

10 IDEA EXCHANGE

NEWSMAKERS IN THE NEWSROOM

When we call ourselves a national organisation, we should have works from every state. So we are thinking of opening branches in Chandigarh, Odisha, Northeast. 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 Gadnayak 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. Gadnayak 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 Northeast comes here... The system gets together presents an artist... Everything is a business

DIVYA A: 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.

DIVYA A: 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 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

'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



National Gallery of Modern Art Director General Adwaita Gadnayak with Senior Assistant Editor Divya A in *The Indian Express* newsroom. Abhinav Saha

works, mostly of young artists, worth at least Rs 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 Kalat 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 D P 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 the 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.

DIVYA A: At a time that the NGMA is planning to expand its influence to Kolkata and the Northeast, 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 Northeast and Jammu & Kashmir. When we call ourselves a national organisation, we should have works from every state. So we are think-

ing of opening small branches in Chandigarh, Odisha and the Northeast. 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 function — 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 sight-seeing. 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?

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 Northeast 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.

SURBHI GUPTA: There is a huge gap between art and the common man,

and the dominant perspective is that art is difficult to comprehend. How do we bridge it?

Before joining the NGMA, I was at Kalinga University in Bhubaneswar. I made a sculpture, which was round. I asked my co-workers, who worked with cement and stone, what they thought of it. One remarked that it was a *roti*. A young artist student said that it looked like the moon. When I asked some professors, they said it was related to philosophy and lifecycle. A simple circle says many things. We often give a title to our artworks. All works at the NGMA have a title. The common man first reads the title. When one looks at an art, one should be stunned for a minute... The response to art should be instinctive. We have not ingrained this system in the common public. In our schools, we don't teach children how to visualise or feel art.

I think people from rural areas understand art better. Children from the rural areas first look at the art and then the title. I think urban people don't think much. That's why we organise art *addas*, where people and artists come together.

We can't tell the public how an artist was created. For that we need to organise workshops and seminars. Earlier we had a bus which used to go around and share artworks with people. But now we need more avenues of interaction. This will take time.

DIVYA A: Before joining, you wanted to turn Delhi into a global art hub. You wrote to the ministry as well in your vision statement. How often do you hold meetings with ministry officials regarding this matter?

We are in the planning stage. We have to bring craftspeople forward. But they don't have the technology or vision. I wish to provide exposure to craftspeople. We did this with tribal artists from Jharkhand. We built government studios, supplied material and even suggested designs to them. But after two-three months, they left. When I asked them why, they said, 'Here we can't use our thread for the *dhokra* craft (an ancient craft of non-ferrous metal casting) we do. In Jharkhand, we knew the trees, waterfall and the atmosphere. We are learning new things here but we are not able to create what we do.' We might ask the National Institute of Design or the National Institute of Fashion Technology to help these artists to develop their designs. But till they don't want it themselves, it won't happen.

DIVYA A: Is there any political or bureaucratic intervention at the NGMA?

The minister has given us a free rein. However, I don't understand the budget as I am an artist. This renovation has cost us a lot. And many things are in the pipeline. By next year, we will have a lot many new things.

VANDANA KALRA: There is talk that India will be officially participating at the Venice Biennale. Is the NGMA curating works for it?

We are in talks with the government, but nothing has been finalised. In fact, I attended a meeting on February 13. The NGMA is not curating, we are the commissioners. Kiran Nadar is curating it. Works from the NGMA and some artists will be sent. We are planning the budget. We are hoping that some businessmen would help us out. We will need about Rs 6-8 crore as the exhibition goes on for six months.

DIVYA A: You were planning to get Air India's art collection to the NGMA. Have the artworks started coming in?

There are some problems. We are trying to figure out if the artworks are original or duplicate. We need to authenticate them. If I am asserting that this is a Ramkinkar Baij work, I need an expert who would say the same. We need to test it in the laboratory as well and I had presented the idea to Air India. But they also have a system in place. The collection is huge and expensive, it will take time.



"In schools, the art teacher is considered a grade above the peon. I want to change that environment. We are also in talks with NCERT and the HRD Ministry to organise summer workshops

ACROSS THE AISLE



P CHIDAMBARAM

The CAG seems to have initially resisted the demand for redaction — there was no precedent, the CAG said — of the commercial details in the Rafale deal, 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

A government running for cover

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. 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 Rs 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) — Mr M P Singh, Adviser (Cost); Mr A R 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.

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FIFTH COLUMN



TAVLEEN SINGH

This is war, not terrorism

A QUESTION that has troubled me ever since Maulana Masood Azhar became one of the jihadist fiends we released in Kandahar 20 years ago is why he is still alive. Why was he along with the other monsters released in exchange for the passengers of IC 814 not killed immediately after they sped across the border into Pakistan? The military men who rule the Islamic Republic have never hesitated to admit that the jihadi groups they created were 'assets' in their unending war against India, so they would have no right to complain if we started destroying these assets by covert means. So why have we never done this? Could it be because we do not have the ability to do this? If not, why not?

When Narendra Modi became prime minister, he promised not to be as much of a wimp as the prime ministers before him. He used strong language to condemn their wimpy behaviour. After the attack on the military camp in Uri three years ago, there was that famous surgical strike. It was a tough immediate response. But, surely since then, there should have been time to build enough covert assets to conduct exactly the sort of war inside Pakistan that the Islamic Republic's military rulers have been conducting on Indian soil for far too long? It is because India has not yet learned to fight this new kind of war that evil men like Hafiz Saeed and Masood Azhar are still able to do what Jaish-e-Mohammad did last week in Pulwama.

These Pakistani 'assets' are religious fanatics who have a hatred for India that is visceral. In a memoir Masood Azhar wrote soon after being freed, he wrote of how the Indian Minister of External Affairs, Jaswant Singh, had offered him food and water on the flight that took him to Kandahar and how he had refused. "I did not want to sip even a drop of Indian water," he wrote. He drank plenty of it when he spent years in Indian jails and to this day it makes no sense why nobody quietly poisoned that water while he was a guest of the Government of India. The other man who we should have been dealt with similarly was Omar Sheikh who was released in the same exchange. He also spent years in Indian jails.

If we can have special courts to try rapists, why do we not have special military courts to try jihadists? In 'secular' Congress times, this was not a question anyone could have asked without being labelled a hawk because senior Congress leaders were not even prepared to accept that the 26/11 attack was a Pakistani military operation. A former chief minister released a book whose title said that the RSS was behind the attack on Mumbai. And, the man who is now Congress president told an American ambassador he was more worried about Hindu terrorism than the jihadist kind.

So we learned to live with what we continue to wrongly call 'Pakistani terrorism'.

It is not. It is war. When the surgical strike in 2016 was Modi's response to the Uri attack, there was hope that Modi understood the need to fight back hard. Surgical strikes have their place but why are we not using the same tactics that the Pakistani army is using against India? If it is because we have not created the assets to do this, then shame on us. We need these assets more than we need Rafale fighter jets because there is unlikely to be another old-style war on our benighted subcontinent. There will not be that kind of war because the Pakistani military has proven that it is unnecessary when they can continue to deploy 'assets' like Masood Azhar.

So what happens now? With India on the verge of a general election, there is little time to do more than pour the kind of platitudes we heard from senior political leaders after the Pulwama attack. 'The sacrifices of our brave security personnel shall not go in vain,' tweeted the Prime Minister and the Home Minister echoed this sentiment. The Governor of Jammu & Kashmir accepted that there had been a major intelligence failure.

But is there nothing more we can do? Since we are in a state of undeclared war with Pakistan, surely we can, at the very least, break diplomatic relations. Is there any point in having an embassy in Islamabad when Pakistan has made it so clear that it has no intention of calling off its cowardly, shameful war?

What must be done even more urgently is to prepare our soldiers and para-military forces to fight the kind of war that is being fought against us. Attacks like the one that killed 40 CRPF men last week are not acts of terrorism; they are acts of war.

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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 blotching 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

OUT OF MY MIND



MEGHNAD DESAI

THE PULWAMA episode is the endpoint of a certain basis for hope in repairing India-Pakistan relations. It was of course a terrorist attack which has all hallmarks of a standard tactic. Simple explosive devices detonated in crowded places inflict the maximum damage. This was the principle behind the 9/11 attack on the World Trade Center, in attacks on Brussels airport and in Paris during a music concert.

HISTORY HEADLINE

What happened in Panipat, 1761?



LAKSHMI SUBRAMANIAN

THE PLAINS of Panipat, well known as a site of decisive military action in India's recorded history, are back in the news. This time, preparations are afoot for a different battle. There is the blistering call for a sustained crusade against the enemy, and to reverse the slide to enslavement — alluding to the fact, as some historians have maintained, that it was after 1761 when the Marathas, one of the contenders in the Third Battle of Panipat, became a spent force, that the English East India Company emerged from the margins, drawing strength from the treasures of Bengal, to emerge as the masters of Hindustan.

So who was the enemy in 1761? Was there an enemy in the singular? Can we find parallels in the 18th century for the times we live in? What was the battle all about? And what were its immediate consequences?

The 18th century was a period of profound change in the Indian subcontinent as the Mughal Empire gave way to regional powers, many of whom, like the Marathas, aspired to, and almost achieved, imperial status. The century saw an array of social movements, organised around religion, community articulations, and agrarian expansion, often crystallising into coherent political entities. It was a period made for political adventurism, with shifting alliances making any political calculation virtually impossible.

In this cauldron was a heady mix of religious invocation that did not always correspond to the cleavages that we assume to exist between Hindus and Muslims. In terms of realpolitik, what mattered was the steady growth of Maratha power northward, in the form of both territorial control as well as mediation in matters of deciding succession in regional states. Maratha operations were not especially well received — for example, by Jat ruler Surajmal.

The Maratha push to the north encountered the equally resolute push from the Afghan Durrani chief into the Punjab and North India, the result being a bloody campaign fought on the plains of Panipat. The Durrani chief was able to enlist the support of several malcontents (the Rohilla chief, the Nawab of Awadh) and



Haryana CM M L Khattar with Maharashtra CM Devendra Fadnis at an event, where he called Third Battle of Panipat biggest link between their states. Express

most impressively, of the warrior ascetics, the Naga sanyasis and Gosains, whose insane gallantry and casual nakedness threw the Afghan soldiers off-kilter!

The events leading to the final encounter between the Afghan and Marathas make for compelling reading. One thing was certain though: the fragility of alliances and the overriding greed for immediate gain undercut possibilities of any long-term balancing of imperial aspirations with those of local powerholders.

The Durrani Afghan chief was barely interested in the crown of Hindustan and wanted above all to keep the Punjab as his milch cow, while the Marathas were keen to control Delhi affairs as well as to restrain other contenders — being prepared for untenable agreements, and remaining impervious to any sort of counsel.

What distinguished Maratha politics was its fragmentation and the overriding rivalry between various sardars, the case of Malhar Rao Holkar and his reliance on Rohilla leader Najib Khan being an instance in point. The precarity of hastily conceived alliances, the extreme cynicism that accompanied all political and diplomatic engagements, blurred distinctions between friend and foe. Therefore, when the two contenders finally met in Panipat, the stage was set for confusion, extraordinary feats of courage, and equally despairing episodes of sheer opportunism.

The final act in the drama, however, was not predictable. With gifted commanders like Sadashiv Rao Bhau, with the select forces of Vishwas Rao, the Peshwa's son, marching towards North India with Ibrahim Gardi, a French-trained Muslim general who had worked for the Nizam of Hyderabad, it seemed the Marathas would take the honours. Only a last-

minute constellation of adverse weather conditions, diplomatic isolation, want of provisions, and the disagreement between the Maratha sardars strained the Maratha forces.

Abdali moved in stealthily, squeezing the line of supplies for the Marathas, and outwitting them in what was essentially a battle of attrition. Neither side could goad the other into firing the first salvo until the starving Maratha camp finally responded, abandoning well thought-out military plans. The struggle and carnage that followed lasted seven hours — by which time some of the great commanders had died, leaving the Peshwa in Poona to decode what remains in history a rare epistle carried by a banker: "two pearls dissolved, twenty-five gold mohurs have been lost, and of the silver and the copper the total cannot be cast up".

It is, of course, tempting to read parallels and prophecies, especially when the contemporary political scene seems to have resemblances to cynical power politics. What was certain then was that the Battle of Panipat temporarily halted the Maratha advance, and enabled the East India Company to maintain a low profile for a while, consolidate its early gains in Bengal, and subsequently make a strong bid for supremacy in the subcontinent.

What is certain now is that the stakes are high, the narrative overcharged with religious symbols, while on the ground, all contenders have to grapple with the realities of power and go beyond the equations of caste, community, and the bazaar.

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Another chapter in a perennial war

That said, what are the options for India? Pakistan is not a normal State. It has a civilian government which off and on during its history has been ostensibly elected on democratic principles. There is an army establishment which has been the backbone of stability in Pakistan for longer than it has been a democracy. Ever since the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan created, with American financial and military help, the Islamist terrorist movement, Pakistan has had a third pillar of authority, the Islamist terrorist armies.

Terrorism is something very difficult to counter and to eliminate. This is not just India's problem. Across the world, developed and emerging countries have failed to eliminate it forever. The US has

been engaged in a futile war for 15 years in Afghanistan and is now withdrawing defeated though not openly admitting it. Muslim-majority countries as much as non-Muslim ones have been subjected to Islamist terrorism. Algeria, Bangladesh, Malaysia have been hit. Boko Haram has terrorised Nigeria for decades now and is spreading to Sudan. No other ideological movement, neither Bolshevism nor Anarchism, has had the global reach which Islamist terrorism has, but like the older ideological movements, it is a global movement and powered by cybernetics and modern weaponry extremely deadly.

India has been at the forefront of the fight against terrorism but its own inter-

ests are not well served by the world at large. The UN system is crippled by the veto enjoyed by the five permanent members. China is not interested in fighting terrorism except at home. Russia is also aiding terrorism in Syria so is hopelessly compromised. Words of support from these two are worthless. India has to treat the partners in the fight against terrorism as fair-weather friends who will be no help at all.

So what is to be done? It is not a case of repeating the Uri surgical strike. That was a skirmish between two armies. Terrorist movements exist outside that domain. For India to cross the border and attack guerrilla groups will be a violation of international law. That may not seem so bad to

most Indians. But if such an attack across the border is carried out, India will have to be ready for a war of some duration with Pakistan.

India has won three out of four wars against Pakistan. The 1948 war can be called unfinished. But the major difference now is that both are nuclear powers. Thus any military engagement has to have a strictly limited aim which can be realised and then India can unilaterally end the war. This is tricky and cannot be done in a hurry and certainly not while Indian blood is boiling. This time the strike has not only to be surgical but it has to be key-hole surgery, precise, subtle and effective.

There should be no haste. Success is vital.