

# Opinion

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 17, 2019

**THE RAFALE DEAL** is unravelling faster than the BJP expected. If the government and the ruling party thought that they could keep the lid on the most opaque defence purchase in recent times, they were wrong, and they were rudely dragged out of their comfort zone. The credit goes, largely, to *The Hindu* and Mr N Ram, chairman of The Hindu Group's publishing company. However, there were — and are — other important players who deserve to be complimented for standing up to the enormous pressure of the government and its leaders.

## New and Flawed Deal

First, the facts that have tumbled out of the closet.

1. It is now confirmed that the Rafale deal was a one-man show of Prime Minister Modi. Mr Modi was the choreographer, it was carefully orchestrated, and all important decisions were taken by the Prime Minister's Office (PMO).

2. The decision to scrap the UPA-era memorandum of understanding (MoU) was not taken first for cogent reasons. The decision to enter into a new deal was taken first and, since the earlier MoU was standing in the way, the MoU was scrapped.

3. Key players were kept out of the loop: the defence minister, the external affairs minister, the finance minister, the Air Force, the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC) and the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS).

4. On April 8, 2015, in Paris, the foreign secretary told the media that the Rafale negotiations were at an advanced stage among the two governments, Dassault and Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL), and Rafale was not on the agenda of talks between the prime minister of India and the president of France. Two days later, on April 10, after a one-on-one meeting between Mr Modi and Mr Hollande, the new deal was announced!

5. The new deal was indeed a new deal. Not 126 aircraft, but only 36 aircraft. Not at the earlier negotiated price, but a new price. Not the previously identified offset partner (HAL), but a new offset partner (a private company with no experience of manufacturing aircraft or aircraft parts). These decisions were taken at the meeting between the two leaders on April 10, not after negotiations between the two negotiating teams.

## Waivers and Omissions Galore

6. 'Payment security mechanism' for the ₹60,000 crore that India would pay to the two suppliers, Dassault and MBDA, was thrown to the winds. There will be no sovereign guarantee, no bank guarantee, and not even an escrow account. All these waivers were directed by the PMO.

7. The mandatory anti-corruption clauses were omitted. There will be no clause against paying commissions, no clause against engaging agents, no pact on integrity, and no access to the account books of the suppliers. These decisions too were taken by the PMO.

8. There was a powerful note of dissent by the three domain experts on the Indian Negotiating Team (INT) —

## ACROSS THE AISLE

P Chidambaram



# A government running for cover



People hold placards protesting against the Rafale deal at a Congress rally in Dharampur, Valsad, Gujarat, earlier this week AP

Mr MP Singh, Adviser (Cost); Mr AR Sule, FM (Air); and Mr Rajeev Velma, JS & AM (Air). The eight-page dissent challenged the recommendations proposed by the other four members of the INT and tore into the numerous deviations and waivers that were being pushed by them.

## Compromised 'Supreme' Audit

As each fact tumbled out, the government scrambled for cover. At first, the government tried to take refuge under the judgment of the Supreme Court but that gambit failed because the judgment itself made it clear that the Supreme Court had declined to examine the issues of pricing and the reduction in the number of aircraft. When Parliament protested, the government tried to silence Parliament — through its brute majority in the Lok Sabha and

through encouraging peremptory adjournments of the Rajya Sabha.

The government may have hoped that the CAG's report will bail it out. The report was presented on the last day of the session of Parliament. Far from saving the government, the report exposed the fact that the government had tried and succeeded in muzzling the independent voice of the CAG, the supreme audit body of the country. The report also debunked the government's claims on cheaper price and quicker delivery schedule.

The CAG seems to have initially resisted the demand for redaction — there was no precedent, the CAG said — of the commercial details, but its feeble resistance dissolved following a stern letter from the government. The result is tables that make no sense and a report that is as opaque as the deal that the CAG was supposed to examine. The report is noteworthy not for what it said but for what it has not said. The

CAG did not comment

- on the undue monetary gain to the suppliers due to amortisation on a smaller number of aircraft (36 against 126);

- on the monetary risk to India because of the absence of any payment security mechanism;

- on the probability of Dassault and MBDA adhering to the delivery schedule given the huge backlog of unexecuted contracts for Rafale aircraft;

- on the perils of omitting the anti-corruption clauses, especially the non-access to the account books of the suppliers;

- on the impact on the operational capability of the Air Force which will get fewer aircraft; and

- on the powerful dissent note recorded by three members of the INT.

In the mist that envelops the Rafale deal, one thing is clear: the last word has not been said on the subject.

Website: [@Pchidambaram\\_IN](http://pchidambaram.in)



## INSIDE TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR

## Fortitude under fire

Arun Jaitley is set to officially resume his duties as finance minister and head the BJP's publicity committee for the 2019 campaign. This, despite the fact that he had two serious illnesses last year. He underwent a kidney transplant after a renal failure and, within a few months, was diagnosed with sarcoma, a rare cancer of the connective tissue. Even opposition politicians are impressed with the fortitude and stoicism with which Jaitley has taken his ill-health in stride. Except for walking with a brace, he is almost back to normal, though he doesn't move around in crowded spaces. In the Sloan Kettering hospital in New York, he remained in touch with his duties from afar. Contrary to speculation, there was no need for either chemotherapy or radiation for his tumour since it was detected in the early stages. The malignant tissue near the knee was scooped out and tissue from the hip transplanted. The cancer probably predated the kidney surgery and it was, in fact, Jaitley himself who realised something was amiss when he noticed the skin bloating every time oil was rubbed on his leg.

## Disunited front

Mulayam Singh Yadav's speech in Parliament expressing the hope that Narendra Modi would return as Prime Minister stunned the Opposition. The Samajwadi Party founder appeared somewhat disoriented after his speech and remarked in awe to a journalist that the PM had twice mentioned him in his address to the House. There were other indications last week that the Opposition has yet to put up a united front. A furious Mamata Banerjee accosted Sonia Gandhi in Parliament's Central Hall, saying she would not forget that Congress MP Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury in his speech earlier that day accused her of involvement in the chit fund scams in West Bengal. Akhilesh Yadav is annoyed with the Congress for abstaining when the SP, joined by the TMC, BSP and TDP, protested in Parliament against the Yogi Adityanath government preventing Akhilesh from boarding a flight to Allahabad. The Congress asked its RJD ally Tejashwi Yadav to boycott the function of an English TV news channel, which, it feels, has a pronounced BJP slant, but the NCP's Praful Patel went anyway. He says he never lets political differences come in the way of social contacts. For instance, he went for BJD rebel Jay Panda's book release in the morning and had drinks with Naveen Patnaik the

same night.

## Keeping BJP guessing

The BJP is faring no better with its allies. The Shiv Sena's Sanjay Raut attended Chandrababu Naidu's Opposition unity rally in which Modi was the target of attack. The BJP remains hopeful of an eventual patch-up. Prakash Javadekar quoted a proverb — "You can't live with us and you can't live without us" — to describe the on-off-on relationship between the allies. The crux of the dispute is that the Sena wants to play the senior partner in an alliance for the Assembly and insists that this be linked with seat-sharing on the Lok Sabha seats. The BJP hopes the Sena will come around if Uddhav Thackeray's son Aditya is promised the deputy chief minister's post.

## Family togetherness

Last Tuesday, a portrait of Atal Bihari Vajpayee by Krishn Kanhai was installed in Parliament's Central Hall. The majestic room is now so crowded with portraits that there is little space for additions. To make place for Vajpayee, Lala Lajpat Rai had to be moved to one side. Someone pointed out that the Jawaharlal Nehru portrait is a misfit alongside Rajendra Prasad, Ram Manohar Lohia and Lal Bahadur Shastri. A panel on the opposite side has four portraits, Motilal Nehru, Rajiv Gandhi, Indira Gandhi and Sardar Patel. It makes sense to swap the positions of Nehru and Patel, the person said.

## Star-struck

The photogenic, blue-blooded Gandhis have a fan following even among journalists. A TV news channel assigned a star-struck young woman reporter on a full-time Rahul Gandhi beat. A smart move since, thanks to the regular interaction, the scribe now has a distinct advantage in persuading the Congress president to give a sound bite to her channel. Seeing her proximity, other channels and photographers follow her doggedly in Parliament since she seems to know in advance from which entrance Rahul will emerge and at what time. Another TV channel now seems keen to build a Priyanka Gandhi arrangement. A journalist from the group followed Priyanka Gandhi's movements in Lucknow so conscientiously that she was tweeting non-stop for 14 hours, though Priyanka spent most of her time in meetings in the Lucknow Congress office. At 4 am, Priyanka emerged to give an exclusive sound bite to the journalist, that she was coming to grips with the Uttar Pradesh party organisation.

# That sinking feeling

The Premier League's Chelsea Football Club seems to be regressing towards the mid-table mediocrity of the pre-Roman Abramovich era

## RINGSIDE VIEW

Shamik Chakrabarty



IT'S NOT KNOWN if Roman Abramovich had watched the very public dismantling of the Sarri-ball at the Etihad last Sunday. Chelsea's absentee owner doesn't turn up for his club's matches these days. Rarely does he drop in at Cobham, Chelsea's training base. Ever since the British government tightened up the investor visas following the Salisbury poisoning incident last year, Abramovich has chosen recluse, football-wise.

Gone are the days when managers received texts from the club owner after defeats. In Carlo Ancelotti's case, as Sky Italy journalist Fabio Caressa revealed, it used to be a simple question mark. Ancelotti managed Chelsea for two seasons, from 2009 to 2011, and won a Premier League title and an FA

Cup. He did a double, in fact, in his first season at the Bridge. A year later, the Italian was gone, with his team still second in the league table. But Chelsea had lost the title race to Manchester United and that was enough for Abramovich to wield the axe.

Abramovich has never befriended patience. Then again, his hire-and-fire policy has worked wonders. Chelsea have won five Premier League titles, a Champions League and nine other trophies since Abramovich took the club ownership in 2003 and changed the English game. The Russian oligarch was the reason why football in England went into a costly makeover. All said and done, Abramovich cared for Chelsea, although he always kept long-term vision at arm's length.

Not that Abramovich has deserted Chelsea. He okayed goalkeeper Kepa Arrizabalaga's signing from Athletic Bilbao for a world record fee of £71 million at the start of the season. In January, he opened his chequebook to bring Gonzalo Higuain on loan from Juventus. At the same time, though, Abramovich has allowed the likes of Nemanja Matic and



Chelsea owner Roman Abramovich

Thibaut Courtois to leave. Matic was sold to United, a direct rival. And now, Eden Hazard's departure to Real Madrid looks imminent. Also, Abramovich has put his £1-billion Stamford Bridge extension plans on hold. From Chelsea's perspective, though, the most concerning factor is that the club owner has all but stopped

communicating with the manager.

The current Chelsea manager Maurizio Sarri said as much after his side received a grand 6-0 hiding against Manchester City. "If the president calls, I will be happy, seeing as I never hear from him. To be honest, I don't know what to expect," Sarri told Sky Italia. It was

Chelsea's worst-ever defeat in the Premier League era, which came on the heels of a 4-0 away defeat to Bournemouth.

Sarri's appointment at the start of the season had raised eyebrows. Antonio Conte won the Premier League and the FA Cup during his two seasons as Chelsea manager. Conte fell out with some of the stars, notably Diego Costa (he was offloaded), Hazard and Willian, but he had to make way for Sarri because Abramovich wanted Chelsea to play passing football a la Barcelona. The Sarri-ball was making waves in Italy. The Chelsea owner fell for it.

At the Bridge, though, player power rules the dressing room and it proved to be Sarri's biggest obstacle with regard to installing his philosophy at the club. He played Hazard and N'Golo Kante — the team's MVP and the world's best holding midfielder, respectively — out of position. In fact, it was a tad surprising that the dressing room took this long to dismiss Sarri-ball. The manager didn't help his cause either by publicly questioning his players' motivation. Sarri's relationship with Hazard reportedly has reached boiling point, which is bad news for the former.

Luiz Felipe Scolari and Andre Villas-Boas were handed pink slips in very similar circumstances, seven and nine months into their respective first terms. At the moment, it feels like Sarri is just one more defeat away from get-

ting the sack. It's apparently the easier option for Abramovich who has presided over 13 managerial changes so far. But will another change augur well for Chelsea?

Their Premier League rivals, Manchester City, Liverpool and Tottenham Hotspur, have been reaping the rewards of stability. Also, it's becoming increasingly difficult for Abramovich to bankroll success — he can no longer match the spending power of City and United. Chelsea seem to be regressing towards the mid-table mediocrity of the pre-Abramovich era. They need long-term vision. They need to give their academy graduates first-team football. For a change, Abramovich needs to give the deadwoods and the troublemakers in the squad the boot instead of parting ways with the manager. The Premier League needs a strong Chelsea.

"People don't understand how difficult the first year can be. People need time; only depends on the owners. The people in charge need to believe," Pep Guardiola had said last week. Not that Sarri is ticking all the boxes. Far from it... To paraphrase Sir Matt Busby, the Chelsea manager is not a man of grass and boots. He likes to present himself as a football intellectual. He is also very stubborn. A little bit of flexibility will do Sarri no harm. In the meantime, Abramovich should hang fire.



# Idea Exchange

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When we call ourselves a national organisation, we should have works from every state. So we are thinking of opening branches in Chandigarh, Odisha, the north-east. We intend to collect works of local artists"

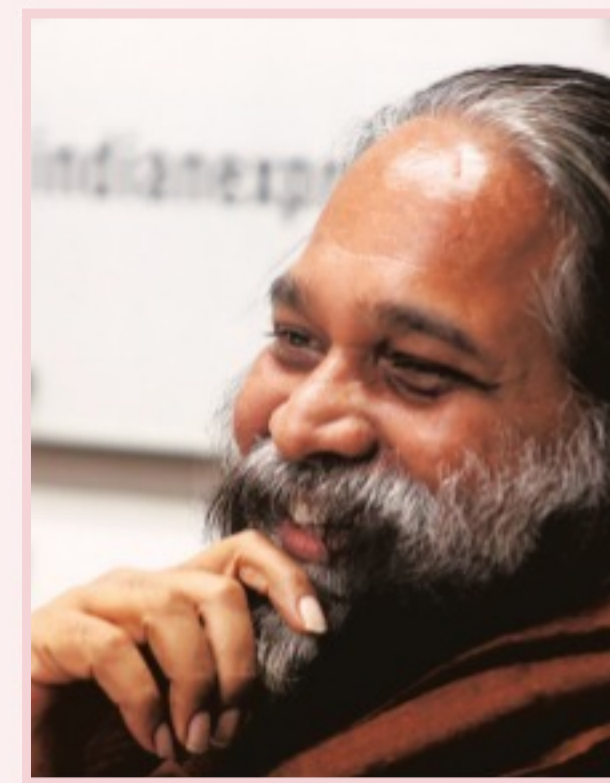


## WHY ADWAITA GADANAYAK

**BEFORE HE TOOK** over as the director-general of NGMA in December 2016, Adwaita Gadanayak headed School of Sculpture at Kalinga Institute in Bhubaneswar. Winner of the Lalit Kala Akademi National Award for Sculpture in 1993, his notable works include the Dandi March at Raj Ghat, a granite sculpture in London called Meditation,

and the centrepiece at the National Police Memorial in Delhi. Gadanayak has started several new initiatives at NGMA to connect masses with art under his tenure, and is overseeing a major facelift of the institution. Recently, NGMA was accused of censorship as actor Amol Palekar's speech at opening of an exhibition was cut short

"It is sad but today the market makes an artist. Whose works sell becomes an artist. That is why no one from the north-east comes here... The system gets together, presents an artist... Everything is a business



It is sad but today the market makes an artist. Whose works sell becomes an artist. And that is the reason why no artists from the north-east come here. We now have art houses which hold auctions. The whole system gets together and presents an artist whose works sell at a very high price. This has been happening for the past 10-15 years... Everything is a business and many have benefited from it.

## NGMA is a space for artists, they should be allowed to say what they have to say

The NGMA director general says Amol Palekar had every right to say what he wanted but he was misinformed, denies any move to curtail space to independent artists, explains why the gallery has not added new works, and talks about bringing art to children

**DIVYAA:** Wasn't the disruption of actor and filmmaker Amol Palekar's speech at the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA), Mumbai, where he criticised the ministry of culture over 'disbanding of advisory committees' at the gallery's centres in Mumbai and Bengaluru, censorship? Had you been there, would you have handled it differently?

The particular event where it all happened, the NGMA had just given the space. The curators were external and the guest was also invited by them. Certainly, the NGMA has not done any kind of censorship. However, if I was in the situation, I would have allowed him to finish what he was saying and then explained the facts to him. After all, the NGMA is a space for artists, they should be allowed to say what they have to say.

**DIVYA A:** What is the role of these advisory committees and have they been disbanded?

The advisory committees have a three-year term. In Mumbai and Bengaluru, their terms ended on November 15, 2018, and in Delhi, on January 17. To appoint members to the advisory committee, we ask for recommendations from all over the country. The process takes time. People who claim that the advisory committees have been disbanded are not aware of this procedure. We cannot disband the committees. There is no such system because when an advisory committee's term comes to an end, the process to form a new one begins.

The curator of Prabhakar Barweji's show (who interrupted Palekar) is not from the NGMA. There was also a controversy about the space available for exhibitions. The NGMA has about 18,000 artworks in its collection—the country's best works, acquired since the NGMA came into existence in 1954. We want people living in Mumbai and Bengaluru to see these artworks. Many artists say that the NGMA exhibits these paintings only in Delhi. As a result, other centres don't get opportunities to showcase them. So, after consultations with the ministry, we have decided to dedicate some space at the NGMA for permanent display and another area for outside artists.

**DIVYAA:** What explains the delay in setting up the new advisory committees?

The term of the Delhi centre's advisory committee was the last to get over—on January 17. We were planning to appoint all the bodies together. Hence, the delay. But it has only been a month since the term has ended. We are collecting names of people and working towards forming the bodies.

**DIVYA A:** What about the charge that space allotted to independent artists to showcase their works at the NGMA is being curtailed?

In Mumbai, we had thought of giving space in the dome area to outside artists. But many of them suggested that aged people might find it difficult to climb the stairs. So we have not taken any decision regarding what needs to be done. But when the issue of curtailing allotted space was raised, we clarified that there was no such intention because the NGMA is for artists. Being an artist myself, I understand the hard work that we put in and when we don't get proper space and facilities to showcase our work, it is painful. Whenever I travel to Mumbai or other places, I talk to artists before taking any decision.

I have been extremely busy for the past six-seven months with the restoration of our building in Delhi. So I couldn't travel to Mumbai. But I want to first hold a meeting and then take decisions. The NGMA belongs to artists... So whatever decisions artists take will be carried out accordingly.

**VANDANA KALRA:** Artists often complain that the NGMA has not added any



National Gallery of Modern Art director general Adwaita Gadanayak with Divya A of *The Indian Express*

ABHINAV SAHA

new works to its permanent collection. Has any new artwork been acquired during your tenure?

The storage facility at the NGMA is not very good. So I am upgrading that first. I want the public to see how we store artworks. But because of the ongoing restoration work, artworks have been moved. Once the storage system is ready, we will form a purchase committee similar to the advisory committee. There hasn't been a purchase committee in the two years of my tenure. When the purchase committee is set up, I plan to buy works, mostly of young artists, worth at least ₹15-20 crore. And it's not about my two years at the NGMA. I have noticed that not many artworks have been acquired in the last 15 years. However, Subodh Gupta's work was added to the collection. I have seen how most of the works go to private and international galleries. So we have to fill up the gap quickly. In the next two to three months, the system will be ready.

**VANDANA KALRA:** Will the works of outside artists be exhibited in Delhi as the Mumbai centre has less space? Last year, Manu Parekh and Jitish Kallat had showcased their work here.

We will have a lot of space in Delhi as we are opening up the old building. Last year, we did fewer shows because the space was limited... Artists from across the country want to showcase their works in Delhi. It was former president S Radhakrishnan who had conceived a space like the NGMA. He planned it with artists such as DP Roy Choudhury, Dhanraj Bhagat, Ramkinkar Baij and Sankho Chaudhuri... After independence, our artists were working all over the country and they thought if exhibitions could be held in Delhi, a national movement could be started. At that same time, Guruji (Rabindranath Tagore) was planning something similar in Shantiniketan. Prominent artists of the Swadeshi movement, Abanindranath Tagore and Nandalal Bose, thought that if a platform could be set up in Delhi, the world would get to know about Indian artists and their works and thoughts. But there was no such platform then. Even now, artists think that showcasing their works in Delhi is the ultimate achievement.

**DIVYAA:** At a time that the NGMA is planning to expand its influence to Kolkata and the north-east, how are you trying to bring regional artists into the fold?

Ever since I joined the NGMA, I have been planning an outreach policy because it is mostly works of artists from Mumbai and Delhi that are collected. I belong to Odisha and I don't have artworks from the state. We also lack works of artists from the north-east and Jammu & Kashmir. When we call ourselves a national organisation, we should have works from every state. So we are thinking of opening small branches in Chandigarh, Odisha and the north-east. We intend to collect works of local artists and showcase them in the respective states and later move them to Delhi. But for this, we have to go to them because artists have high self-respect. The NGMA will visit these places, talk to local artists and acquire a space to host shows to exhibit these artworks. Slowly but steadily, there will be a system in place. If you visit any other country, you will find there are thousands of museums and galleries.

**DEVYANI ONIAL:** You spoke of galleries and museums abroad. But they have a lot to offer to people. Visitors can buy artworks from their shops. Do you think we can borrow something from their model?

I really like their style of functioning. Running (an art) museum is not a 10 am-to-5 pm job. The curator is like the mother of the institution. The curator should oversee everything—what is kept where and how. When we visit foreign galleries, we see how perfectly they func-

tion—display, lighting, security and modern technology. The building itself looks like a work of art. We are now working on our own building. To match them, we have to work hard and it will take us 10-20 years. We are also going to start a souvenir shop in Delhi where replicas of important works in our collection—such as of Ramkinkar Baij and Dhanraj Bhagat—will be stocked.

**PAROMITA CHAKRABARTI:** Art education in schools is very limited. Are you planning something for children?

When students visit the National Museum in Delhi, their teachers show them works related to their syllabus like the Harappan civilisation. There is nothing like that at the NGMA. So I have planned a space where about 30 to 40 kids can come and have a dialogue with paintings, make drawings, sketches and even paint there. We have a variety of portraits at the NGMA. We can tell kids about them and the artists who painted them.

At schools, the art teacher is considered a grade above the peon. I want to change that environment. We had done a workshop with art teachers, where we asked them to meet the bigger artists and once in a while do a show with them... We are also in talks with the NCERT and HRD Ministry to organise summer workshops. We are building a gurukul-like space at the NGMA, similar to Shantiniketan, where senior artists will deliver lectures. When I was a student in London, I didn't even know for the first six months that what I was doing was a part of the course. We were visiting the Tate or the British Museum and I thought our teachers were taking us

out for sightseeing. It was only later that I got to know that these were classes.

Here we teach inside a classroom. The biggest teacher is nature.

**PAROMITA CHAKRABARTI:** Many private galleries are bringing out art books for children. Does the NGMA have similar plans?

There was an old bus at our Jaipur House building in Delhi, which I have turned into a library. We are bringing out small art books. Some artists like A Ramachandranji have come on board. We will display all these books on the bus. The children will also like the experience of sitting in a bus and reading.

**DIVYA A:** You have a strong stand on differentiating between Indian art and Indian craft. You believe that craft is actually art.

We talk about stone carvings in the Ajanta and Ellora caves and the Konark temple. But when they were being carved, they were contemporary art. Now we have classified them differently. We find out how long these took to build and that's how we determine the worth.

When there is a wedding in a village in Odisha, everyone participates. They make artworks in clay, wood and cloth for the family of the bride and groom. But today, when we talk of art, we speak in monetary terms... Craftspeople in Odisha paint tribal art on their walls. I have seen helicopters in their work. What they see around them is reflected in their work. So it should be classified as contemporary.

We recently organised a show of aboriginal art from Australia. If I present works of local artists at the NGMA, other artists will ask why we have such shows. The current system is taking us away from our roots... When the British came and established art schools, they set the pattern and style for art education. There were rebellions in places like Shantiniketan where artists said they won't practise oil painting but do miniatures instead. But that assertion never spread. I think we need to bring them forward, and not relegate them to a side-craft status.

**DIVYA A:** How have commerce and market forces affected art in India?



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