



Pushing boundaries

The air strikes have delivered a clear, robust message; the follow-up must be restrained

The Indian Air Force's strike on a Jaish-e-Mohammad terror training camp in Pakistan's Balakot delivers a robust but calibrated message. The latter is manifest in New Delhi's diplomatic utterances. While the strikes followed the Pulwama attack by a couple of weeks, Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale referred to the action as a "non-military pre-emptive strike". The phrase indicates the action was based on an assessment of an imminent threat, and had ensured that Pakistan's military personnel and infrastructure were not targeted, and civilian casualties were actively avoided. In effect, New Delhi's line is that the operation was an intelligence-driven counter-terror strike rather than escalatory military aggression. The government said all other options had been exhausted in making Islamabad keep its commitments since 2004 on curbing the activities of groups like the JeM. There is no denying that the decision to send Mirage jets across the Line of Control (LoC) to fire missiles 70 km inside Pakistan represents a major shift. During the Kargil war in 1999, Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had drawn a red line over the IAF crossing the LoC, to avoid international recrimination. This strike was carried out in Pakistani territory, not in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir, the theatre for retaliatory action in the past. It is still to be determined how far the JeM has been set back, but the strikes mark a new chapter with New Delhi's willingness to push the war against terror into Pakistan territory. The government has judged, perhaps correctly, that global opinion has shifted and there is little tolerance today for terror groups that continue to find shelter on Pakistan soil. Significantly, with the exception of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation, there has been no global criticism of India's statement on the strikes, and most have just counselled restraint to both countries.

In Pakistan, Prime Minister Imran Khan has called for a joint session of Parliament and for its diplomats to raise the matter at international fora. He has convened a meeting of the National Command Authority that oversees Pakistan's nuclear policy. However, Pakistan's options are limited. It could continue to deny that the Indian strike caused any damage on the ground, and obviate the need for retaliatory strikes; or it could escalate the situation with a military response. It could also make a break from its past, and begin to shut down the terror camps on its soil, which would win friends internationally and ensure peace in the region. The Modi government would do well to continue the restrained approach it has adopted after the latest operation, and avoid the triumphalism that clouded the 'surgical strikes' of September 2016. With a response to Pulwama duly executed, it must reach out to residents of J&K who have borne the brunt of the jingoism unleashed after Pulwama. In the long term, building strong counter-terror defences, partnering with its own citizens to gather intelligence, and creating deterrents will be key.

Decolonising Chagos

Britain must honour the ICJ opinion on returning the islands to Mauritius

The stunning opinion of the International Court of Justice in The Hague, that Britain's continued administration of the Chagos archipelago is unlawful, is a landmark in the effort to decolonise the Indian Ocean and return the islands to Mauritius. Britain's reaction, however, was predictable and disappointing. It said the ICJ's is an advisory opinion it will examine, and stressed the security significance of the islands. Since the late-1960s, the U.S. has maintained a military base on one of them, Diego Garcia. In 2016, Britain extended the lease to the U.S. till 2036 even as it said it would return the islands to Mauritius when no longer needed for defence purposes. Mauritius has made it clear that it does not intend to jeopardise the future of the military base. The agreement to allow Britain to administer the Chagos islands came in 1965, three years before Mauritius gained independence. Mauritius says Britain had made it a pre-condition for independence. This was endorsed by the ICJ, which noted that given the imbalance between the two, the agreement did not amount to "freely expressed and genuine will". It is a damning assessment of colonial legacies and the attempt by former colonial powers to justify or ignore the indefensible on the basis of 'agreements'.

Britain has tried to block Mauritius's claim to the islands at every stage, first by attempting to defeat a UN General Assembly vote in 2017 calling on the ICJ to deliver its opinion. When it lost this, London questioned the court's jurisdiction and Mauritius's version of how the deal had been thrashed out. However, Mauritius has had many countries on its side, including India. In written and oral submissions before the court, India has insisted that historical facts were not with Britain's interpretation and that its continued administration of the islands meant the process of decolonisation had not been completed. In an ideal world, Britain would be compelled to hand the islands to Mauritius. However, as the opinion against the construction of the separation wall in the Occupied Palestinian Territory in 2003 demonstrates, ICJ advisories are not always acted on. At the very least, Britain should show it respects the court's view and Mauritius's sovereignty, and make significant concessions – starting with matters ranging from fishing rights to compensation for the Chagosians, who have suffered through all of this. The ICJ 'opinion' draws the line on what is expected from Britain for it to be a global nation in tune with the new world order. It announces that the world has moved on from passive acceptance of the injustices of empire.

The new order in West Asia

How Saudi Arabia, Iran and Turkey are competing for influence



STANLEY JOHNY

When protests erupted on Arab streets in late 2010 and in 2011, felling deeply entrenched dictators such as Zine El Abidine Ben Ali of Tunisia and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt, it was certain that the changes in government would alter the regional dynamics as well. Many thought the old order rooted in "stability" (read: the decades-long unperturbed rule of single families or dictators) would be swept away by emerging democracies. Eight years later, it is evident that the Arab world has changed, but not in the way many had predicted. The structures of the old Arab world have been either destroyed or shaken, but without fundamentally altering the domestic politics in Arab countries.

The backdrop of history

There have been multiple power centres in the Arab region, at least since the second half of the 19th century when the Ottoman Sultans shifted their focus from the East to the West. The waning influence of the Ottomans in the Arab region created a vacuum which was filled by emerging regional leaders such as Muhammad Ali of Egypt, the Hashemites in central Arabia and the Mediterranean region, and the Al-Saud family in the Arabian peninsula. In post-war West Asia, Egypt remained the most influential Arab country. The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan maintained its influence

in the Mediterranean region, while Saudi Arabia was confined to the Arabian peninsula. When Egypt and Jordan were in relative decline, particularly after the 1967 war with Israel, Iraq rose under the leadership of the Baathists. Saddam Hussein, who became Iraq's President in 1979, was eager to don the mantle of Gamal Abdel Nasser, the former Egyptian leader who called for pan Arabism. Hussein launched a war with revolutionary Iran in 1980 on behalf of most Arab countries. Though there were deep divisions between these countries, one point of convergence was "stability". Neither the monarchs nor the dictators in the Arab world wanted any threats to their grip on power.

This order started to age much before the Arab protests. Hussein broke a taboo of non-aggression between Arab countries when he invaded Kuwait in 1990. And the 2003 American invasion of Iraq toppled him and buried his regime. The Arab protests expedited the changes that were already under way. Egypt went through a long period of instability starting 2011. First, a revolution brought down Mr. Mubarak and took the Muslim Brotherhood to power. And then a counter-revolution by military leader Abdel Fattah el-Sisi took the country back to square one. In the process, Egypt was beaten badly: the government lost moral authority; its regional standing weakened; and with economic problems mounting, a desperate Mr. Sisi went to the Gulf monarchs for help.

The reign of the Saudis

Saudi Arabia was generous in helping the Sisi regime. The Saudis were initially shocked by the fall of Mr. Mubarak, a trusted ally, and



the rise to power of the Brothers, Islamist republicans and sworn enemies of the Kingdom. Both the Saudis and the United Arab Emirates wanted to get rid of Egypt's elected government of President Mohamed Morsi, a Muslim Brother. They backed the 2013 counter-revolution and helped Mr. Sisi tighten his grip on power with aid. In the event, what we have now is a weaker Egypt ruled by a military dictator who's increasingly dependent on the Saudi-UAE axis.

In the Arab world, Saudi Arabia doesn't face a real challenge to its leadership now. The Saudis have been eager to take this leadership position. They organised a massive Arab summit in May 2017 in Riyadh which was also attended by U.S. President Donald Trump. The U.S. and the Arab nations also announced plans to create a Middle East Strategic Alliance, also referred to as the Arab NATO, which is a transnational Arab security entity under Saudi leadership. The common enemy of this bloc is Saudi Arabia's main geopolitical and ideological rival in the region, Iran.

Riyadh has been aggressive in taking on Iran in recent years, be it the anti-Iran campaign it is spearheading globally (in the U.S., Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Sal-

man compared the Iranian regime to Hitler's Nazi rule), the increasingly high military spend, or the desire to take on Iran's proxies (interference in Lebanon's politics or the war on Yemen). Within the Arab world, Saudi Arabia has made it clear that it will not allow alternative power centres to rise, and never from its backyard. The decision to blockade Qatar, the tiny Gulf country that has disagreements with Saudi Arabia's foreign policy, could be seen against this backdrop. Besides Saudi Arabia and the UAE, Egypt had also joined the blockade, showing how dependent Cairo is on the Gulf axis. There are no doubts here: Saudi Arabia wants a united Arab front under its leadership that will contain Iran and maximise the Kingdom's interests in West Asia and North Africa.

Multipolar region

In relative terms, Riyadh has consolidated its position among the Arab countries. But its quest to become a major regional power faces serious challenges. The problem begins with its own inexperience. Saudi Arabia has never been an effective executioner of big ideas. All these years it lay low, either behind other regional powers or under the wings of the U.S. Now, as it has started taking a leadership position, its policies have gone awry. The Qatar blockade is not reaching anywhere and the war in Yemen has been catastrophic. Besides, the assassination of journalist Jamal Khashoggi inside Saudi Arabia's Istanbul consulate has been a public relations disaster.

Second, Iran is hardly a pushover. Ever since the Islamic Revolution of 1979, Iranians have lived under threats and with a huge sense of insecurity, which prompt-

ed them to create networks of influence across the region. Despite forging strong alliances and having a far stronger economy, Saudi Arabia has been unable to contain Iran's influence. And it may not be able to do so in the future either, unless the Americans are ready for another major war in the region.

Third, there is a third pole in today's West Asia: Recep Tayyip Erdogan's Turkey. Turkey's 'Arab Spring' bet may not have paid off as the political Islamist parties, which are aligned to the ruling Justice and Development Party, failed to consolidate power in the rebellion-hit countries, except Tunisia. However, Turkey, which retreated from West Asia in the second half of the 19th century, is now shifting its focus back from Europe to the region. It is a major defence and economic partner of Qatar, and has a strong presence in Syria through its proxies. Turkey also used the Khashoggi murder to turn up heat on Saudi Arabia internationally. While Turkey is not aligned with Iran either, it has shown willingness to cooperate with the Iranians on matters of mutual interest – such as the Kurdistan issue and the Syrian conflict – while its ties with Saudi Arabia have steadily deteriorated.

West Asia's Muslim landscape is now multipolar: Saudi Arabia, as the leader of the Arab world, is trying to expand its influence across the region; Iran is continuing to resist what it sees as attempts to scuttle its natural rise; and Turkey is returning to a shaken region to re-establish its lost glory. This multi-directional competition, if not confrontation, will shape West Asian geopolitics in the coming years.

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Smart farming in a warm world

Investment and policy reform are needed on priority to help farmers cope with climate change



FEROZE VARUN GANDHI

Over the last decade, many of Bundelkhand's villages have faced significant depopulation. Famous of late for farmer protests, the region, which occupies parts of Uttar Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh, has been adversely impacted by climate change. It was once blessed with over 800-900 mm rainfall annually, but over the last seven years, it has seen this halved, with rainy days reported to be down to just 24 on average in the monsoon period. With rains patchy, crop failures become common. There is hardly any greenery in many villages, making it difficult for farmers to even maintain cattle. Adaptation is hard, with farmers varying and mixing crops across seasons, along with heavy investments in borewells, tractors and threshers. While the national media may wonder about hailstones in Noida, such weather has been destroying crop in recent years, with the arhar crop failing completely in 2015. Farmers are increasingly abandoning their lands and heading to nearby towns to find work as labourers.

India is fortunate to have the monsoon, but it is also uniquely vulnerable to rising temperatures, with the country ranked 14th on the Global Climate Risk Index 2019. The country has over 120 million hectares suffering from some form of degradation. This has consequences, especially for marginal farmers. According to one estimate, they may face a 24-58% decline in household income and 12-33% rise in household poverty through exacerbated droughts. With rain-fed agriculture practised in over 67% of our total crop area, weather variability can lead to heavy costs, especially for coarse grains (which are mostly grown in rain-fed areas). A predicted 70% decline in summer rains by 2050 would devastate Indian agriculture. Within 80 years, our kharif season could face a significant rise in average temperatures (0.7-3.3°C) with rainfall concomitantly impacted, and potentially leading to a 22% decline in wheat yield in the rabi season, while rice yield could decline by 15%.

Some solutions

There are simple solutions to mitigate this. Promotion of conservation farming and dryland agriculture, with each village provided with timely rainfall forecasts, along with weather-based warnings regarding crop pests and epidemics in various seasons, is necessary. Our agricultural re-



search programmes need to refocus on dryland research, with adoption of drought-tolerant breeds that could reduce production risks by up to 50%. A mandate to change planting dates, particularly for wheat, should be considered, which could reduce climate change induced damage by 60-75%, by one estimate. There needs to be an increase in insurance coverage and supply of credit. Insurance coverage should be expanded to cover all crops, while interest rates need to be subsidised, through government support and an expanded Rural Insurance Development Fund. The recently announced basic income policy by the government is a good step as well.

A push for actual on-ground implementation of compensatory afforestation is required. India is estimated to have lost over 26 million hectares of forest land and 20 million hectares of grasslands/shrublands between 1880 and

2013. Even now, urbanisation means that India consumes about 135 hectares of forest land a day. Meanwhile, insufficient coordination between the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) and the State Pollution Control Boards (SPCBs) has led to institutional apathy towards alarming air pollution levels in the metros. India hosts over 172 globally threatened species, primarily in reserve forests where they have little meaningful protection against wildlife crime and forest protection, given limited budgets for anti-poaching. Many State CAMPA (Compensatory Afforestation Fund Management and Planning Authority) hardly meet, while State-level forest departments routinely lack suitable record keeping, particularly on assessment and realisation of dues on compensatory afforestation activities and catchment area treatment.

Refreshing the IFS

The Indian Forest Service would also benefit from restructuring, in order to make it equivalent to the police and the army, albeit in the environmental domain. State-of-the-art training to its personnel must be provided, and specialisation should be encouraged in wildlife, tourism and protection for new recruits. Deputations from other services will no longer do; this needs to remain a specialised service. Wildlife heritage towns

should be given more attention – cities like Sawai Madhopur, Bharatpur, Chikmagalur and Jabalpur, which are adjacent to national parks and sanctuaries, need to be converted into green smart cities with upgraded waste recycling processes. The Van Dhan Yojana, as adopted by the State government in Rajasthan, can be scaled up towards building a green mission to save our non-protected forests (outside the existing national parks and sanctuaries). Wildlife tourism must also be encouraged, particularly through public-private partnerships, to help increase conserved areas while making a difference to backward districts.

The impact of climate change will affect India's food security, while reducing fodder supplies for our livestock. Prudent investments and policy reform can help make India resilient to climate change. Any adaptation to ongoing climate change will require that climate justice. This is not a blame game – this can be induced by expansion of joint research and development partnerships (like the U.S.-China Clean Energy Research Center), pairing India's emerging smart cities with green cities in the West. India needs to decarbonise, there is no doubt about that. But the West needs to pay its bills too.

Feroze Varun Gandhi is a Member of Parliament, representing the Sultanpur constituency for the BJP

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

War memorial

The Modi government deserves credit for opening a war memorial ("Modi opens war memorial, hits out at Congress on Rafale", Feb. 26). This is a wonderful tribute to all the soldiers who have sacrificed their lives for the nation. However, it is disappointing that the Prime Minister used such a sombre occasion to attack his political rivals. The defence forces are above politics and they should not be dragged into political slugsfests.

VIDHYA B. RAGUNATH,
Thanjavur

IAF strikes

The Indian Air Force strikes are timely and welcome ("IAF strikes on JeM camp in Balakot; Country is in safe hands, says PM Modi",

Feb. 26, online). India is not sitting duck. This attack, reminiscent of the surgical strikes of 2016, shows the Modi government's zero tolerance for terrorism. The message is loud and clear: violence and diplomacy cannot go hand in hand. This also comes as a timely reminder to the Pakistani establishment to shun state-sponsored terrorism. It is heartening that the entire Opposition has supported the strikes.

B. SURESH KUMAR,
Coimbatore

It is great that the operation was a success and there were no casualties on the Indian side. The intelligence wing deserves praise for furnishing the necessary inputs to ensure a successful strike of this nature. Now, India has to

take all the precautionary steps to face a counter-attack from Pakistan.

S.V. VENKATKRISHNAN,
Bengaluru

With the general election round the corner, we need greater security, not only along the border but throughout the country. For this to happen, political parties need to exercise restraint. They should not make statements that give the impression that we are a divided nation.

V. SUBRAMANIAN,
Chennai

The surgical strikes of 2016 did not result in any let-up in militancy in Kashmir, and the situation in the State only continued to deteriorate. After Tuesday's strikes one can only hope that the situation won't go

out of control if Pakistan strikes back. The NDA's so-called muscular policy towards tackling militancy in Kashmir has resulted in an increase in deaths of security forces and in cross-border intrusions. It is high time the Modi government changes its Kashmir policy. India must do what it can to win the hearts and minds of Kashmiris.

M.P. MURALIDHARAN,
Bengaluru

Derogatory remark

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee's remark is derogatory and unbecoming for someone of her stature ("PM knew about attack, says Mamata", Feb. 26). Politics seems to be at its ugliest in West Bengal.

N. VISVESWARAN,
Chennai

A new Magazine

I am a senior citizen who has been reading *The Hindu* for more than seven decades. I thank you for the refreshed Magazine supplement, which gives enough reading material to last through the week.

G. JAYARAMAN,
Bengaluru

Menstruation talk

It's great that the Academy Awards have recognised a sensitive subject in India and awarded a documentary film on the same ("Period. It's time to carry an Oscar", Feb. 26). While we must credit Guneet Monga and others involved in the film for a well-made documentary on a taboo topic, credit must also go to the makers of the Akshay Kumar-starrer *Pad Man*. It helps when actors

promote such causes.

J.P. REDDY,
Nalgonda

The government should show this documentary in regional languages in rural and urban schools throughout the country and create awareness on menstruation and hygiene. At this time, we should laud the Telangana government which provides health and hygiene kits to girls to deter them from dropping out of school. The rest of the States can take a leaf out of Telangana's book. What we must also talk about now is the importance of proper toilets for schoolgirls, which are absent in many places.

P.S.V. PRASAD BABU,
Bhadrachalam

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THE WEDNESDAY INTERVIEW | SHEILA DIKSHIT

'Congress in U.P. seems to be charged up after Priyanka's entry'

The former Chief Minister of Delhi on alliance formation and the AAP government in Delhi

AMIT BARUAH & JAIDEEP DEO BHANJ

Sheila Dikshit, three-time Chief Minister of Delhi and a veteran Congress leader, is back in the hurly-burly of Delhi's politics as the head of the Delhi Pradesh Congress Committee. In this interview, Ms. Dikshit speaks of the Congress's preparation for the general election, the party's relationship with the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP), and what she thinks will be the best solution for the division of powers between the Centre and the Delhi government. Excerpts:

How do you see the general election unfolding for the Congress?

I am very optimistic about our prospects. I feel this because I meet many common people and they speak about their disappointment with the current government [at the Centre] and want a change. Quite obviously, the change, if it has to come about, must come from a party that has a history of governing the country. Whatever is there in the country today it not because of the current government, it's because of the work the Congress did and what it laid out for the future; everything has been done by the Congress. The Congress stands a very good chance and I get the feeling that people are missing the presence of the Congress.

Would you say that alliances are key to the outcome of the election? And how is the Congress faring nationally when it comes to building alliances?

I wouldn't say that they [alliances] would be key. I wouldn't use the word key, but yes, wherever they are required, they will be adopted. But I don't think they will be across the country. It will be State by State. Like we already have an alliance in Tamil Nadu. So, wherever the powers-that-be on both sides think it's necessary, it will happen.

Many political pundits and

sephologists believe that this election will be won and lost in north India, especially the 80 Lok Sabha seats in Uttar Pradesh. Would you concur with such a view?

Yes, because the north has got the largest chunk of seats. There is no denying that. This has always been so. I don't see any reason why it should not be so now.

The BJP alone won 192 of the 226 seats in the north in 2014.

I would say that we will perform well, but I am not able to tell you the numbers because things are beginning to change and the election has not even been announced yet.

But everyone seems to be campaigning already.

That is bound to happen since elections are imminent. But the number of seats we get will depend on the candidates who are chosen by the party and by [other parties] as well. Many candidates who are with the BJP now have lost a lot of their colour, their attraction. I will be in a better position to answer your question when we come closer to the elections and the candidates are chosen. For instance, there are rumours in Delhi that they [the BJP] are changing all of them [seven sitting MPs].

In 2017, you were actively



SANDEEP SAXENA

involved with the Uttar Pradesh Assembly election campaign and the Congress had an alliance with the Samajwadi Party (SP). But this time, the Congress and the SP-Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) combine have failed to strike an alliance. Why?

One of the reasons is that the Congress has sent Priyanka [Gandhi Vadra] and Jyotiraditya [Scindia] and divided U.P. into two parts – eastern and western – which they have been made in charge of. I think that is a great feeling of comfort for people in U.P. How this evolves eventually, time will tell.

How do you see Priyanka Gandhi Vadra's entry into politics, and how will it make a difference to the Congress?

Well, Congressmen are very happy that she has finally joined, and with her going to U.P., the Congress in U.P. seems to be very charged up and we hope that the results will come. It is too early to pass a judgment on what difference it has made. Let's

In the case of Delhi, you are working in a situation where whichever is the government at the Centre, you need to work together with them instead of having differences all the time.

wait for a while and see.

If the objective of the Opposition is to defeat the BJP, then the absence of an alliance between the Congress and the SP-BSP will divide the anti-BJP vote in U.P.

But it depends on whether the non-BJP vote wants to come together.

What is your sense on an alliance in Delhi? Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal has said publicly that it was the Congress which did not want an alliance in Delhi. Have you engaged in any talks with the AAP?

No, they have never spoken to me. That's what sur-

prises me – you are speaking on your own without having spoken to me or my party.

Mr. Kejriwal says that the BJP will win all seven seats in Delhi if there is no alliance between the Congress and the AAP.

I won't be as pessimistic as he is; certainly not.

The AAP came to power in Delhi on an anti-Congress platform. Is that what is holding back a possible alliance?

You all see it as an anti-Congress platform. I look at it the other way round. I say we lost [in Delhi] because of the false promises that were made to the people [by AAP]. The people got carried away. Of course, there was a sense of fatigue with the same government coming back three times. But there was also a false sense of 'you'll get free water, you'll get free electricity'. I personally feel that we probably didn't understand fully this danger, but finally when we got to understand, it was too late.

There is a history of the Congress supporting the AAP after the Assembly elections. Do you see any possibility of such a tie-up?

Not now, we will be contesting all seven seats.

We have seen all the battles that the AAP has fought with the Centre and vice versa, and we have seen activist Lieutenant Governors. How was it during your tenure as Chief Minister when you had to deal with an NDA government at the Centre?

When you come to govern, you do so in the interest of the city or the State you govern. In the case of Delhi, the Constitution is very different as Delhi is also the capital and you are working in a situation where whichever is the government at the Centre, you need to work together with them instead of having differences all the time. Because, if you were to have differences, eventually it is the Centre that will win, so why do that? You have been selected by the people of Delhi to make Delhi a much better place, and with all humility, I must say that Delhi did become a much better place during the 15 years that the Congress was in power and we were there for 15 years only because of this reason.

What do you think of what Mr. Kejriwal is proposing regarding the full statehood demand for Delhi – that the New Delhi Municipal Council area continues to be under the control of the Centre but the rest of the State gets full statehood?

It is for Parliament to decide such constitutional changes. The change has to come from Parliament. Unless that happens, how do you propose to do it? They

ought to know one thing: that you need to learn to work under the circumstances that are there and you can't be making excuses that this is not right or that is not right. What is the guarantee that if you change it, you are going to be the best government?

Since you have been Chief Minister for 15 years, what according to you should be a practical solution for the division of powers?

All parties contest elections to come to power and if you are coming to power, you must accept the constitutional position. How can you suddenly say that the constitutional position is wrong? We also wanted to change the constitutional position and even put it in our manifesto but our own Congress government and the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government did not accept the demand. The ball was in the court of the Central government and we did not get it for the reason that Delhi occupies a special place as the capital city.

During NDA-I, if you wanted something done, how did you go about it? Did you approach the then Prime Minister directly?

I was always in touch with Mr. Vajpayee and he was very kind. I was also in touch with Ministers looking after urban affairs and it was never a relationship that did not understand the other's point of view. They very often did not give in, but they were never impolite or dismissive.

How do you assess the prospects of the Congress in Delhi?

I am hoping to get, and I am working to get, all seven seats.

What is the formula you are going to use to select candidates?

You will get to know soon.

Do you plan to contest this election yourself?

No.

If you are not going to contest, what is your role going to be in Delhi?

You don't have to contest to play a role. I will work for the party with great love and affection.

We see a lot of full-page advertisements by the AAP in the newspapers promoting the work that they have done. What do you think of this advertising blitzkrieg? Does the Congress have any strategy to counter it?

The government can spend money on whatever they want. But the question that arises out of this is, why are they spending so much money on this? Are there not better things to spend money on, like development and repairing roads in Delhi which are in a big mess? Are these advertisements really necessary, and how are they helping the growth of Delhi?

There is a sense sometimes that the Congress over-projects its own strength. You need the nuts and bolts to deliver as far as politics is concerned. Do you think the organisational strength is in place for the Congress?

Of course it is there and there are Congress workers looking at all aspects. The Congress has always been in tune with the times and has adopted new systems and new ways of doing things. I don't think we are lagging behind in any way.

SINGLE FILE

Illuminating Asia's future

Seoul embraces relations with New Delhi solely based on India's inherent appeal and worth

SOURABH GUPTA



On February 22, a day after South Korean President Moon Jae-in welcomed him as his first state guest of 2019, Prime Minister Narendra Modi was conferred the Seoul Peace Prize in the South Korean capital. Mr. Modi is a conservative, nationalist leader and Mr. Moon is a liberal-minded

leader and a former human rights lawyer. Yet, similar to the *taegeuk* (yin-yang) at the centre of South Korea's national flag, the two leaders, like their respective nations' national identities and foreign relations, complement each other.

The striking historical characteristic of Korea is the homogeneity of its people and its continuous history, until recently, as a unified political entity. The same term, *Han min-jok*, is used to denote both the Korean race and the Korean nation. Riven by subnational loyalties, India is anything but homogenous. Yet India too has exuded unity since time immemorial, which is renewed daily in the hearts and minds of its citizens. South Korea's national identity and nationalism were forged, respectively, by the collapse of Chinese universalism at the turn of the first millennium and, again, in the early 20th century. India was never part of the Chinese world order. Yet both nations were, in the evocative words of Rabindranath Tagore, "lamp bearers" in their modern histories, joined in the struggle against colonialism and determined to re-illuminate the East.

Korea's foreign relations with China were steadied once its Yalu River frontier was confirmed in the late 14th century. That frontier was as porous as India's Himalayan frontier is impassable. Yet both frontiers were breached by revolutionary communists in the aftermath of the founding of the People's Republic, with profound geopolitical consequences that linger to this day.

The long history of Korea's foreign relations with China also lends an important insight into its modern-day strategic conduct: essential to its preservation as an independent state on imperial China's periphery was an immutable policy of non-involvement in the power politics or international relations of its continental-sized neighbour.

Seoul today, alone among its Indo-Pacific peers, embraces relations with New Delhi solely based on India's inherent appeal and worth. India is not a hedge or a foil to be deployed against a rising China. This opens up, rather than limits, the space for bilateral cooperation, including on sensitive defence matters.

India and South Korea view each other today as special strategic partners. As they re-illuminate the eastern sky, they must also help forge a 21st century model of Asian international relations – one that is keyed to regional tradition and historical circumstance, imbued with an ethos of equality and consensus, and which resiles from doctrines that are zero-sum in character.

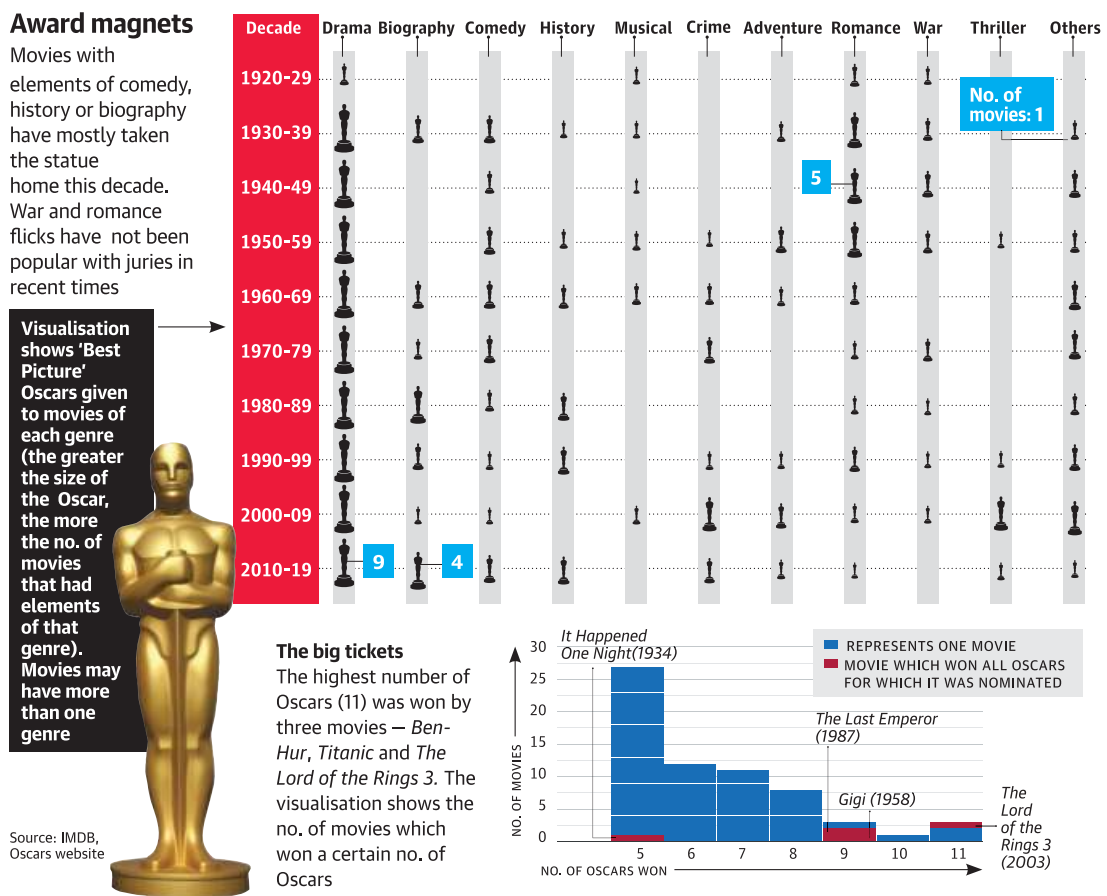
The writer is a Senior Fellow at the Institute for China-America Studies in Washington, D.C.



DATA POINT

Oscar's favourites

Movies with elements of drama have been evergreen favourites for 'Best Picture' among juries of the Academy Awards. Only four movies have won all the awards for which they were nominated. By Varun B. Krishnan



FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 27, 1969

Indian-made rocket launched

The first Indian-made Centaure rocket was successfully launched from the Thumba equatorial rocket station at 3:30 p.m. to-day [February 26] to the great jubilation of a large number of scientists. Dr. Vikram Sarabhai, Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission and Indian National Committee for Space Research, described the flight of the two-stage sounding rocket as "very satisfactory" and as having gone off "completely according to plan." Hailing it as a "momentous event", he said: "We are now on the path to long-range development of superior rockets, which will take us to our goal of satellite launching in five years." He said today's flight was "steady and powerful", the separation took place flawlessly and the telemetry signals were "top class".

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 27, 1919

Indians in South Africa.

With reference to a telegram recently received by Mr. M.K. Gandhi and other leaders in India from Mr. Aswat, Chairman of the Transvaal British Indian Association, Johannesburg, in which he complained that laws affecting Indian community were being rigorously enforced with the object of European competitors. Mr. M. K. Gandhi has [as reported from Bombay] addressed the following letter to the press: The cable received by from Mr. Aswat, Chairman, Transvaal British Indian Association, shows that the revival of Satyagraha, with all the attendant suffering, is imminent in South Africa unless the danger that threatens to overwhelm Indians of Transvaal is averted by prompt and effective action by the Government of India and if necessary by the public also. The situation warrants a repetition of Lord Hardinge's action and immediate despatch to South Africa of a mission consisting of, say a distinguished civilian and an equally distinguished Indian publicist.

CONCEPTUAL

Hamilton's rule

BIOLOGY

This refers to a biological rule that determines when an animal will engage in altruistic behaviour that seemingly does not improve its own well-being. Hamilton's rule, named after the English evolutionary biologist W.D. Hamilton, states that an animal will engage in altruistic behaviour only when the indirect benefits that it derives from such behaviour are greater than the direct reproductive cost that it incurs. When an animal shares common genes with another animal that is in need of help, for instance, it is likely to exhibit altruism. This has led many biologists to believe that altruism could simply be selfish behaviour at the gene level.

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