The Tribune

ESTABLISHED IN 1881

The Indo-Pak frustration

Russia's T-90 tank offer queers the pitch

ANUARY 1 is a day India and Pakistan have set aside for conducting diplomatic business in an air of civility; when for over 25 years they have exchanged a list of nuclear installations as if to suggest that war is a distant possibility, but there is also the instinct to preserve citizens of the other country with common cultural bonds. This January 1, too, while guns roared on the border and a day earlier an all-night skirmish killed two Pakistanis from its notorious BAT team (suspected of beheading Indian soldiers in the past), the foreign offices exchanged a list of their non-military nuclear installations and facilities along with a list of prisoners. And now, just when the Kartarpur corridor and a new government in Islamabad might have provided the scaffolding for sorting out extant differences, the pitch has been queered by reports suggesting a Pak-Russia deal for T-90 tanks, though there are Italian guns too.

If Kartarpur was an olive branch, the tank deal may compel South Block to maintain its line that the corridor was a faith issue and not linked to intra-state ties. The other complication is offered by Russia's involvement in a deal for military hardware that will only be used against India. This raises the question whether an incipient Sino-Russia-Pak triangle may be boxing-in India because of its increased alignment with US' regional security policy? Further proof may have been provided by a newly-minted US law that resolves to bump up ties with India while calling out China for obstructionism; Russia and Pakistan are anyway in the US Senate's doghouse.

While India waits for the US promise of providing licence-free defence technologies to play out, it must explore the new communication channels offered by the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation to hedge against regional isolation. The Russian President's New Year message to PM Modi suggests India remains a priority country for Moscow and the four Xi-Modi interactions in 2018 have reduced Sino-India tensions. The US cannot be India's sole comfort partner given its shifting allegiances in line with its national priorities.

The Gurugram gangrape

Sensitivity and safer environment needed

N aggrieved woman, still struggling to come to terms with the loss of her husband, gathers the courage to pick up the pieces of her Life. With two young children to look after, her immediate concern is consolidating all the money their father may have earned. The widow hires an autorickshaw to go to her late husband's company premises in Manesar, Gurugram. The autorickshaw driver quickly senses her vulnerability as it becomes apparent that she has perhaps stepped out for the first time in that direction. His mind could have worked in two ways: one, to be sensitive towards the lady who is clearly distressed and needy; two, to take advantage of her situation. Guess what? It's the latter thought that prevails. He, along with the co-passenger, and then later two other men summoned for the purpose, drive her around and gangrape the helpless woman, before abandoning her in a semi-conscious state.

It is coldly reminiscent of so many such cases that have with horrific regularity made it to the headlines. Despite the ghastly 2012 gangrape and murder of the paramedic in Delhi, sadly, the hue and cry and public outrage across the country against the brutality seems to have had no effect on most men. Notwithstanding the goading of the nation into making stricter laws and a more efficient legal redress system, in September earlier, a teenaged Class X exam topper of a Rewari village waiting for a bus to take her to her coaching class was sedated, abducted and gangraped and dumped. It was again symptomatic of that lack of sensitivity and apathy for a vulnerable single woman going about her routine life.

Why is it that the environment is not safe for a woman, both from strangers and known people? As is time and again pointed out, the law enforcement and justice delivery systems have failed to deter crime. They even fall short of inspiring confidence in the victims. They suffer twice as the path to justice is often strewn with shoddy investigations and misogynist attitudes of the authorities. Plus, we as individuals, as families and as a society, need to sensitise our boys towards respecting women, so that they grow up as men and not beasts.

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY

A soldier will fight long and hard for a bit of coloured ribbon. — Napoleon Bonaparte

ON THIS DAY...100 YEARS AGO

The Tribune.

LAHORE, THURSDAY, JANUARY 2, 1919

The Conservative Reaction.

THE result of the General Election, though described only as a Coalition victory, is in reality one of those strong Conservative reactions that have hitherto only followed epochs of unsual expansion. Out of a total of 706 candidates, no less than 384 or more than one half are Unionists, while Liberals are only 161 and Labourites only 72. Which means in plain English that Mr. Lloyd George must either become, for all practical purposes, a Conservative or shall continue to be Premier only by the sufferance of the Conservative party. The utter insecurity of his position in the latter event will, there is every reason to fear, make it difficult for him to carry any large measure of far-reaching reform. From our own point of view the only silver lining in an otherwise dark cloud is the fact that Mr. Bonar Law is as fully committed to the policy of reform on the lines of the August announcement as Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Montagu.

India and the Honours List.

AS usual most of the higher honours in the new Honours List go to Europeans, mostly to officials. The only K.C.S.I. is a member of the Indian Civil Service, so also the only ordinary C.S.I. The three C.S.Is made for war services are also all Europeans. The Gaekwar, of Baroda, familiarly known as India's patriot-prince, gets a G.C.I.E. which he ought to have got long ago. The same honour is conferred on the Maharaja of Alwar. Both the two ordinary K.C.I.E.s are Europeans and officials. Of the three K.C.IEs made for war services, one is an Indian, Moulvi Rahim Baksh of Bahawalpur. Of the new C.I.Es no less than in 21 number, only one is an India, Mr. P.C. Mitter, who probably obtains this distinction for his work on the Rowlatt Committee.

Mixing up reforms & management

Army's reorganisation should be a tri-service endeavour



PRAVIN SAWHNEY

STRATEGIC AFFAIRS EXPERT

HE Army Chief, Gen Bipin Rawat, is under pressure from the government to cut his Army to size. Reason: with the bulk of annual defence allocations being spent on the pay and allowances of the 13-lakh Army, there is little money for modernisation of the three defence services.

We now have the third report from the single-member Lt Gen DS Hooda (retd) committee, in addition to the four study groups set up by the Army Chief, and the Shekatkar committee which submitted its report in December 2016. The committee had recommended the cutting of 57,000 troops over three years; the saved finances were proposed to be utilised for new verticals like electronic and cyber warfare and so on.

The Army Chief's study groups have promised to slash one lakh troops over two to three years to meet the challenges of modern war. According to General Rawat, the Army needs three things for modern war: technology infusion; restructuring of the Army from the present bloated formations to agile integrated brigade groups; and most importantly, to be the lead service in war (with the IAF in support role).

The Lt Gen Hooda committee has reportedly made three key recommendations: reduce the standing Army and create a reserve force that can be called upon in war; make Special Forces (SF) a strategic force; and create a three-star post to recommend new technologies like Artificial Intelligence (AI) and robotics and so on for military use. This committee has proposed reducing 20 per cent of the Army strength.

Of the three committees, only the



CLUTCHING AT STRAWS: India hasn't begun the defining journey to revolutionise warfare.

The best course is the simple one: reduce manpower while ceding the lead role in the war to the IAF.

Shekatkar recommendations make sense because of its modest aim of simply reducing the Army strength. This committee, unlike the other two committees, did not propose preparing the Army for modern war; it restricts itself to internal management rather than reforms.

The Army Chief groups and Lt Gen Hooda's recommendations have issues in their implementation for six reasons. One, modern war requires military reforms (involving the three services). Talking of Army reforms alone negates the basis of modern war — joint-ness — the prerequisite for swift, intense and result-oriented warfare. Two, given the infusion of cutting-edge military technology like precision standoff weapons with China and its increased interoperability (ability to fight together on common mission) with the Pakistan military, the IAF, and not the Army, should be the lead in modern war. Three, the Army cannot give primacy to hybrid warfare (with focus on counter-terror and psychological operations) and yet hope to be the lead in a modern war. The two — hybrid and modern war are as different as chalk and cheese.

Four, the Lt Gen Hooda recommendation of raising an SF brigade under the Army Headquarters for strategic tasks without credible counter-offensive capabilities to meet enemy's retaliation serves little purpose. The Army has not had these capabilities since 1990, when counter-insurgency (CI) assumed priority. For this reason, during the so-called 2016 surgical strikes, the then Director-General Military Operations, Lt Gen Ranbir Singh, had informed Pakistan within hours that the mission was over and no further strikes were planned. This was done to ensure that Pakistan did not retaliate. India was simply not prepared for an escalation. Given this, how can the Army have SF for strategic task (like demolition of Marala headquarters) when fearing escalation, it could not use it for tactical task of CI operations along the Line of Control? Moreover, the government has already cleared the raising of a tri-service SF division (which might be upgraded to command), which is in addition to the SF with all three services.

Five, when the committee says that the reserve units should be optimised

for capabilities for desired outcome, it makes little sense. For one, the lessons of Rashtriya Rifles (RR) raisings should be recalled. The RR concept with 50 per cent retired soldiers was mooted in 1990 by Gen K Sundarji. Since few retired soldiers were willing to come back to combat in J&K, the then Army Chief, Gen BC Joshi, was compelled to alter the concept by having all serving troops serve in RR; which remains a regular Army by another name. Given this, where would reserve soldiers, who would come voluntarily and get paid for three months in a year to fight CI operations come from? Seeking human fodder to fight faceless terrorists would be impossible. Besides, how would the Army ensure desired capabilities (equipment and training) for reserve units, when the regular units are woefully short of war-withal?

And six, why does the committee need the post of a DG for identifying new-age technologies for the military when two high-powered discussions on this subject are already under way? Since these technologies comprising AI, partially autonomous systems, robotics and human-machine interface are more in the commercial than in the military domain, NITI Aayog had last year released a discussion paper on 'National Strategy for Artificial Intelligence'. The committee should read this paper to know how the government proposes to set up centres of excellence by privatepublic partnerships. Simply put, India has not even begun this defining journey that would revolutionise warfare. Moreover, the Defence Ministry had also set up a task force in 2017 to identify AI technologies for military purposes.

Given all this, the Army should stop confusing its internal management with military reforms. Once this is done, it would not be difficult for it to reduce its manpower. If it starts to look at progressively reducing the five divisions and three brigades it raised since 2009, when it started the two-front war capability building plan, a beginning could be made.

Brahmastra in common hands

HARI KRISHAN CHAUDHARY

AM a common man, the man in the street toiling to earn his bread ■through labour. I follow debates on television, where burning issues like demonetisation, Rafale deal, corruption, women empowerment, petrol prices and GST are discussed. Weighty pros and cons are put forth on each issue, but the conclusions leave me more confused. It disturbs me. I am restless; feeling like a rudderless soul, failing to see the light at the end of the tunnel. It is dark everywhere.

No news is good news for me. No news channel communicates any news or views worth listening to or ruminating. It sensationalises trivial news, ad nauseam, and fails to

give any heartening news its due. For such news it perhaps reserves a special slot, which is eventually pushed back forever by some more interesting and compelling news.

I miss the good old news readers on Doordarshan, who did not dramatise, and yet, were able to communicate the happenings of the day.

I wake up to see the first page of newspapers. A huge advertisement greets me, of a product that has no relevance to me. To get to the headlines, I have to turn to the second page. But before that, I have to deal with pizzas, burgers, home tuitions and sales pamphlets, falling from the inner precincts of my newspaper.

The headlines stare at me. They are familiar and disturbing. They were part of the late-evening debate yesterday on television. For fresh air, I go out for morning walk. I hear several voices in the park. The discussion of senior citizens, remarks of shopkeeper, the prophecy of the milkman.

Surprisingly, all these voices speak and articulate what I feel deeply. They talk of adulteration of milk and food products, vote-bank politics, civic mess, jobs for children and crime control. These voices are so different from those of television debates, or of netas promising free power, Rs 2 per kg rice and atta, and loan waivers.

I wonder whether waivers are important, or is empowering farmers to prevent them taking a loan! Is free power important than a good remuneration to them for their produce?

But free power to all is a better option, since it is for all big and small farmers and for politicians, too.

Similarly, promising cheap food to the poor is better than building storage capacity for grains.

Elections are fast approaching. We will gear up to listen to fresh promises of good times. We will be pampered with goodies. We will eagerly go through many manifestos to decide the best one for us, or NOTA if none suits us.

But I am a common man. I may see through it all. I may suddenly feel empowered. I am underestimated. It is delightful to see them confused when they realise my power. I may upset all calculations. I may have the last laugh. I have the Brahmastra in my hands.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Cruel judicial joke

Reference to 'Year after death, Telgi acquitted' (Jan 1); it is no less than a cruel judicial joke. He died while serving his 30-year jail term awarded by a lower court. If the Nashik Sessions Court finds no solid evidence against him, on what basis was he jailed for 30 years? Why is it such a sorry state of affairs? Do extraneous factors play a part? Why was Sajjan Kumar acquitted when evidence was available against him? Should not the judicial officers be held accountable in such extreme cases of reversals? Why do they go scot-free after making the farce of justice?

SURENDRA AJNAT, BANGA

Emulate Britain

Refer to 'Britain appoints its first food waste chief' (Jan 1); India too needs to do something in this regard. About one-third of grain, pulses, vegetables and fruits we produce goes to waste post harvest due to insufficient storage capacity, improper storage, irresponsible management, rodents and pilferage. Apart from this, there is a huge wastage of cooked food at restaurants, roadside eating joints, langars and *bhandaras*. It is time that the government and civil society start thinking seriously about it and take concrete measures. This is particularly urgent in India where a large segment of our population goes without food.

RUP SINGH, BY MAIL

Endless food wastage

Apropos 'Britain appoints its first food waste chief'; the apathetic indifference to the problem of extravagant wastage of food is shocking. More so, to know that globally, we waste almost one-third of what we produce (worth \$1 trillion), which may 'rise by a third to 2.2 billion tonne by 2030' according to the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the UN. All nations should emulate Britain's example of appointing a food waste chief. Besides, it is environmentally destructive as when food is dumped it rots, releasing greenhouse gases, wasting the energy and water needed to grow that food. Paradoxically, despite the underprivileged not getting a square meal, the affluent are splurging lavishly on ostentatious parties. Civil society's idea of setting up a 'roti' or food bank at major locations of

cities is a ray of hope. The problem

can be solved by the government's

intervention, in tandem with the corporate social responsibility. YOGESH SINGLA, PANIPAT

Out of public domain

The article 'Danger in over-hyping Army operations' (Jan 1) was an eye-opener. No doubt the strikes were politicised during election rallies in various states and came up for debate on electronic media. So much so, it was discussed with some Pakistani retired military officers, who negated it vehemently. What was the need of all this? All Army activities are kept away from the RTI, why was this brought to the forefront? Frequent discussions are giving a chance to our rivals and Pakistani officials to raise a finger on our Army's glorious achievements. A code of conduct should be introduced that no issue related to the defence forces is discussed in any manner or anywhere. Nation's security should be everybody's priority.

GIAN P KANSAL, AMBALA

Fooling farmers

Apropos the editorial 'Pension plan for farmers' (Jan 1), after loan waiver in some states, all parties, including the ruling one, are forced to think about how to woo farmers to secure votes in the forthcoming elections. Parties seem more interested in votes rather than farmers' welfare. If the government was interested in farmers' welfare, it could have taken concrete steps during the past four years instead of fooling farmers that their income would be doubled by 2022. The MSP of wheat and paddy should have been increased by 50 per cent. Farmers may not agree to any formula or doles now, beyond the implementation of the Swaminathan committee recommendations.

ROOP SINGH NEGI. SOLAN

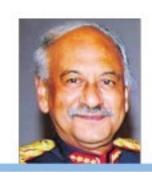
Pension alone won't help Refer to the editorial 'Pension

plan for farmer' (Jan 1); pension plans, loan waivers, etc., are all means to a political end. The welfare of farmers is a necessity but long-term solutions are required instead of falsely appearing them. Better equipment facilities and cost of crops in market should be ensured for the produce. Exploitation by middlemen should be eliminated. Unless real steps are taken, everything else is short-sighted and will not be fruitful.

TANISH CHACHRA, LUDHIANA

Letters to the Editor, typed in double space, should not exceed the 200-word limit. These should be cogently written and can be sent by e-mail to: Letters@tribunemail.com

Don't tinker with time-tested combat systems



LT GEN SR GHOSH (RETD) FORMER GOC-IN-C, WESTERN COMMAND

VER 12 years after the then Vice Chief of the Army fired the first salvo, the present Army Chief carried out 'carpet-bombing' last month when he spoke his mind on the problems of inducting women into combat. In 2006, the Vice Chief had remarked that the comfort levels with women officers in the Army were low and that we could do without them. Right or wrong, he was pressured into making a public apology. Gen Bipin Rawat, in a recent interview to a news channel, reopened the debate when he stated that women in combat areas would have to be kept cocooned from prying eyes and that the Army could not have Commanding Officers of operational units getting pregnant and proceeding on long maternity leave.

The Army Chief's views may not have been couched in diplomatese, but there definitely was merit in what he implied. Unfortunately, this has reignited an avoidable debate with indignant protests from women's rights activists, IPS officers and even some military veterans. The arguments given by most of these people are based on superficial knowledge or experience of our combat arms and of warfare. Their reactions are based more on social issues of equal rights and feminism rather than on pragmatism, ranging from an absurd compari-

son with Jhansi ki Rani who "could even fight with her adopted son strapped to her back", to the modern era where women succeeded in becoming airline pilots, Everest summiteers champions in boxing and wrestling. One veteran commentator even suggested that the Army should induct women into combat roles quickly before the judiciary forced it to do so.

At the outset, it must be clarified that the capability of women in any field, be it politics, banking, civil services, business or sports, to name a few, has never been doubted. In the military, women doctors and nurses have served with distinction since time immemorial. Since 1992, women have also been commissioned into other branches of the Armed Forces, even though issues of their management and logistics keep cropping up from time to time. In 2015, the Indian Air Force inducted the first women as fighter pilots, while the Navy will probably soon allow them to be deployed on battleships.

The fresh debate has unfortunately missed the woods for the trees. The central focus here is the ability of women to cope with the difficulties of frontline infantry combat rather than it being a gender issue. Before the uninitiated start glamorising warfare, they must understand the harsh realities of being in actual combat, which is a far cry from the soft operating environments of other jobs.

Combat means violence of the extreme kind where men are required to kill others at the cost of getting killed or wounded themselves. Combat means largescale destruction and death all around from repeated barrages of artillery rockets, missiles and shells. The horrors and violence of combat are too many and can neither be sufficiently explained to nor understood by armchair specialists.

Let alone women, even many men find



TOUGH JOB: Let alone women, even many men find it difficult to cope with the rigours that a combat soldier has to face.

The debate on inducting women into combat has missed the woods for the trees. The central focus here is the ability of women to cope with difficulties of frontline infantry combat rather than it being a gender issue. Before the uninitiated start glamorising warfare, they must understand the harsh realities of being in actual combat, which is a far cry from soft operating environments of other jobs.

it difficult to cope with the rigours that a combat soldier has to face. The physical and physiological capabilities of a woman to handle the difficulties and hazards that infantry soldiers encounter during operations and when involved in physical combat with an enemy, terrorist or insurgent have, therefore, to be understood in the correct perspective and not seen as a gender equality issue. The dangers and horrors of women officers being taken prisoner by the enemy and being violated, tortured and mutilated are too real to be brushed aside. Are we as a society prepared to see young girls, wives and mothers coming home in coffins or to live with their faces and bodies disfigured from gunshot wounds or with amputated arms and legs?

The Army would only get increasingly embroiled in conducting courts of inquiry and court martials in cases where privacy and authority of female officers were allegedly encroached upon, at the cost of carrying out critical opera-

tions against terrorists and insurgents.

In the overall context, is there really a compelling necessity to induct women into infantry or armoured units? Is the nation so short of physically and mentally fit male volunteers for combat units? The Army is in the serious business of protecting our borders and citizens from our enemies and violent terrorists. Warfare and combat are, therefore, best conducted by trained, hardy men led by tough commanders who live together, train together and fight together, at times to their last breath. This has nothing to do with gender bias or masculinity.

In case there really is such a strong demand of women wanting to be involved in some sort of physical combat, let us first use the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) such as the BSF, CRPF and ITBP as a test bed. The pan-India strength of women police personnel is just above seven per cent, whereas the share of women in the CAPF is an abysmal three per cent or less. Only a

minuscule percentage of these are women officers. In fact, the BSF inducted its first direct-entry woman officer only in 2017, while the CRPF did so just a year before that. It would also be of interest to check how many IPS officers, male or female, are manning posts in CAPF battalions located in any operational area. The answer is probably zero.

Let us use this opportunity to blood our women IPS officers as company and battalion commanders in the BSF, ITBP and CRPF, where they will be able to lead troops in hostile operational areas, including anti-terrorist and insurgency operations.

Considering that the IPS cadre is short of about 1,000 officers, the government must seriously consider lateral induction of trained and experienced short-service women Army officers into the IPS. This will not only result in huge budgetary savings on induction and training, but also go a long way in filling critical vacancies in state police cadres.

Let not the focus of our military commanders be distracted from their primary job of destroying inimical forces from across the border. Let us also not tinker with the Army's triedand-tested combat systems or organisations at such critical times. Women officers are already posted in the Army's combat and combat support arms such as the Engineers, Army Air Defence, Corps of Signals and Intelligence Corps. Add to these the fresh opportunities in language skills and military police now being offered by the Army Chief. These will provide more than sufficient avenues for women to showcase their organisational, intellectual and analytical skills in the Army without having to get into physical contact with an unpredictable enemy.

BJP searching desperately for new allies



SUNIL GATADE SENIOR JOURNALIST

Months before the Lok Sabha elections, the BJP is looking weak and exasperated, while its allies, which were ignored, humiliated or harassed, are now fighting back with a vengeance as they know that their worth has suddenly grown. It is time for them to demand their pound of flesh.

HEAD of the fast-approaching Lok Sabha elections, the BJP-led NDA is in the news for the wrong reasons, with doubts being cast upon a second term for Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

The fag-end of 2018 delivered a body blow to the BJP in the form of loss of power in the key states of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Rajasthan.

The shock defeat has set in motion its own dynamics. The ruling alliance is showing never-before cracks in dealing with key issues arising out of 'non-communication' between the 'strong leader' and the allies, which were left in a 'take it or leave it' situation till not long ago.

The problem with the BJP is that it has repeatedly believed in its own slogans and come to grief because of that. Before the 2004 Lok Sabha polls, when Atal Bihari Vajpayee was at the helm, the then ruling party sincerely believed in 'India Shining'. Sonia Gandhi pricked the bubble easily by playing the alliance card deftly.

Now, Modi's pet project of 'Congress-Bharat' has not only boomeranged, but also given rise to a resurgent Congress, whose leader Rahul

Gandhi is making all the right noises. Paradoxically, the NDA's woes appear to be never-ending. What can one say about the health of a coalition in which the second largest constituent (Shiv Sena) insists that it is not bothered about whether the tie-up happens or not unless issues close to its heart, such as the construction of the Ram temple and a fair deal to



ALL'S NOT WELL: Modi and Shah have their hands full in the election year.

farmers, are addressed well in time? Some of its allies in Bihar have cautioned the leadership that it should stick to the path of development, as laid down by the alliance, and refrain from taking up any other issue which is not on its agenda, a clear reference to the vexed Ayodhya matter.

Modi and BJP chief Amit Shah, the two-man army that overran many 'enemy territories' in the past five years, is suddenly finding itself running out of steam. The irony is that having tomtommed itself as the world's largest political party till some time ago, the BJP is desperately searching for allies.

The BJP is looking weak and exasperated, while its allies, which were ignored, humiliated or harassed, are now fighting back with a vengeance as they know that their worth has suddenly grown. It is

V. HARD

time for them to demand their pound of flesh. How else can one interpret the letter from young Lok Janshakti Party leader Chirag Paswan to Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, wondering why he is not listing out the 'benefits' of demonetisation for the allies to tell the people ahead of the Lok Sabha elections? No one in the ruling dispensation could have dared such a veiled dig at the PM.

In the changed scenario, Modi and Shah are projecting that 'people are most precious' as they seek to keep the flock together. Earlier, the view appeared to be that the allies are like the 'extras' of Bollywood who are needed to be around like showpieces so that the 'hero' is depicted in a brighter light and runs the show singlehandedly.

"Modi is a people's leader, dynamic, dedicated and determined, who

SU DO KU

reflects the aspirations and hopes of over a billion Indians" was the projection, signalling that others play second fiddle, remain low profile, be content with what is offered and remain in the silent mode.

All that is changing painfully for the BJP as it is attempting to grapple with the challenges brought in by the 'tsunami' of defeat in the recent Assembly polls.

The BJP, which secured 22 Lok Sabha seats in Bihar in 2014, has finalised seat-sharing in the state, agreeing to contest just 17 seats while leaving an equal number for Chief Minister Nitish Kumar's JD-U. The development makes it crystal clear that Modi and Shah are bending over backwards in the wake of the resurgent 'mahagathbandhan' of the RJD-Congress-RLSP and other parties. The recent bypoll verdict in adjacent Jharkhand, where the Congress won convincingly, is a wake-up call for the ruling BJP, which lost two byelections earlier in the year.

Maharashtra, the second most important state after Uttar Pradesh with 48 Lok Sabha seats, would remain the test case on the flexibility or otherwise of the beleaguered BJP.

The growing bargaining power of the allies has emboldened the Shiv Sena, which is seeking to extract the maximum from the BJP. Perceived as the 'most wronged' party in the alliance, the Shiv Sena is having a field day in attacking, targeting and humiliating the BJP and its top leader. In fact, Modi is the favourite punching bag of the Sena, which in recent times has

Vikrami Samvat

praised Rahul Gandhi in a manner not done by even most of the allies of the grand old party. Recently, Uddhav Thackeray used Rahul's pet phrase of 'chowkidar chor hai' to target the Prime Minister.

The Shiromani Akali Dal, another old ally of the BJP, made it plain by telling the ruling party that it is time it was 'generous' with the Sena and built the rainbow coalition of parties which were part of the Vajpayee-led NDA. "Bring the present, former as also estranged allies together on a war footing. Give the much-needed new deal to the farmer and work for the betterment of the youth", goes the prescription as time is running out fast.

After parting of ways with TDP's Chandrababu Naidu, the BJP has become virtually non-existent in South India, barring pockets of influence in Karnataka. Biju Janata Dal-ruled Odisha and Mamata Banerjee-controlled West Bengal are being seen as the new greener pastures for the saffron party, which is facing resistance in parts of the Hindi heartland due to the Congress comeback.

With the Bahujan Samaj Party and Samajwadi Party set for an alliance in UP, it has dawned on the powers that be that only help from allies could ensure a second term for Modi. But the fact is that the alliance issue is turning out to be a hard nut to crack as regional parties realise that 2019 is a different cup of tea than 2014.

The BJP's desperation to find new allies shows that Modi magic alone won't work in the Lok Sabha polls.

20 22 YESTERDAY'S SOLUTION

Across: 1 Misuse, 4 Mascot, 9 Zambezi, 10 Exult, 11 Rapid, 12 In depth, 13 Storyteller, 18 Expiate, 20 Voter, 22 Loose, 23 Kibbutz, 24 Minute, 25 Heated. **Down:** 1 Mozart, 2 Sum up, 3 Slender, 5 Ahead, 6 Crumple, 7 Tetchy, 8 Pie in the sky. 14 Typhoon, 15 Lovable, 16 Vellum, 17 Prized, 19 Adept, 21 Taunt.

ACROSS

1 Arbitrary (4-6)

- 8 To lead to a place (5) 9 Female singing voice (7)
- 10 Excess (7)
- 11 Killed (5)
- 12 Bear witness (6)
- 14 Narrow passage of water (6)
- 17 Exclude (5) 19 Hermit (7) 21 Jumpy (7)
- 22 Rowdy fight (5) 23 Inveterate (4-6)

- **DOWN** 2 Receive as legacy (7)
- 3 Multitude (5) 4 Realisable possessions (6)
- 5 Down payment (7) 6 Stage play (5)
- 7 Generally shabby (4,2,4) 8 Honest (10)
- 13 Dickensian miser (7) 15 Praise excessively (7)
- 16 Decisive moment (6) 18 Uninterested (5)
- 20 Venomous snake (5)

9 6 5 3 2 4 8 9 8

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JANUARY 2, 2019 WEDNESDAY

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■ Moon in Scorpio sign									Jalandha
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4	7	6	9	2	3	8	5	1	Hisar
9	2	8	1	5	7	4	6	3	Sirsa
5	3	1	4	6	8	7	2	9	HIMACHAL Dharams
4 3	_		Ŀ		_	Ľ			Manali
8	1	9	2	3	4	5	7	6	Shimla
2	6	4	7	1	5	3	9	8	JAMMU &
7	5	3	6	8	9	1	4	2	Jammu
			,		_	_			Leh
1	8	2	5	7	6	9	3	4	Srinagar UTTARAKH
3	4	7	8	9	2	6	1	5	Dehradu
							-	_	1
6	9	5	3	4	11	2	8	7	Mussoor

WEDNESDAY 17:32 HRS SUNRISE: THURSDAY 07:20 HRS **Foggy** Rainy MAX MIN 18 05 arh 06 23 18 05 20 06 18 05 18 05 21 06 21 04 06 21 L PRADESH sala 14 05 11 -02 12 01 17 07 03 -12 02 -01

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06

05