

Opinion

SUNDAY, MARCH 10, 2019

THE RAFALE CONTROVERSY will not go away! If it had been pushed to the background because of the Pulwama terrorist attack and the retaliatory strike by the Indian Air Force, Prime Minister Modi brought it back centre stage by his provocative remark, 'If we had the Rafale aircraft...'

To his misfortune, within two days of his remark, *The Hindu* published another investigative article on the Rafale deal. The article punctured the conclusion of the Comptroller & Auditor General (CAG) that the NDA deal was cheaper than the UPA deal by 2.86%. (The government's claim that the price it had negotiated was 9-20% cheaper had been rejected in the CAG's report.)

Which deal was cheaper?

The issue is quite simple. Under the UPA deal, Dassault was required to give a bank guarantee and a performance guarantee. Under the NDA deal, that requirement was waived. While providing a guarantee the bank will charge the customer, in this case Dassault. That is the 'cost' of the guarantee — something that every businessman is familiar with. In the Rafale deal, since a sum of approximately ₹60,000 crore was involved, the guarantee charges would have been stiff.

If one deal was loaded with guarantee charges and the other deal was not loaded with guarantee charges, common sense will tell us that, before the two prices are compared, the guarantee charges in the first deal should be taken out. CAG got the numbers. He calculated the charges in two parts:

Bank Guarantee charges	€AAB1 m
Performance Guarantee & Warranty charges	€AAB2 m
Total	€AAB3 m

The CAG used alphanumeric because he had promised the government to 'redact' the price information! He did the government a huge favour.

However, the CAG was forced to conclude as follows:

"Therefore, the total saving of AAB3 million € accruing to the vendor by not having to pay these Bank Charges should have been passed on to Ministry. Ministry has agreed to the Audit calculations on Bank Guarantees but contended that this was a saving to the Ministry because the Bank guarantee charges were not to be paid. However Audit noted that this was actually a saving for M/s DA when compared to its previous offer of 2007."

CAG Failed the Nation

The guarantee charges remained hidden from the public and a meaningful comparison could not be made about the prices of the two deals. *The Hindu* story has ferreted out the information from the report of the Indian Negotiating Team (INT). The charges were €574 million. If this amount is taken out of the UPA deal and the two deals are compared, the NDA deal is more expensive by €246.11 million. At the current exchange rate of ₹80, the

ACROSS THE AISLE

P Chidambaram



The anti-national newspaper!



Comptroller and Auditor General of India Rajiv Mehrishi

NDA deal is more expensive by ₹1,968 crore. On this count alone, each of the 36 aircraft will be more expensive by ₹54.66 crore.

It is a mystery why the Prime Minister's Office held parallel negotiations undermining the efforts of the INT. It is a mystery why the three anti-corruption clauses were deleted. It is a mystery why the payment security system — sovereign guarantee, bank guarantee and escrow account — was jettisoned. These could not have been done out of 'love and affection' for Dassault. The facts point to an oblique purpose. The CAG had a duty to probe these mysterious aspects and bring out the truth. He failed the country.

The Hindu is bringing out the hidden aspects of the deal one by one. And what is the government's response? The government is accusing the newspaper of using 'stolen documents' and threatening to slap criminal charges! The Attorney General of India was

fielded by the government to hold out these threats!

Famous Stolen Papers

In 2012-14, the Government of India obtained the names of account holders in Swiss banks that had been hacked and passed on to France and Germany. The Income Tax department issued notices, raised tax demands and launched prosecutions. Was the I-T department acting on the basis of 'stolen documents'? Similarly, in 2016, 11.5 million documents were leaked from the computers of a law firm (stolen by someone?) to a German newspaper, *Sueddeutsche Zeitung*, which shared them with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists. The I-T department had no qualms about releasing the names of account holders who were Indians or NRIs and issuing notices to them.

The famous Pentagon Papers were actually a secret report commissioned by the US Defense Secretary on the Vietnam

war. It was leaked in 1971.

The Washington Post was preparing to publish them. The US government sued the newspapers. The US Supreme Court by a vote of 6-3 allowed *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* to publish the documents without the risk of censorship or punishment (403 U.S. 713). Justices Black, Douglas, Brennan Jr, Stewart, White and Marshall put freedom of speech above vague concerns of national security and held that spread of information was critical to keep the democratic process intact. No one even mentioned 'stolen documents'!

History is repeating itself, this time in India. Mr Modi and his ministers will brand *The Hindu* as anti-national or worse. Regardless of the invectives, readers will continue to read the newspaper. The Rafale aircraft will arrive. There will be an inquiry. The truth will be out. The life of the country will go on.



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INSIDE TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR

Timely cover-up

By the time clear satellite images were made available to the public, the Pakistanis had smartly finished reconstructing the roof over the bombed seminary at Balakot and attempted to cover up the destruction, officials say. Satellite photos could not be taken on the night of the aerial strikes because of the darkness. The next day the cloud cover prevented a satellite image being shot. On the third day, the Indian authorities managed to get a satellite picture revealing that the building had been damaged, particularly the roof, but the image was hazy. Instead of releasing this photograph immediately, it was simply put out on Twitter in the hope that a better shot would be available later. When commercial satellite photographs were finally taken more than a week later, the site did not look as ravaged as the first satellite image, thanks to Pakistan's swift restoration efforts, officials believe. But even in the later photos the blackened areas to the north of the building indicated significant damage.

Number crunching

Many wonder how the number of Pakistani casualties at Balakot was estimated at 250. The figure was first put out on Twitter and Facebook by those who had reportedly been fed by Indian Army intelligence sources in Kashmir. It was picked up by two TV channels. Adding to the confusion was Pakistan's initial claim that two Indian pilots and two aircraft were downed. Since India had only one missing pilot and aircraft, several Internet sites put out the theory that one pilot was actually a Pakistani who had been lynched by his own countrymen in PoK, assuming he was Indian. But the name of the dead pilot, supposedly the son of a former Pakistani Air Marshal, turned out to be fake.

Divided we fall

After Balakot, there have been renewed efforts to avoid divisions in the Opposition ranks. Mamata Banerjee, Sharad Pawar, the trusted US-based family friend of the Gandhis, Sam Pitroda, Muslim leaders from Uttar Pradesh and others have all voiced their concern. The problematic states where opposition parties are likely to cut into each other's vote share and help the BJP are: Delhi, Haryana and UP. In Delhi and Haryana, the local Congress leaders are against an alliance with AAP. In UP, the Congress is

still hoping for a last-minute compromise with the BSP-SP alliance, which is feeling the heat because the Congress has emerged as a third force. Several BSP and SP potential Lok Sabha candidates, who lost the nomination because the partner was allotted the constituency, have joined the Congress in the hope of a ticket. The defectors to the Congress include former SP MP Rakesh Sachan from Fatehpur Sikri, former BSP MP from Sitapur Kaiser Jahan, and former BSP MP Kunwar Chand Vakil, who hopes to get the Congress ticket from Agra. The hurdle in the effort to persuade the SP and BSP to allot more seats to the Congress in UP is Mayawati's demand for seats in several other states as compensation.

Slow start

Rahul Gandhi is annoyed that the BJP's publicity campaign has already got off the ground while the Congress has yet to finalise a firm for its advertising. The BJP has gone for the same well-known publicity and advertising firms as it had done in 2014, and its campaign slogan 'Namumkin ab Mumkin Hai' (the impossible is now possible) appears in a slate of recent government ads. The delay is reportedly because two factions, one led by Anand Sharma, who heads the Congress's publicity committee for the Lok Sabha elections, and the other by Jairam Ramesh, who is the coordinator of the party's core group, are working at cross-purposes. One side has even accused the other of inviting firms for presentation of their powerpoint proposals for shortlisting without calling all the committee members. Another grouse is that a little-known firm has been shortlisted.

Sons rise

The Congress is yet to announce nominations for Lok Sabha elections in Madhya Pradesh, but the scions of three political dynasties have been given the go-ahead to start campaigning from their respective family seats. MP chief minister Kamal Nath's son Nakul, who till now has stayed in the background, hopes to contest from Chhindwara, the parliamentary seat which his father won nine times. Arjun Singh's son Ajay Singh may have lost the election last time but is all set to contest from Satna. Arun Yadav, former PCC chief and the son of former minister Subhash Yadav, will stand from Khandwa.

On the clock

Golfers, stop thinking, and start playing

OVER THE TOP

Meraj Shah



ONE OF THE most singular rounds of golf I've had in the past few years was at the Blackstone course—the top-rated championship layout at the Mission Hills Resort in Haikou. Located on the idyllic island of Hainan in South China sea, and constructed on a bed of volcanic rock, this golf course is the pick of the lot amongst the 10 courses at this resort, and used to be the venue for a much publicised exhibition match-up between Rory McIlroy and Tiger Woods, which is what I'd gone to witness on this particular occasion.

After the event was over (the details of which I won't get into here, but interested readers can look up that column in the archives of this column online), I inquired if it would be possible to get an interview with the CEO of Mission Hills. Dr Ken Chu conveyed that he would be happy to tee it up with me for nine holes the next morning as long as I didn't mind wrapping up in under an hour.

I was a bit nonplussed, but assumed that the busy man probably used some

kind of special high-speed cart to get around, and agreed. The purpose was the interview, and I'd got that, or so I thought.

To cut a long story short, the next morning, Dr Chu—who at the time looked more like an elite athlete than a corporate bigwig—hit his ball off the first tee and, pleasantries done, proceeded to sprint down the fairway at full pep. Given the fact that there was a gallery looking on, I did what seemed to be expected of me: sprint behind him, as if my life depended on it while the carts followed with the golf bags. And so it went: Chu would spend literally seconds on the golf ball, hit his shot and run off, with me following close behind. Eventually though, I held up the white flag and chose to retire to the cart. Needless to say, there was no interview. And that—six holes in 30 minutes—was my introduction to Speed Golf.

This quirky variant of the game has been around for a long time—speed golf tournaments are held across the world—but it is widely regarded by most weekend golfers as an anomaly. Most players, when I recount this experience, are bemused and tend to dismiss it as a mutation of their favourite pastime. "Just run if you want to run, why play golf like that?" chips in Parakram Rautela, a fellow hack and playing partner. Now Rautela, like a number of other players, is very deliberate about his golf game. A man of process, as it were: with an unchanging pre-shot routine. He lines



Speed Golf, that combines running and golf, is becoming popular the world over

up to the target, shuffles the hips, checks the clubface alignment, takes three looks to the target and then pulls the trigger—a joy to watch, really. Inexplicably, when he's around, or on the green, some gremlins creep into Rautela's mind, and freeze him over the golf ball.

Time stands still in these moments, and eventually Rautela's playing partners start shooting furtive glances towards the

group behind them, which is waiting back in the fairway. A few holes of this, and patience starts running thin. Now, Rautela manages to hit some spectacular chips and hole a fair number of these putts, which makes it hard to fault him for his interminable routine, but it's a fine line. Thankfully, the man is working on it.

Slow play has emerged as the biggest challenge in pro and amateur golf alike. It

affects the players because rounds take longer to finish; it affects television viewership—only serious aficionados sit through hours of coverage. In my mind, it also affects the game's growth—it's hard to attract young people who find the sport too slow and boring.

But forget all that. I'm the first to admit that I'd continue to take my time if it really helped my game. None of these

arguments are compelling enough reasons to speed up your play; here's one that works for me, and I'd just like to put it out there for readers to consider.

One of the biggest obstacles in becoming better at golf is the stationary ball. Unlike any other sport, the fact that the ball isn't moving means you're not moving into position to hit it. Try picking up, say, a racquet (any sport will do) and visualise hitting a shot to the other side of the court. Ideally a top spin, but it doesn't matter as long as you're hitting a definite shot to a definite point on the other side of the court. Your body moves naturally into the position it needs to for you to hit that particular shot. Your hands do what's required to execute that shot. You don't think about what your body is doing and you certainly have no time to keep track of minute movements.

I know it sounds simplistic, but it is, in fact, quite hard. Simply because trusting your body to that degree is difficult when you've trained yourself to think about your golf swing.

Speed golf is a great way to break out of that mould. You don't have to run like Dr Chu, but try giving yourself, say, only five seconds to see the shot and hit it. That's not enough time to focus on the minutiae. All you'll end up doing is allowing the body and natural sporting instincts to take over. Focus comes naturally when you know you have just a few seconds to hit a shot. Time is of the essence.

A golfer, Meraj Shah also writes about the game

Idea Exchange

SUNDAY, MARCH 10, 2019

(Before surgical strikes) Then foreign secy said something was building up... He asked me to prepare... When strikes took place, we spent four days locked down in a safe place at the High Commission in Pak"



WHY GAUTAM BAMBAWALE

The terror attack in Pulwama that killed 40 CRPF men, followed by the IAF's aerial strikes on Balakot, have led to an increase in tension between India and Pakistan. A 1984-batch Indian Foreign Service officer, Gautam Bambawale was India's High Commissioner to Pakistan in 2016 and 2017. He was in office when India undertook

surgical strikes following the terrorist attack in Uri, and when Kulbhushan Jadhav was captured by Pakistan. Bambawale was India's ambassador to China in 2018, and handled the Wuhan Summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping following the Doklam stand-off

"On cricket, my own gut feeling is that just because the emotions are high, doesn't mean we stop playing cricket with Pak in an international setting... It's quite silly to lose points when we know we can beat them"



One surgical or aerial strike may not force Pak to stop aiding terror. But we have raised the costs

Former ambassador to China and ex-high commissioner to Pakistan Gautam Bambawale says the message from the recent air strike on Balakot is that India can undertake such an exercise 'successfully', insists there is 'no deep-seated hatred' between Indians and Pakistanis, and explains why, on listing of Masood Azhar as a terrorist, India needs to be 'transactional' with China

SHUBHAJIT ROY: What does the decision to conduct air strikes on terrorist camps in Pakistan mean?

Pakistan has been following a policy of bleeding India by a thousand cuts. That policy is of aiding, abetting and sponsoring terrorism directed at India. We have had terrorist incidents for almost 35-40 years, not only in Jammu and Kashmir but all over India. This is a low-cost strategy for the Pakistanis.

With the (surgical strikes) for the first time in 2016, and now again in 2019, what we have indicated is that the people of India have had it up to their necks in suffering from terrorist activities. Also, we have indicated — and the government can take credit for the bold and brave decision — that if Pakistan will not control terrorists, then we will go and strike them inside Pakistan. That is what has changed. A lot of people are describing it as a new template that has been brought to the table. I agree with that assessment. It is no one's case that one surgical strike, or one aerial strike, would force Pakistan to stop aiding and abetting terrorism. But we have increased and raised the costs for them to do this.

SHUBHAJIT ROY: We did not incur any casualties in the air strikes, but in such situations, things can go wrong. Were we prepared for that?

There is no doubt that it was a risky operation. But a lot of people in India are now saying that look, if Pakistan is not going to stop aiding and abetting terrorism, then we must take our own steps. These people are asking questions of our government. I think this government has only answered those questions by undertaking the surgical strikes of 2016 and the aerial strikes of 2019. I am sure the people in the government would have considered all the action-reaction scenarios, and only after assessing them would have decided to go ahead with it.

SHUBHAJIT ROY: You were India's High Commissioner to Pakistan when the surgical strikes were carried out by ground troops in 2016. How did you engage with the Pakistanis at the time?

The situation then was slightly different from what it is now. When the surgical strikes took place, the Pakistanis decided to deny it. And then they were not forced to react to it either. Regarding the decision to carry out those strikes, there were a number of options on the table. I cannot reveal the details, but I am very confident that the same options, maybe a few more, were on the table this time as well.

Much before the surgical strikes took place, and may be even before the attack on Uri, I had a long chat with the then foreign secretary, S Jaishankar, during one of my visits to New Delhi in 2016. One of the things he told me was that there was something building up. He said he did not know what will happen or what options will the government choose, but said if some action was taken against Pakistan, one of his primary concerns was to ensure that Indians at the High Commission in Islamabad remained safe. He asked me to prepare for a situation wherein everyone working at the Indian High Commission could be locked down in a safe place. We did actually prepare for that, and when the surgical strikes took place, we spent four days locked down in a safe place within the Indian High Commission.

AMITABH SINHA: So the former foreign secretary mentioned that something was building up against Pakistan even before the Uri attack? Then, were the surgical strikes a strategic decision rather than a response to an attack on the Indian State?

No, I am not saying that. My limited point is that the foreign secretary had



Former ambassador Gautam Bambawale with Senior Editor Shubhajt Roy in The Indian Express newsroom in Pune

ARUL HORIZON

enough foresight to visualise that we may get into a situation where the safety of the people in the High Commission in Islamabad could be at stake. He said that once he did not have to worry about the safety of Indians in Islamabad, he would be free to consider all options. So it is not that we had already decided to carry out surgical strikes before Uri. No, not at all.

AMITABH SINHA: There has been a debate on whether the recent aerial strikes were effective. For argument's sake, if we concede that there were zero casualties, and that the strikes probably did not hit the intended targets, would you even then say that the strikes were significant for India, strategically and diplomatically?

Firstly, in such situations we are not looking at benefit or loss, or victory or defeat. We are not thinking in those terms at all. The fact on the ground is that there is a lot of terrorism emanating from Pakistan. And we want to do something to raise the costs, to dissuade the other country from exercising this kind of option. I also want to say that the military strikes did indeed happen. We can quibble over whether 25 terrorists were killed or 200. That is something that we do not know about. But I believe that the strikes took place and were successful. That is also the most important part. That is the message. The message was not that 200 people were killed. The message was that we can undertake such an exercise to attack terrorist bases and infrastructure. And I think that message has been sent not just to the world but even to Pakistan.

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS: India wants to isolate Pakistan, but there is a SAARC summit that is due, and it has to be held in Islamabad. Do you think it will happen?

The SAARC summit has been due for some time. Pakistan is the next host. But we are not sure when it will happen. There are at least a few of us in the region — India, Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Bhutan — four out of eight members,

who believe that this is not the right time to hold the SAARC summit.

PARTHA SARATHI BISWAS: China has been restrained in its response to the aerial strikes by India. What do you make of it?

The situation is not easy for China. From their perspective, terrorism is an issue that they realise is a problem across the world, including in China. The Chinese position on terrorism is very clear — they oppose it in all its forms and manifestations. On the other hand, they have this very close, tight strategic, economic, military relationship with Pakistan. Whatever they said at the time could also be due to the fact that our Foreign Minister was scheduled to go to China (for the Russia-India-China meeting). They were a little worried that she may cancel if they push too much. But the kind of reaction that came from the Chinese, even from the RIC meeting, I would say, is a step forward. It is much better for India than it has been in the past.

On the specific issue of listing of Masood Azhar as a terrorist, I think we need to be transactional with China. If there is something that we can do for China — say at the UN, there is an important election where they want us to vote for them — we should ask for a quid pro quo. I say this because last year when the grey listing of Pakistan took place at the Financial Action Task Force meeting, we were able to do this kind of transactional

bargain with the Chinese. I think we can do it again. The timing is right. There is enough momentum internationally to get him listed.

MANOJ MORE: What do you make of the hatred that is portrayed between India and Pakistan? What is it like on the ground? Should we be playing cricket with them?

I don't think there is a deep-seated hatred for Indians among Pakistanis. The problem is that this terrorism, which is aided, abetted, supported, financed, by Pakistan, is bleeding us. That is the main thing that people in India would want to be stopped. You can discuss all kinds of things — music, literature — with Pakistanis very easily, but the moment it comes to bilateral issues there is a difference of opinion. It is because there is too much emotion involved, and it goes back to the times of Partition.

On cricket, my own gut feeling is that just because the emotions are high, doesn't mean that we stop playing cricket with Pakistan in an international setting. There is the World Cup (later this year). If we don't play, we will lose points. I think it is quite silly to lose points when we know we can beat them.

MANOJ MORE: Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan said he had tried to speak to PM Modi. Do you think the Indian PM should talk to his counterpart in Pakistan?

If you look at the entire episode (aerial strikes by India), the big takeaway is that the international community stood by India's right to self-defence. That is where we have won in this messaging war



OIC, and this is a recognition of the facts on the ground. At the same time, we should not think that suddenly the OIC has changed its position completely. This is a process. And it is a process that will unfold in the next 15-20 years. Our participation in the OIC is a turning point, an important inflection point in our relations with West Asia and Islamic countries.

AJAY KHAPE: Wing Commander Abhinandan Varthaman was released very soon, in about 48 hours...

According to the Geneva Convention, they would have had to release him at some point in time. I think the way it must have happened is that Prime Minister Imran Khan might have said that if we have to release him after a few days, why not give him up today and claim credit for it. I hope that is what has happened because it then means that he has been able to convince the military authorities in Pakistan to do this. That is relatively a good thing. I think it was a goodwill gesture, even if it came under international pressure.

AMITABH SINHA: Pakistan started the 'nuclear' talk on the first day after the strikes. They had a nuclear command meeting as well but probably decided not to go any further. So, their nuclear threshold is probably not as low as many in India thought?

They would have a threshold. I don't know what it is. Maybe people in government have a better idea. I don't think it is as easy to cross the nuclear threshold.

SHUBHAJIT ROY: How have we handled the case of Kulbhushan Jadhav, whom Pakistan has accused of being an Indian spy?

I want to make only two points. Firstly, it is incumbent on any government that has signed or is party to the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations to give consular access, and till today, Pakistan has not given it to us. Our whole case at the International Court of Justice is this — that you have an international law that provides for consular access and these guys have not given it. The second point is that when a military court undertakes a hearing, we don't know what happens. We don't know whether there was anyone to defend him. So that sort of proceeding is bad in law, and hopefully will be turned down by any international court.

SUSHANT KULKARNI: There is also a perception battle being fought after the aerial strikes.

If you look at the entire episode, you will see the big takeaway is that the entire international community stood by India's right to self-defence. I think that is the big picture and that is where we have won in this messaging war.

SHUBHAJIT ROY: There have been three incidents of stand-off with China in recent years. How has the approach of India changed?

You have to factor in the fact that India and China not only do not have a common boundary but we don't even have a common line of control. When you add to that the fact that both sides have better technology, better roads, better communication... What is beginning to happen is that the militaries of India and China, which used to be fairly far apart, are now coming closer to each other. Both India and China are also conscious not to push the envelope.

SHUBHAJIT ROY: The informal summit between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and China's President Xi Jinping in Wuhan last year was dubbed as agenda-less...

We decided that after the confrontation at Doklam, it was important to keep talking to each other. Both countries were able to talk to each other through diplomatic channels. And we agreed to have an informal summit between the leaders. The two leaders spent about eight to 10 hours together. In a formal setting, meetings usually don't last for more than an hour or so. They were able to cover a lot of topics... It helped clear the air, clear the misunderstandings. It was not an agenda-less meeting. Certain topics were agreed for talks. They covered that and much more.

Informal summits are probably a new diplomatic template that has been introduced. Later this year, when the elections are over, I think the Chinese President will visit India for an informal summit.