



A thought for today

Crime does not pay as well as politics

ALFRED NEWMAN, US composer

Enemy Within

Probe Dawood brother Iqbal Kaskar's connections

It's hardly news that underworld don and fugitive terrorist Dawood Ibrahim lives in Pakistan, as disclosed by younger brother Iqbal Kaskar arrested recently in Mumbai. Islamabad has not apprehended or extradited Dawood in the past and is unlikely to do so now, with the fur flying between India and Pakistan at the UN. According to investigators Kaskar may have extorted as much as Rs 100 crore from builders and jewellers in the past three years using his brother's dreaded name. What New Delhi can do in this situation is to act at home by disrupting the terrorism-crime nexus.

In that context, Kaskar's arrest has been accompanied by disturbing allegations that some local Maharashtra politicians acted as middlemen in the extortion racket.



Links to politicians and corporators must be thoroughly probed, as their existence would render the country especially vulnerable to terrorist attacks. Apart from senior politicians, even elected representatives at the lower end of the democratic pyramid like corporators can ply their influence to get building plans or various safety licences rejected. Fighting elections, rewarding workers and playing good Samaritan to voters all require a constant supply of money, and builders or jewellers can provide a convenient source. But that can be no excuse for supping with the enemy.

Thane police is probing, in particular, the involvement of two NCP leaders in Maharashtra's extortion racket. Political compulsions, such as the fluid BJP-Shiv Sena alliance and BJP looking at an alternative alignment with NCP, must not be allowed to prevent Thane police from taking its investigations to their logical conclusion. Exposing Dawood's and Kaskar's connections is in national interest and government must back the police and intelligence agencies to the hilt.

Women's Vote Bank

Sonia suggests how Modi can woo it

Congress president Sonia Gandhi has sent a letter to Prime Minister Narendra Modi. In it she requests Modi to take advantage of his historic majority in the Lok Sabha to get the Women's Reservation Bill passed there, like Sonia got it passed in the Rajya Sabha in 2010. Not only did BJP support Congress on the issue back then, its 2014 election manifesto reiterated a commitment to 33% reservation for women. If Sonia and Modi join hands on this today, it will repaint the country's political landscape.

But entrenched internal patriarchies will resist such a progressive alliance. Sonia experienced this first hand in 2010 when UPA allies put up a raucous fight both inside and outside Parliament. Sharad Yadav famously called the Women's Reservation Bill a conspiracy of women with short hair - 'parkati auratein'. Mulayam Singh Yadav said it would 'provoke young men to whistle' in Parliament. At root such protests were about how women's reservation would undermine caste politics. Today that would be a concern for BJP as well as it aggressively woos OBCs and Dalits.

A key question is how RSS, whose inputs and foot soldiers fuel the BJP electoral machine but where women are not even allowed in the same shakhas as men, would get on board. Of course if he got the Bill passed, Modi could march into the 2019 battle with a women-centric narrative, which could really outpace the Hindutva steed.

Rocket Men Face Off

Escalating insults on Korea could lead to mushroom clouds over the Pacific

Nayan Chanda



President Donald Trump heightened fears of a nuclear confrontation on the Korean Peninsula, which had been building for weeks, up a few notches with his blunt threat to "totally destroy" North Korea. Ironically, his concurrent threat to abandon the Iranian nuclear deal helped to remove any incentive for Kim Jong-un to come to the negotiating table.

Defence secretary Jim Mattis hinted that Trump's threat may not be mere bluster when he refused to deny reports that the Pentagon was considering using tactical nuclear weapons against Pyongyang. Other sources have hinted about an unspecified "sharp, short warning shot" at North Korea - a limited application of military force that would ideally not trigger a devastating response.

Trump may be trying to scare the North Korean leader, whom he mocks as a "Rocket Man" on a suicide mission, into joining talks aimed at compelling him to abandon his nuclear weapons. But the salutary example of Muammar Gaddafi - who had voluntarily surrendered his nuclear weapons programme - is a chilling reminder to Kim that denuclearisation is the surest path to an ignominious demise. And, as Trump's current hostility to the Iran nuclear deal vividly illustrates, there are no guarantees that disarmament would preclude further demands from the US and its perfidious allies.

Having defied countless unanimous UN Security Council resolutions, Kim is unlikely to give up the only weapon that ensures his survival. He also knows that his closest neighbours China and South Korea oppose a US-led military solution that would engulf the entire region. As such, the net result of Trump's threat might well be to encourage Kim to speed up building his nuclear-tipped ICBM and force Washington to accept the reality of a nuclear-capable North Korea.

It was acceptance of the unpalatable reality of Iran's nuclear capability that led the Obama administration, UK, France, China and Russia plus Germany to enter into negotiations with Tehran. The 2015 agreement essentially stopped development of Tehran's bomb and sharply constrained its nuclear programme

for 15 years in exchange for the lifting of crippling economic sanctions. The agreement was premised in part on the hope that, by the time the agreement terminates, Iran would have discovered that the benefits of global engagement were more attractive than being a nuclear-armed international pariah.

Many Western and South Korean analysts believe that North Korea is so far ahead of Iran in its nuclear and missile development that it is well past time for an Iran-like deal. At this stage, Kim would not likely be satisfied with anything short of a grand bargain in which Washington and the international community recognise North Korea and offer economic aid in exchange for a freeze on its weapons and missile programmes.

Trump has at times hinted that he is impressed by the young dictator, stating that "If it would be appropriate for me to meet with him, I would absolutely, I would be honoured to do it." This was a course suggested to him by Chinese President Xi Jinping during their first meeting. To assure Kim, Washington has stated that it does not seek regime change - only abandonment of the nuclear programme. But North Korea's series of missile tests and apparent testing of a hydrogen bomb provoked Trump to increase his own insults and threats. With Kim returning the favour it is increasingly difficult for either side to de-escalate without losing face.

With a majority of Americans favouring military action against Pyongyang, a diplomatic grand bargain could come as a major disappointment to Trump's fired-up base. China and Russia, conversely, would support negotiations, which would inevitably weaken US-South Korea military ties and reduce American influence in the region. South Korea's left-of-centre new administration too would warmly welcome a move towards peace and stability.

But with relations between two nuclear powers descending into a school-yard brawl between bullies, the time for grand bargains is fast disappearing against the gathering threat of mushroom clouds over the Pacific.

Bareilly's Far From Berkeley

A successful US tour will not be enough to overcome doubts about Rahul Gandhi's political future

Sadanand Dhume



Can touring the United States help revive Congress party vice-president Rahul Gandhi's flagging political fortunes in India? It may be too early to answer this question, but it's not too early to sum up the impact of his nearly two-week long coast-to-coast sojourn in America.

Simply put, Gandhi pulled off a successful visit. But only the bravest Congress partisans - a dwindling tribe - can claim that this means his troubles are now miraculously behind him.

Before diagnosing what was missing in Gandhi's American performance, let's acknowledge what he got right. For starters the Nehru-Gandhi scion exploded the popular myth, propagated assiduously on social media and WhatsApp, that he is some sort of half-witted man-child whose idea of intellectual stimulation must be Tinkle magazine.

Instead we saw, in both public and private, a thoughtful politician able to express himself clearly on some of the most pressing issues facing India. Gandhi touched upon subjects ranging from Chinese competitiveness in blue collar manufacturing, to mass migration from rural to urban India, to the low agricultural productivity that plagues the countryside. Time to toss the Tinkle theory in the trash where it belongs.

To his credit, Gandhi homed in on the most obvious chinks in Prime Minister Narendra Modi's armour. In event after event the Congress leader explained that about 30,000 young Indians enter the workforce each day, but only 450 of them find employment. Arguably this growing jobs crisis - rather than the more commonly mentioned growth slowdown - best illustrates the mismatch between Modi's promise of economic revival and his lacklustre performance.

At the same time, Gandhi amplified fears that Modi has empowered some of the more rabid elements in the Sangh Parivar. Since the appointment of Yogi Adityanath as Uttar Pradesh chief minister in March - coupled with a clutch of widely covered beef lynchings



Western universities, quite another to connect with the people who will actually elect the next prime minister.

I caught a glimpse of Gandhi's less-than-stellar political skills in New York on Wednesday. In a private room ahead of his speech he posed stiffly for photos with an endless parade of pushy non-resident Indians. A natural politician would have fed off the human energy. Gandhi bore the haunted look of a librarian forced to publicly perform vaudeville.

In the hotel auditorium where Gandhi spoke, the crowd was a fraction of what had gathered to cheer Modi three years ago in Madison Square Garden. More worrying for Congress, none of those I spoke with counted themselves as Gandhi supporters. They were there to gawk at a celebrity, or out of some sort of nostalgia for a time when the Nehru-Gandhis were synonymous with political power in India.

Nor is it clear that Gandhi has fully comprehended why Congress has crashed, or what it must do to retool. His vision for India appears blandly technocratic - getting small and medium enterprises to generate those much-needed jobs, using cold chains and food processing to boost agriculture, and improving health and education. He hopes to do all this while increasing transparency and devolving power to local governments.

Missing is any acknowledgment that India may have changed fundamentally since Congress last won an election eight years ago. At Princeton, the prominent scholar of Islam Bernard Haykel asked Gandhi if newer forces of "vernacularisation" were displacing Anglophone elites like him. In response, Gandhi said the "central reason" behind Modi's rise "is the question of jobs".

Perhaps the Congress vice-president is right. Maybe deep down the people of India seek a leader who talks of "opening up structures" and "deepening conversations". But based on the evidence we've seen so far, Gandhi's argument seems to work better in Berkeley than in Bhaikhori or Bareilly.

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questions after releasing a joint press statement with Trump in June - Gandhi came off looking approachable.

You can't really blame Congress for making much of all this. After the party's drubbing in Uttar Pradesh, and chief minister Nitish Kumar's defection in Bihar, any scrap of good news is welcome. But while Gandhi easily surpassed expectations for many people, to suggest that this marks some sort of turning point for him remains woefully premature.

To begin with, the power of networks notwithstanding, Berkeley and Princeton are a long way from Bikaner and Patna. It's one thing to charm audiences at elite

- many observers in the West no longer feel confident that economic development lies at the heart of Modi's agenda.

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That Gandhi reached out at all to overseas Indians, a community that he had largely ignored until now, suggests a belated recognition of something that Modi appears to have instinctively grasped a while ago. In a tightly networked world, emigrant Indians play a role in shaping political perceptions in India in a way that was unimaginable a generation ago. Technology has blurred the boundaries of national discourse.

Finally, Gandhi benefited from appearing open and relatively down-to-earth. At both Berkeley and Princeton he took questions, some of which echoed widespread scepticism about both his own privileged dynastic background and his party's uncertain future. This was not exactly a grilling, but compared to Modi - who did not even allow customary

Towards a free, open and prosperous Indo-Pacific: PM Shinzo Abe's India visit is harbinger of a new era

Kenji Hiramatsu



A week before the visit, my friends in the Indian government told me that it would be unprecedented, something even they had hardly seen in their lifetime.

I knew what my friends had been talking about the moment the motorcade headed by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, First Lady, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi departed the Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel International Airport. The streets of Ahmedabad were filled with tens of thousands of cheering and smiling men and women, dancing and singing girls and boys, and flapping Japanese and Indian flags.

Not only the opening parade but the entire arrangement was special. PM Abe and Mrs Abe sensed warm feelings of the people and PM Modi's thoughtfulness in every place they visited.

Indeed, the personal commitments by the two leaders have been the engine of the quantum progress in Japan-India relations in recent years. Their friendship is genuine and beyond interests. The bond was further strengthened during the intense one-and-

a-half days they spent together last week.

The substance of the visit was as good as the optics. We could demonstrate concrete progress in major projects and cooperation which we had developed over the years. The depth of strategic discussion between the leaders reached a new level. It has become common for me to say "Japan-India relationship is a certainty in the age of uncertainty, providing stability not only for the two

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countries but for the entire Indo-Pacific region and beyond." PM Abe said, "A robust Japan-India partnership is the public goods which underpins the regional order." The outcome of the visit should serve as proof for these statements.

The historic first step of the Mumbai-Ahmedabad high speed rail project was celebrated. Shinkansen was once a dream project for Japan. It transfor-



med the country into an industrial hub. Now the project to realise the same dream has started in India.

As PM Abe expressed, Japan is committed to fully supporting this project. He also pledged to cooperate for railway safety, making full use of Japan's expertise as demonstrated in the zero-casualty record of Shinkansen. We look forward to working together to introduce Japan's state-of-the-art technology, contribute to Make in India, and thereby materialise the hopes and dreams of bringing about a sea change in India.

We could also make tangible progress in defence cooperation. While our forces are increasingly engaged such as in the Malabar naval exercise, specific areas of cooperation in defence

equipment and technology - robotics and unmanned ground vehicles - were identified. There will be more to come in the near future.

Connectivity is another area which deserves attention. In addition to stressing the principles for connectivity infrastructure, the two countries have deepened cooperation in India, notably in the north-eastern region, and other countries in the Indo-Pacific region including Africa.

I should also highlight, on the economic front, the establishment of a working group for civil nuclear cooperation and rapid increase of FDI from Japan, from \$2.6 billion (FY2015) to \$4.7 billion (FY2016), which we hope to be accelerated by new measures announced

during the visit. People-to-people exchanges also gathered momentum thanks to a decision to work towards establishing Japanese language certificate courses at 100 higher educational institutions and training 1,000 language teachers in five years. The introduction of open sky will also give a boost to people-to-people exchanges.

The two leaders had in-depth discussions about regional strategic issues. They agreed to exert greater pressure on North Korea, which is posing a grave and imminent threat. Japan and India subscribe to common principles such as the rule of law, freedom of navigation and peaceful resolution of disputes. Japan sees India as the most trustworthy partner, highly appreciating its principled and consistent approach to international challenges.

Prime Minister Abe's visit has kindled a light to brighten the thrilling possibilities of the Japan-India Special Strategic and Global Partnership. I look forward to contemplating with Indian friends how we could elevate the most promising relationship in the Indo-Pacific to an even higher stage.

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dilbert



Sacred space

Friendly Opponents

We will not agree on every issue. But let us respect those differences and respect one another. Let us recognise that we do not serve an ideology or a political party; we serve the people.

John Lynch

A Short, Glorious Life Or A Long, Mediocre One?

Devdutt Pattanaik

In the Greek epic, Iliad, which is based on the Trojan War, the hero, Achilles, seeks a short but glorious life, which accounts for his wild and stubborn spirit. My way, or no way, he declares. He refuses to bow to the commander Agamemnon, and refuses to fight for the Greeks, when Agamemnon claims his concubine. Achilles dies in the Trojan War when an arrow hits him on his most vulnerable part, his heel.

If Iliad is located in the Trojan War, the other Greek epic, Odyssey, is located on events that follow on the journey of hope. It focuses on the 10-year-long journey home of the cunning but cursed Odysseus, after the 10-year Trojan War. During his adventures, Odysseus, like many Greek heroes, makes the voyage to Hades, the land of the dead, and there,

encounters ghosts of fallen warriors, both Trojan and Greek. He even encounters the ghost of Achilles. And he is shocked to hear what Achilles has to say. While during his short life, Achilles wanted a short but glorious life, in his death, he mourns his choice: he would have rather lived a long life as a landless labourer with barely anything to eat, than die young, a hero!

The two heroes of the Trojan War, the mighty Achilles and the wily Odysseus, who have lived life very differently and made very different choices, are confronted with the meaning of life. Is life about glory? Is life about living? How much does fame matter? Does family matter more? Achilles dies alone, without wife or child beside him. His only son is

Pyrrhus, born unknown to him, from a youthful engagement. Odysseus reunites with his faithful wife Penelope and lives a long life.

So is life about length or quality? Given a choice what would we prefer: a short, successful life or a long, mediocre one? A similar theme is found in Hindu mythology.

In the story of Markandeya, Shiva asks a young couple if they want an intelligent child who will die young or a dull child who will live long. And the parents choose the intelligent child. When faced with the imminent death of their child, they do not know what to do. The son prays to Shiva who then comes to his rescue by defeating Yama, the god of death.

Likewise, as per the legend of Adi Shankaracharya (legend is based on

some historical facts, while myth is indifferent to history completely), he was due to die at the age of eight, until he promised Vyasa that he would retrieve the lost Vedic knowledge. So his lifespan was doubled to 16. At 16, he promised Vyasa that he would spread Vedic knowledge to every corner of India. And so his lifespan was doubled once again, till 32. Having spent 16 years spreading Vedic wisdom everywhere, Adi Shankaracharya took samadhi, voluntarily abandoning his body.

Let's ask ourselves what kind of life we want to live - do we want a short, meaningful life like Achilles or a long life, full of struggles, but with family, like Odysseus? Does quality matter or quantity? Perhaps a short, meaningful life makes sense to old, suffering souls and a long, meaningful life makes sense to youth facing imminent death.

