just on winning the bigger elections but also the smaller elections – mandis, panchayats or corporations, the cooperative sector, agricultural banks – for these set the tone and tenor of how the political landscape will evolve.

On the other hand, Vasundhara (Chief Minister Vasundhara Raje) went on her Swaraj Sankalp Yatra and made massive promises, 90% of which are only on paper. People are beginning to ask questions. She spoke of 15 lakh jobs, the official records show it's only in the thousands. She said she would make agriculture remunerative for the farmers, instead there have been 80 suicides in the last two years.

Are you saying there were no suicides in the past?

Earlier when there was crop failure, the state would intervene, have a loan waiver, give some financial

help. People had the faith that 'if we are in trouble, the government will save our lives'. Because there is a disconnect between the ruling dispensation in Jaipur and the farming community, we have come to this. Ten lakh farmers are waiting for compensation from last year's crop damage caused by hailstorms. This is as per the official records, and this has been stated by the Minister in the Assembly.

We have been raising the issues of agrarian distress, corruption, unemployment, and of the complete handing over of state institutions to private hands. I am not against private investment, but in the garb of PPP (public-private partnership) you can't give away valuable resources and assets of the government of the State to private hands without any transparent MOUs.

The BJP has effectively used the issue of corruption against the Congress, but the Congress has not succeeded in countering it either in Rajasthan or anywhere else.

I can't talk about Delhi, but in Rajasthan the people know the facts. One lakh big has of land were given illegally to 600 people in one day. This was brought to light. We asked for a CBI (Central Bureau of Investigation) probe, we went to the



*SHANKER CHAKRAVARTY

CVC (Central Vigilance Commission). The government cancelled those mines and handed over the inquiry to the Lok Ayukta – the Chief Minister's office does not come under its purview. Even before the Lok Ayukta report has come in, the concerned secretary's suspension has been revoked. There are many instances where the Rajasthan government has accepted that there are malpractices, corruption. Through our messaging, face-to-face interactions, people know this.

There is no clarity still on whether you or Ashok Gehlot will be the Congress's face for next year's elections.

We all have different responsibilities. It's not about one or two people, but a collective leadership. In Rajasthan, we have a big pool of leaders, all of whom have given decades of service to the Congress. The time has come for us to give back to the party, make sure we win the State. Who will head the government when the Congress forms the government is a speculative question. The decision will be taken by the State MLAs and the AICC (All

India Congress Committee.

You will go to the elections without a chief ministerial nominee?

As a practice we don't do that (announce a nominee), except maybe the odd State here or there. But the BJP, which announced its chief ministerial faces in Madhya Pradesh, in Chhattisgarh where it is in power, and in Karnataka where it is not... why has it not done that in Rajasthan?

Will Rahul Gandhi be the Congress president by the end of October?

I don't want to prejudge the election results, but all indications are that he will be.

Or is there a chance that Sonia Gandhi will continue?

You are speculating now. Mrs. Gandhi has been Congress president for 19 years and she has her own space not just in Congress politics but in national politics too. She will continue to guide the party and be a force against growing divisive forces.

Today there is a disregard for systems and institutions that we have worked so hard to create.

There is much talk in the party about the clash between the old guard and the Young Turks, talk of growing frustration.

I don't want to sermonise, but the word frustration really shouldn't be there. It's not about A, B or C any more. In the Opposition, there should be only one goal – how to become the voice of the people so that we can take on the BJP in 2019. This is a fictitious argument, about young and old. The talk that you mentioned has been played up much more than it actually exists. Much has been written in the media, but we all work together. I became an MP at 26, a Minister at 30, and State party president at 36. I have been an MP for 10 years, fought three elections. So if someone says I should get more from the party, that's nonsense.

You may have an exceptional career graph.

But let us take the case of a general secretary who does not know whether he will be replaced tomorrow. What will he deliver?

Everyone who is truly loyal to the Congress, as long as he or she holds a position, must discharge that responsibility with full honesty and commitment. Now is not the time to think of promotions or demotions, but to give everything to the party because the situation today is much worse than it has been before. We have had BJP and non-Congress governments before, but what is happening today is much worse. There is a certain level of strangulation, a disregard for systems and institutions that we have worked so hard to create. I think what people expect from a government is that it should be fair and just and transparent, have a two-way communication, and be sensitive to the hopes and aspirations of the people. All the propaganda people are absorbing through radio, TV, the Internet, and the newspapers, but what about the main issues in this country?

We have had the worst economic report in the last three years, the GDP is tanking, exports are falling, job losses, agrarian distress. And the entire discussion has moved on from the RBI report (on demonetisation) just a couple of days back to the Cabinet reshuffle. It's important, but it's hogged three days of prime time as opposed to the real issue of job losses in the IT, manufacturing, export sectors. How successful was the money ban? Now we have even the RBI saying it was a flawed policy. Somebody has to be able to ask questions of the government. But the environment is such that the people asking questions are raided. There is a new policy: defame, denounce and destroy.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been able to

change the goalposts whenever something his government has done has failed. But you have to grant that Mr. Modi is a 24x7 politician. You don't see that energy in the Opposition. Is Rahul Gandhi an effective counter to Mr. Modi?

It is true that all of us in the Congress, in the Opposition, need to act much more decisively and swiftly. So far it has been a tough journey... when parties with people from such different backgrounds come together. And yes, the BJP also plays spoilsport – look what they did in Bihar. When you break the Opposition like that, yes, unity suffers. As the largest Opposition party, it is incumbent on the Congress to get a credible line-up of Opposition leaders and then pose a challenge, which is what we are going to do.

You still haven't answered whether Mr. Gandhi is an effective counter to Mr. Modi.

This comparison is drawn all the time and it's fair to do that. But the Congress is a set of ideas and we are going to go into elections with a clear objective of replacing the BJP. The media can make comparisons, but we are going into elections as a party. Mr. Gandhi has said many times that he as vice president and Mrs. Gandhi as president reflect the Congress's background, commitment, and how it can take on the BJP. We will do it effectively.

Every Opposition party has understood that there is need for a strong, united, viable opposition to challenge the BJP. Within the NDA, what happened to the JD(U) after it joined? They were left out of the Cabinet expansion. The Shiv Sena is not happy, so all is not rosy within the NDA. We will mount a formidable challenge in 2019.

Whenever the Congress

takes up the issue of corruption, the BJP changes the subject to its communal agenda. The BJP is very deft at changing the narrative. Why is the Congress not able to do that?

Issues define the narrative, not political parties. People may not voice these things clearly, but I can tell you that on the ground there is a huge resentment among the Dalits, the farmers, about prices not coming down, gas prices going up, the impact of GST on small grocery shops. There is a certain level of disenchantment already there.

Are you saying that this economic downturn could be a turning point?

Absolutely.

Why didn't it work against the BJP in U.P., after demonetisation?

It was too early in U.P. And two, Mr. Modi positioned the money ban as a rich versus poor agenda which is not the case. The stated objective was to deal with Naxalism, terrorism, black money – all that was set apart. People have understood the real agenda. If you look at the score card of real achievements – Startup India, Stand-up India, Digital India – in all the slogans now it is 2022, not 2019.

You are a second-generation politician and the BJP is always talking about dynastic politics in the Congress.

I don't have to counter it. Look at the Chief Minister of Rajasthan: her mother was a prominent BJP politician, her sister is a minister in the BJP government in Madhya Pradesh. The BJP talks of hereditary politics but Chhattisgarh Chief Minister Raman Singh's son is an MP. The story is the same with the previous Himachal Chief Minister. I can go on and on.

Somebody has to be able to ask questions of the government. But the environment is such that the people asking questions are raided. There is a new policy: defame, denounce and destroy.

SINGLE FILE

Paths to liberation

The importance of unusual spaces for the abundantly free mind

SHOHINI SENGUPTA



The author Anna Pavord says in a moving documentary about living space, "Space is our best defence to an increasingly aggressive world." It is perhaps curious that spaces, particularly spaces of freedom, are often associated with open, public spaces, of commute, dissonance, people, commerce, which is why so many

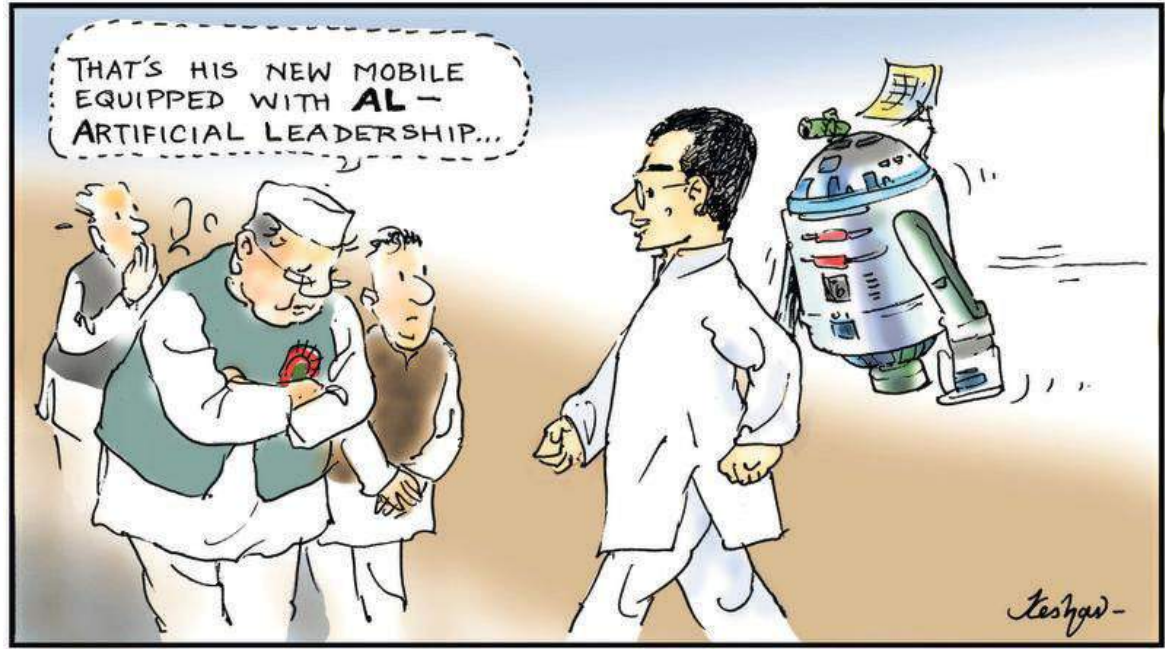
demonstrations of freedom emerge in the same realm. The history of space and freedom is the history of modernity, the history of old cities breaking the barriers of elusiveness and liberation for the common man, from city barriers and fortifications to the creation of gardens and public houses of expressions, creation of streets where things could flow freely, wide boulevards, lower awnings, monuments of liberalism – educational institutions, private enterprise, court houses, museums. Throughout history, and the evolution of the modern thinking human, unusual spaces have existed wherever human craftiness and imagination have allowed them to exist, as adaptable and fluid as people have willed them to be.

Gardens are among the few remaining vestiges of human-kind's creativity, and luxuries, in the past of kings and aristocrats, and today of people who live in and around gardens. As Virginia Woolf puts it in *Kew Gardens*, gardens are important because they are repositories of our past lives.

Choosing colour

Perhaps not so rationally, when I think of freedom, I think of the freedom of choosing colours, to be able to blend and stand out, breathe and perish whenever one chooses to. Consider Woolf's use of the colour 'green' in her story 'Blue and Green'. She takes a shard of glass, pours green down it, places animate and inanimate objects around it, makes the grass glisten, runs camels through mirages, flops frogs over, and sets unbroken stars; all before the night seeps in with its shadows and "blots of blue", ending the saga of the 'green'. Colours can do wonders for the soul, and it can rip apart the ordinary to create fleeting spectres of what our lives could be, or who we can be today, with the freedom to make the green vanish suddenly into blots of blue. Unusual spaces stolen out of the preserves of what we know and imagine have terrific possibilities. The Nobel Peace Prize winner, Leymah Gbowee, credited with ending the Second Liberian Civil War by leading a women's peace movement, started to bring together young girls ravaged by war and abuse, to a shared space of a community, scaling up the comfort and space of a single room into wider rural communities of trust and commitment, where girls are slightly more immune to fear and hopelessness. These are unusual spaces because they exist in places that have witnessed violence at unprecedented levels, and continue to do so, unusual because of the participants (the girls) who could have given up and didn't, unusual because women like Gbowee create these spaces of freedom out of nowhere, quite like Woolf's 'blots of blue', appearing magically out of 'green': urgent breakthroughs and unusual spaces for the abundantly free mind.

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CONCEPTUAL Anthropocene GEOLOGY

This refers to the period in earth's history when human activities began to have a significant impact on the state of the planet's ecology. The term was popularised by Dutch chemist and Nobel laureate Paul J. Crutzen in his 2002 article 'Geology of Mankind' published in the journal, *Nature*. Crutzen proposed that the Anthropocene period, which is currently underway, began during the latter part of the 18th century when Scottish inventor James Watt invented the steam engine. It is marked by increasing concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere which has had a substantial impact on the global climate.

MORE ON THE WEB

Here's what you need to know about the Lucknow Metro
<http://bit.ly/lknwmtro>

NOTEBOOK

A dangerous game

Reporting on the murky relationship between humans and tech

SUVIJIT BAGCHI

"Ki hochhey bol toh (What is this chaos about?)" asked the station house officer, my batchmate. He was baffled. "What is this Blue Whale game?" He had to dig deep as senior officers had initiated an awareness campaign underscoring just how dangerous the game was. The campaign, the police claimed, had "saved" a student who was at an advanced stage of the game. In the Blue Whale game, an administrator reportedly assigns a player various tasks such as watching horror films, etching the shape of a whale on one's arm with a sharp object, and finally committing suicide. Bengali television routinely broadcasts stories on the game, which is enough to unnervise parents.

"I have a 14-year-old son," my friend said. I did not tell him that we in the newsroom too often won-

der about the depth of the crisis amidst West Bengal's recent communal flare-ups and the Darjeeling imbroglio. West Bengal is a State with little "mass entertainment" in the districts, other than some folk theatre and television serials which are usually not watched by students. 'Blue Whale' is fast filling up that space, we had concluded. To understand how the human mind works, I passed on my Netflix password to my friend, to watch *Black Mirror*, an ongoing British TV series on the impact of technology on society. Even if the series is set in suburban England, perhaps it may provide some background to the future of our societies, I thought. *Black Mirror* prophesies a society swallowed up by mobile applications and games.

Episode two of season three is a good example of how *Black Mirror* antedated Blue Whale, a year before it entered West

Bengal. In this episode, a gaming company implants a neural chip on the nape of the neck of protagonist. This transfers him to a setting where the interface between reality and hyperreality gets blurred. His administrator describes the experience as having "layers on top of reality". While *Black Mirror* is fiction, Blue Whale is not, indicating that the interface between "layers on top of reality" and the brain is reducing and often even colliding. My friend watched the episode and said that he stopped his son from accessing the Internet on his mobile. "But it will put you in trouble too," he told me. How, I asked. Am I not old enough to understand the Blue Whale game? "Journalism separates a lie from the truth. If the public is confused between what is real and what is hyperreal, what will you report?" he asked. I was stumped.

FROM The *Hindu*. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 6, 1967

Chagla resigns over education policy

The External Affairs Minister, Mr. M.C. Chagla to-day [September 5] resigned from the Union Cabinet as he felt that the educational policy of the Government of India "is likely to threaten if not undermine the unity of the country." The Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, accepting his resignation "with deep regret" maintained in her reply that the inferences that Mr. Chagla had drawn about the educational policy and the consequences that might flow from it were "not correct". His assumption that it might undermine unity was also "not valid", she said. The Prime Minister will hold charge of the External Affairs Ministry for the time being. Mr. Swaran Singh, Defence Minister, will lead the Indian delegation to the United Nations General Assembly. If Mr. Swaran Singh is shifted to the Foreign Ministry other changes will be necessary.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO SEPTEMBER 6, 1917

Mrs. Besant to be released; Vicoery on reforms.

The first meeting of the autumn session of the Imperial Legislative Council was held this morning in the Council Chamber, Viceregal lodge (in Simla). His Excellency the Viceroy presided. All members were present except Mr. B.N. Basu, who, however, it is understood, has not yet resigned. The visitors' gallery was packed with ladies and gentlemen, both European and Indian. Lady Chelmsford was also present. After His Excellency had taken his seat, Messrs C.E. Low, M.N. Hogg, C. A. Kincaid, J.E. Jennings, M.E. Couchman, D.S. Bray, and Sir G.M. Chatnavis took the prescribed oath of allegiance.

DATA POINT

Dream run may end
Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals – a programme that allows children who came to the U.S. before they turned 16 the chance to apply for temporary rights to live, work, and study – is now under threat with the U.S. government keen on ending it

- 1 The programme mandates renewal every two years
- 2 Close to 8 lakh young unauthorised immigrants, often called dreamers, have been drafted since 2012
- 3 The chart shows how by September 2019 none of them will be protected from deportation if the U.S. gov't. stops renewal



SOURCE: CATO INSTITUTE