

## Anxious ticket seekers

As election fever rises, so does the anxiety of ticket seekers. The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) President Amit Shah was in hospital suffering from flu but even here, people wanting to press their claims for a BJP nomination in the Lok Sabha simply wouldn't stop calling on him. The BJP is facing a funny kind of problem: Following announcements by a handful of its senior leaders that they would not fight the Lok Sabha elections, the party is besieged with people wanting to become their replacements. The problem is particularly acute in Uttarakhand where at least out of five BJP MPs — General BC Khanduri and BS Koshiyari — have said they will not contest the 2019 elections. The same is the case with Vidisha represented by Sushma Swaraj and Jhansi where Uma Bharati became an MP. Both have said they will opt out in 2019.

In the Congress, the situation is a little different. The party spokesperson Priyanka Chaturvedi has said she wants to contest from Mumbai. Maharashtra leader Ashok Chavan would prefer to fight the assembly elections and wants his wife to contest the Nanded Lok Sabha seat which, from all accounts, he has all but wrapped up, via a deal with the Majlis e Ittehad ul Muslimeen (MIM). And in Tamil Nadu, while Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) leader Stalin might have crowned Rahul Gandhi his party's choice for PM, the party is not in a mood to concede too many seats in the Lok Sabha. But the upside is, former prime minister Manmohan Singh might get to represent Tamil Nadu in the Rajya Sabha: An offer has been made, as his term as MP from Assam comes to an end next year. So expect a big upheaval but the bottom line is: the Congress which was ruled out of all races as politically unbankable has now entered the ring as well.



## OPINION

THERESA MAY

## Should the UK remain a member of the EU?

Tomorrow, Members of Parliament will cast their votes on the Withdrawal Agreement on the terms of our departure from the European Union and the Political Declaration on our future relationship.

That vote in Westminster is a direct consequence of the votes that were cast by people here in Stoke, and in cities, towns and villages in every corner of the United Kingdom.

In June 2016, the British people were asked by MPs to take a decision: Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or should we leave?

In that campaign, both sides disagreed on many things, but on one thing they were united: what the British people decided, the politicians would implement.

In the run-up to the vote, the government sent a leaflet to every household making the case for remain. It stated very clearly: 'This is your decision. The government will implement what you decide.'

Those were the terms on which people cast their votes. If a majority had backed remain, the UK would have continued as an EU member state.

No doubt the disagreements would have continued too, but the vast majority of people would have had no truck with an argument that we should leave the EU in spite of a vote to remain or that we should return to the question in another referendum.

On the rare occasions when Parliament puts a question to the British people directly we have always understood that their response carries a profound significance.

When the people of Wales voted by a margin of 0.3%, on a turnout of just over 50%, to endorse the creation of the Welsh Assembly, that result was accepted by Parliament.

Indeed we have never had a referendum in the United Kingdom that we have not honoured the result of.

Parliament understood this fact when it voted overwhelmingly to trigger Article 50.

And both major parties did so too when they stood on election manifestos in 2017 that pledged to honour the result of the referendum. Yet, as we have seen over the last few weeks, there are some in Westminster who would wish to delay or even stop Brexit and who will use every device available to them to do so. I ask them to consider the consequences of their actions on the faith of the British people in our democracy.

The House of Commons did not say to the people of Scotland or Wales that despite voting in favour of a devolved legislature, Parliament knew better and would over-rule them. Or else force them to vote again.

What if we found ourselves in a situation where Parliament tried to take the UK out of the EU in opposition to a remain vote?

People's faith in the democratic process and their politicians would suffer catastrophic harm.

We all have a duty to implement the result of the referendum. Ever since I reached an agreement with the EU on a Withdrawal Agreement and declaration on our future relationship I have argued that the consequences of Parliament rejecting it would be grave uncertainty - potentially leading to one of two outcomes.

Either a 'no deal' Brexit, that would cause turbulence for our economy, create barriers to security cooperation and disrupt people's daily lives.

Or the risk of no Brexit at all — for the first time in our history failing to implement the outcome of a statutory referendum and letting the British people down.

These alternatives both remain in play if the deal is rejected. There are differing views on the threat that a no deal exit poses. I have always believed that while we could ultimately make a success of no deal, it would cause significant disruption in the short term and it would be far better to leave with a good deal. Others in the House of Commons take a different view and regard no deal as the ultimate threat to be avoided at all costs. To those people I say this: the only ways to guarantee we do not leave without a deal are: to abandon Brexit, betraying the vote of the British people; or to leave with a deal, and the only deal on the table is the one MPs will vote on tomorrow night.

You can take no deal off the table by voting for that deal. And if no deal is a bad as you believe it is, it would be the height of recklessness to do anything else.

But while no deal remains a serious risk, having observed events at Westminster over the last seven days, it is now my judgment that the more likely outcome is a paralysis in Parliament that risks there being no Brexit.

That makes it even more important that MPs consider very carefully how they will vote tomorrow night.

As I have said many times — the deal we have agreed is worthy of support for what it achieves for the British people.

Immigration policy back in the hands of people you elect — so we can build a system based around the skills people have to offer this country, not where they come from, and bring the overall numbers down. Sovereign control of our borders.

Decisions about how to spend the money you pay in taxes back under the control of people you elect — so we can spend the vast annual sums we send to Brussels as we choose, on priorities like our long-term plan for the NHS. Sovereign control of our money.

No one else has put forward an alternative which does this. Compare that outcome to the alternatives of no deal or no Brexit. With no deal we would have: no implementation period, no security co-operation, no guarantees for UK citizens overseas, no certainty for businesses and workers here in Stoke and across the UK, and changes to everyday life in Northern Ireland that would put the future of our Union at risk.

And with no Brexit, as I have said, we would risk a subversion of the democratic process.

Edited excerpts from British Prime Minister Theresa May's speech on Brexit at Stoke-on-Trent, January 14

## DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?



"I may not agree with their thoughts but I cannot help admiring their consistency and commitment towards organisation building, something those adhering to our socialist ideology never excelled at."

Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar about the RSS, January 15, Patna

## CHECKLIST

## GATHBANDHAN-MAKING: ALLIANCES IN THE PIPELINE

■Tamil Nadu: efforts are on to forge an alliance between the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK), currently in power in the state. The problem is, the BJP has had a past history of committing itself to a Kazhagangal Ila Tamizhagam (a Kazhagam-less Tamil Nadu). And the AIADMK is wary of letting the lotus bloom in the state at its expense. Moreover, in the past, the BJP has had alliances with the DMK as well. However, talks are going on.

■Andhra Pradesh and Telangana: a Federal Front, a coalition of parties to keep out the Congress, BJP and Telugu Desam Party is being negotiated under the leadership of K Chandrashekhara Rao. As the BJP is a limited force in these two states, the alliance will ultimately work against the Congress-TDP combine and in favour of the BJP. The alliance comprises smaller parties like the Majlis e

Ittehadul Muslimeen, YSR Congress and others. Pawan Kalyan's Jana Sena has not yet indicated which way it will go

■Bihar: All the parties opposed to the BJP-Janata Dal United alliance have come out and formed an alliance. JDU leader Nitish Kumar is dismissive about the front.

■West Bengal: the Trinamool Congress has ruled out an alliance with the Congress but has indicated it will be part of the federal front. It has also said its post-poll options will be open.

■Maharashtra: Raju Shetty's Swabhiman Paksha has walked out of the BJP alliance and has joined the Congress Nationalist Congress Party (NCP) grouping. The Left is likely to join it as well. The presence of all these groups including the Congress will restrict the maneuverability of the NCP to jump ship even if it wants to, after the elections.

## How was your first meeting with the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) President Mayawati? What was the ice-breaker?

It was very good because our goals are the same.

## Unlike your father, Mulayam Singh Yadav, who worked with Mayawati for some time in a coalition government, you hardly knew her until now...

That's not true. I know her as much as Netaji (Mulayam). She and I were MPs around the same time. I always respected her.

## The SP-BSP relations were terribly bitter. Did she ever bring up the State Guest House incident (of June 2, 1995) when she was attacked by your party workers?

No, never.

## Was Mayawati different from how you'd imagined her to be?

Not at all. She's as committed to upholding democracy as I am, she is as committed to our alliance as I am. It was a good political decision on her part and the country has welcomed it. Both of us felt the people's pulse and responded accordingly.

## What is the USP of your gathbandhan? The BJP is still strong in UP, the upper castes are rallying around it.

The USP is, both of us are pro-development, pro-growth and pro-infrastructure. How can the BJP dub us as backward? Don't the backward castes use the metro rail? Are there separate seating arrangements for the backward castes? I don't have to prove my commitment to growth to the BJP or anyone. Take the Delhi-Lucknow Expressway. I completed 340 km in my time, the BJP added only 160 km. Yet the BJP claimed ownership over the project.

## But you must have had to convince your party workers who've fought the BSP for many years. Wasn't that tough?

The leaders and party workers think alike about the alliance on both sides. When the SP and BSP fought the Gorakhpur and Phulpur by-polls together (March 2018), our workers from the neighbouring districts came out in strength to make our candidates win. If the workers were upset about my understanding with the BSP, would they come out? When we nominated a person from the Nishad party in Gorakhpur, my only condition was he should fight on the SP's symbol. Things always fall in place. In the Kairana by-poll (May 2018), I told Jayant (the RLD leader), field my candidate on your symbol and he agreed. Together, we gave

the first Muslim woman MP (Tabassum Hasan) from UP to the Lok Sabha in a long time. If the leaders work together, the workers get the message and there's no bitterness on the ground. This is the way we will win the elections.

## Why didn't you want the Congress in your gathbandhan?

We have left two seats (Amethi and Rae Bareilly) for Congress. Congress should help us in the other seats. That's the meaning of a mahagathbandhan (grand alliance).

## The Congress can take away your votes, those of the minorities...

Congress should think in the country's interest and decide who they want to help, the BJP or our alliance.

## But there's still an element of distrust among Muslims towards Mayawati because of her past dealings with the BJP.

This is BJP's disinformation. Now SP and BSP are seen on the same platform, so how can anyone distrust BSP? And she (Mayawati) has sacrificed so many seats to save democracy from the BJP.

## In the presser you addressed with Mayawati, you diplomatically parried a question on whether you want to see Mayawati as the next PM.

The PM can be from anywhere. But I will be happiest if the PM is from UP. UP is spearheading the battle to stop the BJP from coming to power so the next PM must be from UP.

## Do you think the "federal front" is becoming a reality?

Change is necessary. Since Independence, for a long time, there was a one pit latrine. May be under the BJP you have a two pit latrine. But the Congress and the BJP could never install water tanks and flushes for the poor. So I am saying, you just cannot have two poles, the Congress and the BJP, and keep the poor in thrall to them. To give you another example. When I was the CM, the Centre never released enough funds to complete the GT Road from Araul (Kanpur district) to Champaran.

Had the project been given to me, I would have completed it. This is why a central government consisting of regional parties will work better for the individual states. The regional parties are doing good work, Mamata ji (Banerjee), KCR, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, I, ran good schemes. A federal front can become a reality but the Congress should help.



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

Akhilesh Yadav, the Samajwadi Party president, was the fulcrum of an Opposition coalition in Uttar Pradesh put together to challenge the Bharatiya Janata Party. The gathbandhan includes the Bahujan Samaj Party and smaller entities representing castes and the minorities but excludes the Congress. Radhika Ramaseshan met Yadav at his Lucknow office and spoke about the prospects of this gathbandhan and whether the Congress could be a part of it in the future. Edited excerpts:

## 'Federal front can become a reality'

## You have been described as the initiator and the pivot of the UP gathbandhan. What were your compulsions in putting the coalition together?

Trust me, there were no compulsions. I am fighting to keep democracy. For the past five years, democratic institutions have been attacked. Of course, earlier the Congress governments did it, and now the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). The BJP showed many dreams in the name of acche din (good days) but these have not been realised. Our economic growth has been hit, the country has regressed. If I fight for growth, the BJP brands me as a backward who has no business to speak on economic issues.

On November 8 (2016, when bank notes were demonetised), I stated it will not help because rupee can't change its colour, the system has to change its colour. I stand by it. People who

lined up for hours, even days, before banks lost their lives but the Centre wasn't remorseful. Traders were ruined. Where are the jobs? The next government has a tough task on hand — putting the economy back on track.

## Yet, the BJP is confident of returning, or even repeating its previous Lok Sabha showing in UP...

Forget the BJP, I don't know how some political experts are saying they will return with 74 seats, one more than what they got in 2014. The UP government has done nothing but shilanyas on top of an earlier shilanyas (foundation-laying). This is unprecedented in the world. Our chief minister and prime minister are re-inaugurating the projects I started. At least change some technical details to keep UP's izzat after it gave you so many MPs.

## Community for women, by a woman

SheThePeople.tv gives a platform to women to tell their stories of courage and inspiration, and build a community for themselves, writes Sneha Bhattacharjee

Post graduate degree holder Rohini Shirke from Satara was married to someone who wasn't even a graduate. Shirke was coaxed to be a homemaker. However, instead of sitting back, she first encouraged her husband to dream big and take a job outside the village and then utilised internet to her advantage. She learnt bee-keeping that was a primary occupation in the village she lived in. However, she had no idea about how to market it. It was through internet that she learnt how to source bottles for safe keeping honey and then selling them to people. The girl now sells natural honey on Amazon as well as takes orders on phone. That is the power of digital where one can be anonymous and at the same time showcase one's talent to the world by learning from the same channel, says journalist turned entrepreneur, Shaili Chopra, founder, SheThePeople.tv.

It was the data — "there are 600 million women in India, which is 9 per cent of the global population" — that prompted Chopra to create a space for women to speak. In her 18-year long career spanning business journalism, data was all that Chopra breathed, wrote and read about. And, when the very data showed an imbalance in the number of women voices, Chopra thought it was about time there was a space for all women — be it rural, urban or semi-urban.

"Till a couple of years back, how many women would you see on the covers of magazines? Or read stories about? Of course, there

were stories but all were either of the same lot, or those that had been long heard about," she says. Thus was born SheThePeople.tv — a digital storytelling platform for women, dedicated to passionately championing and promoting their journeys. With the aim to empower, engage and elevate, as well as connect the women to an amazing network that inspires and grows each other's efforts, the platform aims to engage with everyday women — from leaders, game changers, board members, executives, sportspersons and more.

With over 50,000 stories told on the platform, it has been an exhilarating and at the same time an enriching journey for Chopra. "Personally, I felt inspired seeing women who have built their careers while being young mothers," says Chopra, adding how important it is to encourage such women all the more to take on the challenge of raising a child as well as aiming high at work.

It was Chopra's research on her book, *The Big Connect: Politics in the Age of Social Media*, that made her realise the importance of how social media is playing a key role in empowering the women of today. "She can be anonymous. She can be under a pseudo name. She can just be herself. She can start her own page. Create her own business," she adds stressing how internet has offered an answer to the knowledge a woman possesses.

The website, SheThePeople.tv, is currently bilingual — English and Hindi — and is all set to expand to four more languages — Bengali, Tamil, Kannada, and Marathi. The content for



WOMEN POWER Shaili Chopra's research on her book, *The Big Connect: Politics in the Age of Social Media*, made her realise the importance of how social media is playing a key role in empowering the women of today

both English as well as Hindi is written anew and not merely translated, says Chopra. She also plans to include more video content on the platform by hosting studio-driven programmes. One example of such content is "Women & the Vote" show, which has been launched with the general elections in mind, where they discuss at length issues that matter to the women in the country. There is also non-branded content on health and hygiene that

the founder feels need to be talked about at length.

Chopra also plans to generate content for women travellers so they can travel in India and get all the information they need about the country at one place.

Chopra surely has big plans in the pipeline and with women as her focus, she is hoping to build a community bustling with stories of inspiration, courage and daredevilry.

# Thunder down under

Kohli's team shows it can dominate away from India

It has been a momentous tour for the men in blue, who have traditionally been formidable at home and fragile abroad, as they completed an unprecedented display across formats against the Australian cricket team. Former Australian captain Michael Clarke admitted that even the final scoreline — a 2-1 victory in Tests, 2-1 victory in ODI and a drawn (1-1) T-20 series — did not capture the extent to which India dominated the hosts. Rain probably saved the Aussies from losing the T-20 series, and from losing the Tests by an even higher margin (3-1). Australia being dwarfed like this —

game after game, format after format — is unheard of. Indeed, this is the first Indian team to have won a Test series in Australia, which had lost at home just six times in the past 30 years. Even India's golden generation of batting legends featuring the likes of Sachin Tendulkar, Rahul Dravid, V V S Laxman and Virender Sehwag and led by the fearless Sourav Ganguly could not clinch the deal in Australia.

What makes India's heroics in Australia all the more remarkable is the fact that exactly a year ago when the Virat Kohli-led team started its away tours with

the first Test in Cape Town, there weren't many who gave them much of a chance. Indeed, with back-to-back away tours in South Africa, England, and Australia lined up, Kohli's very future as Test captain was at stake. In fact, Kohli took over from M S Dhoni when the team lost one away series after another despite having a stellar record back home. Paper tigers, flat-track bullies etc. were beginning to look like well-deserved epithets. To be sure, after losing the first two Tests (and with that the series) in South Africa, many of those fears were reinforced. While India had some promising fast bowlers especially with Jaspreet Bumrah's debut, it was its inconsistent and unsettled batting that was the main reason for failure. In three Tests in South Africa, Indian batters managed to cross the 300-run mark just once. However, India

did show resilience and not only managed to win the last Test but also beat the Proteas in the ODIs and T-20s.

Yet, by the time India reached England, its claim as the world's number one Test side sounded hollow. Indeed, poor team selection and complete lack of application in batting meant that India had no room to hide in the five-Test series. Eventually, India was humiliated with a 1-4 loss against an English side that struggled to bat itself. By the end of the series, Coach Ravi Shastri was beginning to sound preposterous with claims that Kohli's team was the best to tour England in the past 15 years. Yet, even in the face of receding support, Shastri maintained that in this team "there is no negative bone in the body" and that it will endeavour to be the best travelling side of the world.

To be sure, by the time India reached

Brisbane in November last year for the first T-20, India had a wide array of effective bowlers to choose from — both in the fast and spin categories. Moreover, Australia was struggling to come to terms with the eviction of their captain (Steven Smith) and vice-captain (David Warner), who were also their batting backbone, in the wake of the Sandpapergate episode. The only thing missing for India was a consistent batting order. And this is where Cheteshwar Pujara and new entrants such as Mayank Agarwal and Rishabh Pant stepped up to show they belonged. Led by indefatigable Kohli, India out-batted and out-bowled the Aussies in their own backyard. The team now travels to New Zealand and even though they only play ODIs and T-20s, it should hopefully do an encore and prove that its domination in Australia wasn't just a one-off miracle.

# Damning HAL will get us nowhere

Wisdom lies in giving Hindustan Aeronautics every encouragement. The Air Force should work closely with it, just as the Navy does with public sector ship-building enterprises



The light combat aircraft being assembled at HAL Bengaluru. The pace of delivery is slow, and the Air Force also does not accept it as fully combat-worthy

PREM VIR DAS

In the context of the Rafale purchase, a collateral victim has been our largest defence public sector undertaking (PSU), Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL). The ministry of defence has little difficulty in paying foreign manufacturers on dates specified in contracts even for equipment yet to be supplied, but has no issue in delaying similar payments for supplies already made by their own PSU.

HAL is possibly one of our earliest PSUs, leaving aside the Ordnance factories. From producing the little Gnat in the 1960s to the Sukhoi fifty years later has been no mean achievement. It has the distinction of designing and manufacturing the first Indian fighter aircraft, the HF-24, in its earliest years; how that project crash-landed is another story. Since then, it has manufactured a variety of aircraft and helicopters for the Indian Air Force — British, French and Russian — albeit under licence.

For over two decades now it has, under the aegis of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), been involved in the design and production of our own Indian fighter, commonly known as the LCA. Though very few of them are accepted by the IAF as fully combat-worthy, and the pace of delivery is not up to expectations, the fact is that the LCA makes India one of fewer than ten countries in the world that can design and make such aircraft. Yet, instead of taking every step to enhance its capabilities and capacities, no effort is spared in deriding HAL in every possible way — most recently, by denying it the option of manufacturing Rafale aircraft in India along with purchases of some from France.

Let us compare this with the progress of another defence PSU, Mazagon Docks Limited (MDL), which caters to the needs of the Navy. Its foray in the production of major warships began in the mid-1960s with the building of a Leander class frigate of British design and with weapons, sensors and machinery from the same source. Even as the first ship was being built, the Navy was already making plans to replace important sensors in three follow-on ships to a Dutch source, and this

change was successfully made.

While the third of this line was under construction, it was felt that there was need for such ships to embark heavier and larger anti-submarine helicopters, necessitating an increase in size and weight, and this is how the heavier fifth and sixth ships came. Then, even as the fifth was on the slipway, it was found necessary to have not one but two such helicopters, which meant a further increase in the size of the next three ships. This brought us the Godavari at 4000 tonnes, about 800 tonnes heavier and 80 feet longer than the Nilgiri, all within the space of a decade.

Since then, MDL has moved on to the Delhi class destroyers followed by Shivalik class frigates and Kolkata class heavier destroyers. Admittedly, some ships were delayed, but there was never an instance in which MDL was not supported; the Navy considered them as part of the learning curve. In this same time, it groomed another PSU, Garden Reach Shipyard and Engineers (GRSE) to start building major warships, which has led to that PSU being earmarked to build three new frigates alongside four by MDL.

It is another matter that a third yard has been nurtured, called Goa Shipyard (GSL), which has graduated from building smaller warships to one putting out more capable ocean-going warships. On another plane, a PSU is building our first aircraft carrier at Kochi, even if at not good-enough speed. Sadly, plans to build submarines in India have suffered a penalty of two decades owing to corruption allegations of earlier years which have yet to be proved and for which MDL has no responsibility.

Other defence PSUs — Bharat Electronics Limited and Bharat Dynamics Limited, to name only two — face no such disapprobation. It is not that they have not seen delays, but these have often been for reasons beyond their control.

Why is it that a PSU which has turned out hundreds

of Gnats, Jaguars, Mirages, MIGs and Sukhois with progressively increasing sophistication is looked down upon, while others do not face the same distrust? The answer lies in the close interface and involvement of the user (or the lack of it) with the PSU charged to meet its own needs. The Navy, from the very beginning, has participated much more proactively with MDL, BEL, et al, and accepted limitations inherent in their productivity than has the Air Force.

And, even as a few ships have been purchased from outside, the focus has always been on indigenous manufacture or Make in India. Most importantly, the Navy, from the earliest days, decided to have the design function integrated in its headquarters and the strength of this designer fraternity, all in naval uniform and recruited from Indian technological institutes, has grown from a mere dozen-odd to several hundred in the last sixty years.

This process has been neither easy nor quick, but there was a realisation that generating expertise would be slow but, hopefully, steady. The experience with private sector companies, even the better-known and bigger ones, such as the Birla and Reliance groups, has shown that manufacturing skills for military platforms do not come in a sprint. Larsen and Toubro is an exception, largely through its close interface with serving and former naval personnel. The Air Force has no design cadre or expertise of its own.

Since privatisation, the ongoing mantra, is not going to come HAL's way — the example of Air India stares us in the face — wisdom lies in supporting this PSU and giving it every encouragement and support. Bouquets for the work being done rather than brickbats for the negatives should be the norm and for this the Air Force, even more than the defence ministry, should take responsibility. For a Navratna PSU to have to resort to bank loans to pay its employees must surely be seen as a slap in the face, not so much for HAL as for those for whom it exists. Demolishing it will get us nowhere.

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# China's military: The shape of things to come

HARSH V PANT

Earlier this month, at a meeting of top officials of the Central Military Commission (CMC), which he heads, Chinese President Xi Jinping ordered the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to be ready for battle, as the country in his opinion faces unprecedented risks and challenges. He said "all military units must correctly understand major national security and development trends, and strengthen their sense of unexpected hardship, crisis and battle."

Underlining that "the world is facing a period of major changes never seen in a century, and China is still in an important period of strategic opportunity for development," Mr Xi stressed the need to focus on combat research, advance work in all areas and accelerate the development of strong and efficient "joint-operation commanding institutions for theatre commands to comprehensively boost the military's battle-winning ability."

Mr Xi also signed a mobilisation order for the training of the armed forces, the CMC's first order of the year, which requires all units of the PLA "to welcome the 70th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China with 'excellent performance'."

Mr Xi has been a great enthusiast for the Chinese military's proactiveness, and ever since assuming office, has been pushing the PLA to boost its combat-readiness. He told the Communist Party's 19th Party Congress in 2017 that China will complete the modernisation of its armed forces by 2035, and achieve a "world-class" military by 2050, that can fight and win wars across all theatres.

Last year Mr Xi ordered the military region responsible for monitoring the South China Sea and Taiwan to assess the situation it is facing, and boost its capabilities so it can handle any emergency. It has been reported that about two million personnel were involved in more than 18,000 mostly small-scale exercises in 2018, compared to just 100 such exercises in 2016.

For Mr Xi and China, military modernisation is top priority as the international environment enters uncharted waters. But more than that, it's the effective integration of force into foreign policy-making that is now becoming the norm, and is a cause of concern for other states. Tensions between the US and China are gathering pace and show no sign of abating. The Donald Trump Administration is not letting up the pressure it has mounted on Beijing, with US Vice-President Mike Pence charging recently: "Using that stolen technology, the Chinese Communist Party is turning ploughshares into swords on a massive scale."

Acting US Secretary of Defence Patrick Shanahan told the US military leadership to remember "China, China, China," singling out Beijing as a key pri-

ority in emerging great power competition. The US Navy continues to conduct freedom of navigation exercises in the South China Sea region.

The Chinese response is getting shriller, with Beijing revoking permission for a US warship to visit Hong Kong and recalling its key naval official from Washington. China has taken strong exception to US sanctions on its buying of weapons from Russia and Washington's stepped-up rhetoric on Taiwan. Recently, Mr Xi called on Taiwan to reject moves towards formal independence and embrace "peaceful reunification" with his country, in line with the concept of "one country, two systems" used in Hong Kong when China regained sovereignty over the city from the UK in 1997. Mr Xi did not rule out using military force to take Taiwan.

The Chinese leader has in the past vowed not to cede "a single inch of our motherland", and has increased military exercises around Taiwan. Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-wen rejected Mr Xi's "one country, two systems" suggestion outright, underlining that Taiwan's priorities in 2019 include protecting its democracy and safeguarding its sovereignty, in addition to improving people's livelihoods.

In the face of an economic downturn back home and growing pressures abroad, Mr Xi is using military rhetoric to shore up his credibility in the eyes of his domestic constituencies. But it is also a fact that China's military modernisation is beginning to pay dividends, with the gap between the US and Chinese militaries getting narrower.

While the US Navy remains technically more advanced, the PLA Navy (PLAN) is catching up. New stealth fighters and long-range bombers have been brought into service and Chinese warships are gearing up with advanced radars and control systems. Earlier this month, China showcased a new type of massive aerial bomb as its response to America's "Mother of All Bombs", the most powerful non-nuclear weapon. The Chinese weapon is said to be smaller and lighter than the American version. China is moving rapidly, emerging as a frontline state in cutting-edge defence technologies, which will have grave implications for the technological balance of global power.

Indian military modernisation is also progressing but moving in fits and starts. A cohesive strategy is still not visible, especially in the context of challenges that China is posing from across the border. As global military thinking rapidly undergoes a shift, Indian conventional and nuclear thinking will also have to evolve. Old certitudes will no longer apply.

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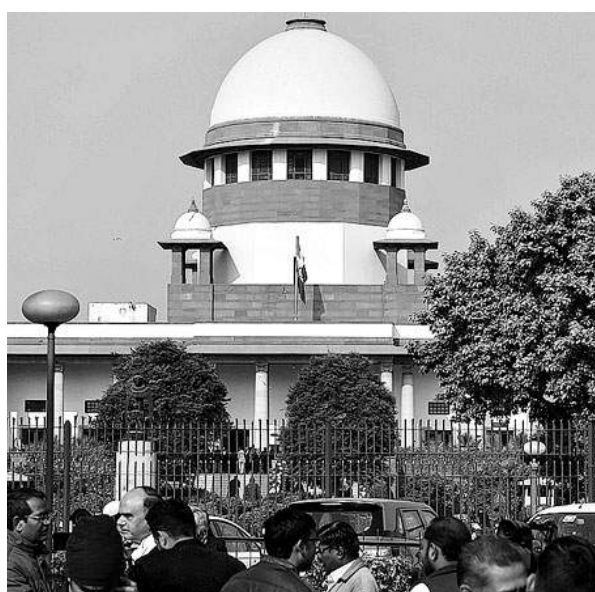
## OTHER VIEWS

### SC collegium decisions must have institutional sanctity

Retirement of one judge should not be a reason for revoking a decision

Former Chief Justices of India, a sitting Supreme Court judge, and the Bar Council of India have taken exception to the collegium's unusual action of revisiting decisions made at an earlier meeting, and recommending the elevation to the apex court of Justice Dinesh Maheshwari and Justice Sanjiv Khanna, instead of two judges whose names had been considered earlier. The official reasons are in the public domain in the form of a resolution on January 10. It claims that even though some decisions were made on December 12, "the required consultations could not be undertaken and completed" in view of the winter vacation. When the collegium met again on January 5/6, its composition had changed following the retirement of Justice Madan B Lokur. It was then decided that it would be "appropriate" to have a fresh look at the matter, as well as the "additional material".

The only rationale for the names of Rajasthan High Court Chief Justice Pradeep Nandrajog and Delhi High Court Chief Justice Rajendra Menon being left out is the claim that new material had surfaced. Can the retirement of one judge be a ground to withdraw a considered decision, even if some con-



system has once again been called into question. The recent practice of making public all resolutions of the collegium has brought in some transparency. Yet, the impression that it works in mysterious ways refuses to go away.

The Hindu, January 18

### Federal imbalance

States should be free to pick DGPs

The Supreme Court's directive that the states must select their police chiefs from a list of officers empanelled by the Union Public Service Commission is against the federal principles outlined in the Constitution. Public order is exclusively a state subject and hence, the appointment of the Director General of Police (DGP) should be left to the discretion of the state governments. The SC, however, on Wednesday dismissed applications by five states that had sought a modification of the Court's order in July last year, where it had reiterated the directives issued in *Prakash Singh and others vs Union of India & others* in 2006. The responsibility of

state government, which does it through the police machinery. Voters penalise the state government if it fails to enforce law and order. The involvement of the UPSC, whose members are appointed by the Union government, allows the Centre to have a foothold in what is clearly a domain of the states. The SC has said the choice of a DGP has to be made "on the basis of their length of service, very good record and range of experience for heading the police force". A state government, surely, could be trusted to make this choice, especially since the police force, including the officers, serves under it.

The Indian Express, January 18

### State fighting its own people

Sedition law is used indiscriminately

The law against sedition was formulated by India's imperial rulers to keep their subjects under control. It does not say much about successive elected governments in independent India that this law, enshrined in Section 124A of the Indian Penal Code, continues to exist unchanged, although Britain withdrew its own law against sedition in 1977. Since the phrasing of Section 124A is vague enough to allow the State to arrest anyone expressing criticism of and dissent with the government, the Supreme Court made clear in 1962 that without inciting violence against the State, no one can be considered seditious.

Sedition charges have now been framed against Kanhaiya Kumar and nine

others, a few from Kashmir, accused of supporting terrorists and raising "anti-India" slogans at a meeting in Jawaharlal Nehru University almost three years ago. Hiren Gohain, the well-known writer and critic, was charged with sedition with two other activists in Assam last week for protesting against the citizenship amendment bill, 2016 that is based on sectarian discrimination. The profiles of those charged indicate the type of people which governments, usually led by the Bharatiya Janata Party, wish to muffle. In 2014, 55 people were arrested for sedition, in 2015, 73 and in 2016, 33. Such lawless use of the law is truly dangerous.

The Telegraph, January 18