Questions during crises



TICKER **MIHIR SHARMA**

t is almost two World Centre was brought down by terrorists, but the weeks and months that followed remain unusually clear in my memory. I was living in Boston at the time, from where the planes that al-Qaeda hijacked took off. I remember

remember the stunned

silence when the first tower fell; and I also remember how the United States changed in the time that followed. It gave in to anger. Even in the freest nation in the world, it became politically toxic to ask questions. Eighteen years on, America is living with the consequences of that failure: A political class and media that are thoroughly distrusted, and a continuing crisis in the Middle East. The forced uniformity of that period, the unwillingness to ask necessary questions of a US government that declared that patriotism required uniformity and obedience, has permanently scarred American politics and culture.

This is why we should be appalled that the current government has chosen to claim that questions of its many failures on the national security front — in controlling terrorism, in deterring Pakistan, and in managing Kashmir - are "anti-national". Questioning the choices made by the government in terms of its response to the Pulwama terror strike is not "questioning the forces" and thus unpatriotic. It is, instead, a necessity - the government, any government, must constantly be held accountable.

Indeed, if anyone is playing politics over national security it is the current ruling party, some prominent leaders of which have not concealed their hope that it will lead to an improvement in the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP's) electoral performance. The Prime Minister even addressed a political rally in Rajasthan in front of photographs of the CRPF jawans who were killed at Pulwama. The BJP's official briefing accused the Congress president of giving comfort to the Jaish-e-Mohammed (JeM). The Prime Minister even linked counter-terror action to the controversy over the purchase of Rafale aircraft from France. The chief of the BJP in the national capital chose to campaign in army fatigues to which he was certainly not entitled. Anyone on WhatsApp will have noticed how their BJP-friendly contacts have sought to transform a national response to terror into one that is dependent upon the prime minister's personality. In Rajasthan, the party is even selling sarees that have pictures of fighter jets, soldiers, and the Prime Minister on them.

But, said Home Minister Rajnath Singh, "It's politicisation when someone asks how many terrorists were killed. That's like raising doubts on your security forces." In other words, it is not politicisation to say that under this government a strong response to terror has become the norm; but it is politicisation to ask how strong it was. It is not politicisation to campaign in military fatigues; but it is politicisation to wonder who will be held accountable for the intelligence failures that led to the death of young men wearing the uniform. It is not politicisation to claim that the government's diplomacy has been so effective that the entire world stands with New Delhi; but asking why Beijing once again blocked a UN resolution against the JeM's founder counts as giving aid and comfort to terrorists. This inconsistency would be amusing were it not so dangerous.

A forced uniformity on matters of national security is the greatest possible danger to national security. The opposition, the media and ordinary citizens must feel empowered to ask whether they are being protected properly. If they are instead silenced, or voluntarily abandon the right to question at moments of crisis, then the eventual choices that are made will go unscrutinised — and, more often than not, will be the wrong ones. This is the climate of hysteria and silencing that led to the Iraq War.

The simple truth is that the government does indeed deal of explaining t

decades since the Trade gasping when the second plane hit; I

Silver lining to import substitution

India's flourishing crony capitalism guarantees that, as with Rafale fighters, some favoured tycoon will be licensed to make Tabasco at home

WHERE MONEY TALKS

SUNANDA K DATTA-RAY

ith election approaching, fears are being expressed about a return to the pre-1991 import substitution regime. "We'll have to start using Capsico if they stop importing Tabasco!" is the lament from Malabar Hill to Alipore, South Extension to Advar, referring to the cheaper Indian substitute for the tangy imported sauce. The serious threat of going back to autarky is that the long heralded take-off in manufacturing won't happen. Exports will continue to languish, and the fear of overwhelming imports will

mean higher protectionist taxes and more friction with Donald Trump's US.

We've been here before. P V Narasimha Rao's panicky foodgrains subsidy and whispers of differences with Manmohan Singh fed fears of reforms being abandoned and prompted Singapore's Lee Kuan Yew to visit India in 1996. Singaporeans believed Dr Singh felt "Rao was holding him back". A worried Goh Chok Tong, Singapore's prime minister, asked Lee to find out. Anxious as ever to see a strong India balance resurgent China, Lee was concerned that despite liberalisation, only one Singaporean businessman risked India against the five or six who went to China. The newly active Gulf states were also emerging as rivals. The BJP seemed to be making waves in India.

"I thought Narasimha Rao needed to be encouraged," Lee told me afterwards. "So I went there." It was eight years since his last visit when he was prime minister. Prem Singh, a bluff Jat former army officer who was then India's high commissioner in Singapore, recalls a lunch at Hyderabad House where Lee, sitting between the prime minister and Atal Bihari Vajpayee, told the latter. "If your party comes to power, you will also waste four or five years discovering that socialism doesn't work." Not

so, Vajpayee retorted immediately. "He has stolen our policies," he said, pointing to Narasimha Rao. Lee was sceptical. "Vajpayee and Advani came to see me," he said. "They were unreformed. They were not at all convinced that what Manmohan Singh and Narasimha Rao were doing was right. They said — wrong policies, giving away the country on the cheap. So I said, 'Oh God! This is back to square one again'. And I warned Goh Chok Tong. 'I said one step forward, one step ba'."

Actually, there was little difference by then between the Congress' and the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) economic programmes. Differences were mainly over emphasis. But the BJP was never candid about its pragmatism, focussing more on culture and identity. Nor was it keen to stress its origin in the Jana Sangh, the original free market party. Several years later I asked Mr Advani about the inaccurate impression that Lee had been given. "We strongly opposed the Congress's licencepermit-quota raj," he said. "We were against a controlled economy, but we also felt that a fully free economy was not suited to a large country like India with a strong democratic tradition and large areas of poverty."

He knew Lee had got it wrong. But the

Swadeshi Jagran Manch was a force then. The role of multinationals was being fiercely debated, and the media was absorbed in the Hindutva angle. So, Mr Advani thought it prudent not to commit himself. He couldn't tell Lee that India's electoral style obliges the Opposition to oppose irrespective of substance. Or that the easiest way of demolishing an adversary is to accuse him of colluding with the Foreign Hand.

That was on the eve of Vajpayee assuming office. The chorus in 2014 was that not only was Narendra Modi committed to a dynamic free market economy but that he would ensure that the country at large benefited from what was hailed as the "Gujarat Model". I don't know what the model was or whether it owed anything to Modi's endeavours since Gujarat was a prosperous and progressive state long before he was a twinkle in Damodardas Mulchand Modi's eye. Far from transforming India into Guiarat, he seems to be doing his best to make the country another West Bengal Just as bright young Bengalis seek jobs in Maharashtra or Kerala, bright young Indians lead the global pack of economic migrants. The "Make in India" campaign seems to have petered out. Customs duties and import tariffs have increased. Among the five taxes on capital the RBI has identified, the long-term capital gains tax further discourages investment.

The silver lining is that no one will have to make do with Capsico. India's flourishing crony capitalism guarantees that, as with Rafale fighters, some favoured tycoon will be licensed to make Tabasco at home.

LUNCH WITH BS > SARYU DOSHI | ART HISTORIAN

An unplanned tryst with the arts

Doshi tells Anjuli Bhargava how she never envisioned a career for herself and why even children should be taught to respect their heritage

ne's taught Indian miniature art to students at Michigan **D** and Berkeley, edited one of India's best known art magazines for many years, set up and run the National Gallery of Modern Art (NGMA) in Mumbai, chaired the Lalit Kala Academy for years, is vicechairman of INTACH, written over a dozen books on various aspects of Indian art and is on innumerable committees relating to the arts in the country. She has a Padma Shri (awarded in 1999) to boot.

None of this happened by design or plan, she tells me quite categorically. At no point did Saryu Doshi wife of late industrialist and founder of Premier Motors Vinod Doshi envision "any kind of career" for herself. She just stumbled into things and one thing led to the next.

Why don't the rest of us rely a bit more on fortuitousness, I think to myself. Without much planning and thought, the 87-year-old lady sitting before me — a picture of grace — at Mumbai's hip eatery, The Table, has managed to contribute more than most do in a lifetime.

We're meeting after a long exchange of emails. I have, over email, politely declined her suggestion of her first taking me for lunch to the Willingdon Sports Club at Race Course to "get to know each other", before we do the actual "Lunch with BS", a disarmingly charming old world proposition and one that I'm almost tempted to agree to. A practice lunch before the actual lunch? Such a lovely thought! But, of course, my hectic Mumbai schedule doesn't permit such luxuries.

Sir JJ School of Art, one of the few students with a bachelor's degree already, and found that the arts were where her passion lay. Soon after, she was married and accompanied her husband to the University of Michigan where he was doing his master's and she decided to pursue another bachelor's in art history. At Michigan, she was a bit of an exotic creature. Back in 1956, they hadn't seen many Indian women - let alone an Indian woman in a sari, studying art history.

At Michigan, Doshi tasted blood. "I took to it like a duck to water," she says. This metamorphosed into what would be a 60-year love affair with the arts. She returned to India and found herself in a remote village in Maharashtra (one of her husband's factories was located here) with more time on her hands than she knew what to do with. That's when she decided to pursue her doctorate in Jain miniature art from Mumbai University with the Prince of Wales museum as her guide. Jain miniature art was a relatively unexplored subject then so her work entailed original research.

Soon after, she won the Rockefeller fellowship and decided to go for a year to the United States Indian miniature art was something the rest of the world was quite unfamiliar with so she was one of the few authorities on the subject back then. As a result, she ended up teaching courses at her alma mater Michigan, Berkeley and even at Pune University. But teaching was not really for her - she was focused on her hearth and home and that was proving too disruptive - so when she was approached to edit Marg, a magazine set up by writer Mulk Rai Anand, one of the only publications on art at the time, she went for it. The fact that she never considered herself a career person meant that she could experiment, and was

unafraid of failure. She thoroughly enjoyed editing Marg, coming in close contact with Pupul Jayakar and working with her on Festival of India. There was very little that happened in India's art scene that she didn't touch in some way. As we chat, I realise this holds true even now when she's well past 80. She's currently involved with IGNCA, INTACH, Jawahar Kala Kendra, Lalit Kala academy, a host of art related committees... the list is long.

It was in 1995 that she was asked to set up the NGMA in Mumbai — again a first for her as she'd neither run, let alone set up, a gallery or a museum, nor was an expert on contemporary art. It was there that Doshi experimented with many new thoughts and ideas. To draw in the Mumbai crowds, she requested Amitabh Bachchan to come and recite his father's poetry — a session that was so successful that he took it as a show to many cities subsequently. She also used the space in the gallery innovatively, once hosting a fashion show by Abu Jani and Sandeep Khosla there again a first as fashion shows were

rarely held at such venues. She held unique and innovative exhib tions at the NGMA, making it a spot that art lovers from the rest of the country and the globe flocked to.

ple seem to have for corporates. She believes they would not destroy anything intentionally but only due to lack of knowledge. She goes into some detail of one site near Viramgam in Gujarat — the Munsar lake and the shrines that surround it, where we are losing invaluable heritage. "I'd be very happy if the Lodha's or some other group takes charge and revamps the entire place," she adds.

A second thing that worries her is the Indian mindset that if something is no longer perfect it is worthless. She cites the story of a dhobi in one of the Indian villages who was apparently using a big black stone to beat his clothes with; it turned out to be a discarded but very old and valuable statue, something she's described in one of her books. Since the statue was no longer complete, it was considered useless. The same holds true for manuscripts or even bronze figures. A slight tarnish and no one wants to pay attention to them. The rest of the world values and preserves its heritage and museums exhibit imperfect pieces with equal pride.

She argues that love for one's culture, monuments and history needs to be inculcated from the very beginning and that's why she is strongly in favour of school trips to such places. "If we can explain to children why we need to preserve and take pride in our history, we will have solved half our problems," she says adding that chilren saving no to crackers has led adults to be more sensitive about their effect on environment. This resonates strongly with me since that's how I grew up - dragged from monument to monument. We've moved to coffee as our meeting is coming to an end. I ask her how she evaluates the direction her life has taken, albeit inadvertently. "If you had asked me when I was 20, what I'd be doing, I would have said I'd be a fat married guiju lady with three children like many of my aunts," she says jokingly. But the arts gave her life a delightful and rich hue that she never imagined, planned or designed. And the lack of pressure to perform ensured that she did.

why the number of terrorist incidents in Kashmir has grown enormously under its watch. It needs to explain how the Pulwama attack came about, given it was one of considerable complexity and took place on the highest-security highway in India. It needs to explain how an airstrike that Pakistan retaliated to has changed the incentives facing those in the Pakistan military who have long supported terror. It needs to explain why it has not in five years built up the capabilities required to conduct effective, sub-conventional retaliation against cross-border terrorist architecture in Pakistan. And it has to explain what it got out of its fabled 'Wuhan moment' with Pakistan's sole remaining patron, Beijing. These are questions that can and should be asked of any government, of any party. If these questions are not asked then we are failing in our duties as citizens. It is those who seek to silence such questions who will harm India's national security.

Email: m.s.sharma@gmail.com; Twitter: @mihirssharma

We order a soba salad, an avocado toast and a zucchini spaghetti and decide to share all. It's a frugal lunch with no drinks — we stick to mineral water.

A product of Mumbai's Elphinstone College (a bored economics student), Doshi joined the

Our food arrives: The soba salad is excellent as is the bread basket. The avocado toast is good but the zucchini spaghetti is a disappointment (we tell the maître d'hôtel and I notice later when I pay the bill that he hasn't charged us for it) and effectively wasted.

We are interrupted by the Asia Society group of ladies, who know her well. Indeed, Doshi is well known in Mumbai for the work done through the Vinod & Sarvu Doshi Foundation. The foundation funds deserving students' post graduate studies overseas in arts and humanities, supports



community projects and works with emerging talent in the fields of visual art. The couple and what they stood for represent a fast disappearing breed that used its money wisely and towards good purpose.

I ask her what she thinks of the Adopt A Heritage scheme. She says she is totally in favour of it as long as someone - a body like the INTACH or even a new body set up for the purpose — monitors the private efforts to ensure that nothing is lost for lack of awareness. She doesn't have the mistrust many peo-

Phone-savvy workers



PEOPLE LIKE THEM KEYA SARKAR

n Santiniketan, the house I inherited from my mother (and she from her father) is 70 years old. Needless to say, the maintenance of the house needs a lot of attention and money. However, soon after I arrived in Santiniketan, I had decided to renovate my ancestral home with all things natural and avoid industrial products.

We have managed to hold on to this philosophy despite the fact that people who can do lime wash on the walls, who can polish cement floors, who can work with wood and bamboo, are becoming difficult to find.

Recently, after extensive repairs to the outside walls, we finished painting them.

After a few days, we decided to start on the interior walls. Our interior walls (much to the horror of my father who worked all his life for a paint company) have first been covered in cow dung and then covered in clay tinted through available colour strainers. This I have been lucky enough to get done by the tribal women who live in and around Santiniketan. They apply first the dung and then, after it dries, with their hands on the clay create a pattern on the wall. Most people who visit us comment on the walls because the patterns give our cement wall tranquility of a mud construction.

So first, I had to get in touch with the four women who have been doing this for us at intervals over the last decade. They gave me a date a fortnight away. This was because they had to finish harvesting the potatoes that they had sown. I then got in touch with the men who could assist the women in tying up the bamboo platforms that would enable them to reach our high ceilings. After they too confirmed the dates, I started organising the cow dung and the clay. Compared to the 1,000s, I would spend on an industrial paint, the bill for the dung and clay totaled a modest ₹2,000.

The work started. First, the two men and the women painstakingly removed all the small furniture and covered all the large ones with plastic. After they were done with a room, it would be thoroughly cleaned with no traces of the mess created by the gobar and the clay. The order of the rooms being taken up for painting was planned such that when the kitchen and the dining room are done, we could escape to our home in Kolkata.

We left on the appointed day with the women assuring us that the progress would be as planned and the whole house would be freshly painted by the time we got back. We left feeling truly blessed for having such dependable people work for us and there was no need to pay handsome fees to paint companies for do-your-house contracts.

The house was indeed ready by the time we returned. The walls freshly painted, all the furniture put back and even the paintings put back on the walls. We were impressed to say the least but were also much amazed at how they had managed to remember the position of not only the furniture but the placement of each painting on the wall. When I asked the men how they managed the feat, they looked at us like any youngster today looks at their technologically-challenged parents. 'We had photographed all the rooms on the phone before we started," he said.

Check-in of a different kind



KISHORE SINGH

t wasn't till a packet of toilet rolls, ordered online, was delivered at home that it dawned on my wife that we hadn't been on a holiday for some time. "It's so shameful," she said to me, "to be out of toilet paper." This is usually easily remedied in most homes by ordering a supply from the neighbourhood kirana, but in my wife's case it involved extraordinary logistics that began with checking into a hotel. On standard instructions, her assistant packs a small suitcase with her clothes within a larger one, which means she checks in with one recent travels.

bag but checks out with two. You'd think it might be cheaper to simply buy one's toilet paper, but where

would be the excitement then? My wife's modus operandi is now well established and simple. Call housekeeping from the room for additional supplies; remove toilet rolls before the staff comes in to clean the room in the morning, and again before turndown in the evening; purloin from the housekeeping cart in the corridors; always making sure to lock the stash away to avoid being found out. To add to this supply, she makes frequent use of the public washrooms from where extra rolls find their way to the usually large, empty bag she carries for just such purpose. The quality of toilet paper in our house fluctuates depending on the hotels we have returned from.

I learned a long time ago not to curb my wife's enthusiasm for such freebies. but baulked when we had to pay extra baggage on an international sector for oversized baggage that was loaded with yes, toilet paper. "Really?" I argued, but she explained that it was hard to resist the embroidered cloth pouches in which the spare rolls were stored. Any audit of such pouch holders in our bathroom can provide guests with a reasonably accurate picture of our

Let me hasten to assure you that my wife isn't a garden-variety kleptomaniac but a specialised one. If you spot any hotel towels on our premises, they were probably nicked by me - accidentally, of course. Occasional ashtrays and sundry memorabilia has found its way to the house in mysterious ways since no one in the family is willing to take credit for their inexplicable presence. Shampoos and conditioners are par for the course, usually as tokens for the domestic staff. But if there is one thing I'd like to filch, it is the incredibly soft pillows most hotels spoil you with, and which you can never find in any store. I'd ask my wife to do it, but then she'd require three bags instead of two, which might look suspicious should the concierge remember that she walked in with only one.

Meanwhile, word is that the toilet rolls ordered online don't quite fit the bill. "I need to go to Mumbai," my wife mused to me this morning, asking me to book her tickets and hotel, ostensibly for some exhibition, but I heard her mention to her sister on the phone that "supplies are running low". My suspicions were confirmed when I heard her tell her Man Friday to be sure to find the right size of suitcase to place within a bigger one. She might not bring me back pillows, but at least the quality of the toilet paper will be an improvement.

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WEEKEND RUMINATIONS

T N NINAN

The unmentionables

ne of the major reform initiatives of the outgoing government is the introduction of an effective bankruptcy process that — so far — has taken place in only the private sector. Why not subject governmentowned companies to the transparency and clear-cut decision-making of the same or a similar bankruptcy process? Handing over the matter to a judicial body like a tribunal, with all parties getting a fair hearing, can remove the political sting involved in such sensitive decisions - and also enforce some rationality. Once we are past this electoral season, during which all promises are presented as free lunches, could we bring such non-populist issues into focus? Like fixing the problems of the public sector? "Fix" as in: Let the good ones be, salvage the troubled ones with an approved programme that has finite budget limits, sell those that can't be salvaged, and shut down the rest.

Among the prime candidates to be looked at is Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd (BSNL), which says its mission is to be the leading telecom service provider and the most admired telecom brand. Yet it has been losing revenue, market share, money and relevance. In five of the last seven years, it has lost ₹7,000 crore or more, and will do so again this year. Its twin, Mahanagar Telephone Nigam Ltd (MTNL), operates in the most attractive markets of Delhi and Mumbai but has costs that are twice revenue, and lost nearly ₹3,000 crore last year. BSNL last earned a profit 10 years ago, its revenue today is much less than it was then, and both companies are now unable to pay salaries. BSNL's share of the telecom market is down to 10 per cent.

Consider the issue step by step. Can these companies be salvaged? In the bitterly competitive telecom market, a turnaround seems impossible. The next option is to sell both companies. But, like Air India, they might find no buyers. The only non-economic reason for not moving on to the final option (shutting down, like many private telecom players already have) is the very human one that BSNL has about 180,000 employees, and MTNL another 25,000. But a bailout for the employees would be cheaper than repeated bail-outs of the companies, and could take the form of a lump sum plus an annuity. The bill, even if steep, would be a bargain, considering what the government pumps into these companies. BSNL got ₹7,500 crore two years ago. The latest proposal is for another ₹14,000 crore (which the NITI Aayog sensibly opposes).

Bear in mind that the two companies have spectrum valued at several thousand crore rupees. In addition, BSNL is sitting on freehold land that was revalued a couple of years ago at ₹70,000 crore. That is the value that can be unlocked if the employees are taken care of. Subjecting these companies to something like the bankruptcy process for the private sector would force the government to explain why it continues to pour money into these bottomless pits, in preference to the other options that it should logically consider.

No political party can address such issues at election time, and it is unrealistic to expect such hara-kiri (though the witless Rahul Gandhi seems to be committing it anyway). But is there any time at all when the elected government can deal with those issues that can't be packaged as free lunches? So far Narendra Modi has carefully ducked all issues that involve trade-offs which may hit voters. Hence the patchy reform record on labour, trade, agriculture and other issues, which (you could argue) has resulted in the lack of economic momentum outside of manufactured statistics. Take the nationalised banks that have got sums approaching ₹2 trillion as fresh capital from the government, but have seen much of that disappear in the market valuation metrics. We have seen "Recognition" of these banks' problems, and we have got "Recapitalisation" (with more to come, doubtless), but what about the forgotten "R": Reform? And reform of government-owned entities in their totality? Forget value creation, can we at least stop large-scale value destruction?

Five fatal follies of Modi doctrine

India looks less equal to China than 5 years ago, strategic alliance with US is hobbled by trade, and Pakistan is looking anything but chastened by Balakot. What's gone wrong?



should be asking a psychologist. What a columnist can do is to collect hard facts, sift them from fantasy and propaganda, and provoke an important debate. Trolling, we take in our stride.

Earlier this week, China delivered a nasty kick in India's shin by blocking Pakistan's Jaish-e-Mohammed chief Masood Azhar's designation as a global terrorist by the UN Security Council.

Not only did China block it for the fourth time,

much inspired commentary in Chinese state- or party-controlled media held out admonitions for India. The rudest was a commentator in Communist Party-owned Global Times who, with pictures of angry BJP workers in the background, accused Narendra Modi of exploiting the situation for his election campaign, and concluding with a final insult: China is India's friend, not a hostage to its nationalism.

With this, China redefined the SHEKHAR GUPTA "Wuhan Spirit" to mean that if my

troops aren't squatting on your territory in the run-up to your elections, I have kept my part of the deal. For the rest, the old rules apply.

for their tone and emphasis. India has been ridiculously guarded, not daring to even name China and expressing just "disappointment" with "a nation". The Americans, on the contrary, had no such hesitations. They named China in a statement enormously more severe than India's pusillanimous one.

The Modi government hasn't lost its muscularity. It is just applied more selectively now, though not particularly with an application of mind. Mr Modi's India of March 2019, two months to the elections, treats a hostile China with nervous deference, but launches an all-out Swadeshi trade war on Donald Trump's friendly America. We suck up to those who harm and humiliate us because we fear them. We fight on with those who speak for us because we love them.

rere are the five follies of what we might call the Here are the five folies of what the model of the folies of the second s 1) Inability to appreciate that strategic alliances need a big heart: Strategically, America has been, to use a familiar Americanism, a stalwart ally. Yet, at the top levels of the US Administration, beginning with Mr

hat is more overpowering, fear or love? You Trump, a wary fatigue has developed about India. It is tempting to dismiss Mr Trump as a petulant child. But can you afford to do so? You might laugh at his fixation with Indian duties on Harley Davidson motorbikes, but he can also similarly call your Swadeshinomic approach to trade nutty and insincere. Slashing prices of imported medications and medical aids is a good moral and political idea. But must you implement it with sudden price controls and import restraints? The Americans must be bemused to see India declaring

war on their Amazon and Walmart while it heartily welcomes Chinese investments in Indian e-commerce and digital financial services.

While the way America has stood by India after Pulwama is creditable, there are strains in the relationship and personal chemistry between Mr Modi and Mr Trump. A bilateral hasn't happened since November 2017 and attempts to set one up at the recent G-20 summit in Buenos Aires in November 2018 failed. Mr Trump isn't the kind to invest time in photo-ops and plat-

itudes when his favourite peeves are not addressed. A little "give" on trade wouldn't hurt India.

Mr Trump isn't asking for something as difficult as troops in Afghanistan or to not buy those Russian S-400s or to shut the Chabahar port in Iran. All he wants is a little concession on some tariffs and business as usual on the rest. Smart leaders pick their fights, especially with friends, carefully. Mr Modi has erred in opening a swadeshi trade front with Mr Trump, who also has a domestic political constituency.

2) Miscalculation that unilateral appeasement works with arrogant big powers: See it this way. India has locked horns on trade with the US, with which it enjoys a \$60-billion trade surplus, but is giving unfettered access to China, with which it has an equal, \$60-billion deficit. The idea behind opening up our markets so widely to Chinese goods and investments may have been to give them an economic stake to moderate their strategic policy towards India.

Nothing of the sort has happened. Two years ago, the Chinese walked into Doklam. Now, the message from them seems to be, if we are not in Doklam or Chumar again, as you head for elections, send us a thank-you note. Likely on a Chinese phone, network, and operating system. Just as with America, the Modi government has demanded all "give", with China it is

all "take".

3) Obsession with personalised foreign policy: Mr Modi has stature and charisma. But it doesn't substitute the preparation and follow-up of professional diplomacy, and the need to refine policies through internal debate and discussion. Also, individual styles and approaches of other leaders vary

OPINION

The Saudi Crown Prince might love a copious hug and take decisions on the spot, but a Xi Jinping may be irritated or misread it as fawning. Besides, although the most powerful Chinese leader since Deng, he doesn't have the personal power in Beijing that a Mohammad bin Salman or Mr Modi does in Rivadh or New Delhi. Mr Xi works with a structured and empowered "system" that functions a lot more effectively than the Modi cabinet. It is now evident that Mr Modi's first charm-filled approach with Mr Xi was counter-productive, and this continued later through Xian, Wuhan and elsewhere. The misstep of a Republic Day invite to Mr Trump and the failed hugging outreach with Nawaz Sharif showed inadequate homework.

4) The price of predictability: From politics, diplomacy, to warfare, sport and gambling, predictability is a liability. Mr Modi has made that error. Foreign leaders know his personalised style, need for publicity, photoops, praise, all of which they understand he needs for his domestic audiences. The Chinese know very well by now that Mr Modi is wary of another intrusion in the months leading to the polls. The Chinese also would have known that much as Mr Modi might like a little skirmish with Pakistan, which he could quickly end claiming victory, there is no way he could start and end anything with China like that. Predictability makes it easy for others to guess your responses. The Chinese have been the first to do this.

The Pakistanis must have taken note of a few things too. They know Mr Modi is now publicly committed to a quick retaliation in the case of major terror attacks. It gives them the power of orchestrating a crisis and drawing the world to the subcontinent at will. All they need is to tell the ISI to unleash another incident. Great leaders do not allow themselves to be "gamed".

5) Perils of mixing foreign policy with domestic politics: Mr Modi has often used his foreign policy initiatives and summits for domestic image-building. The Chinese were the first to exploit it. They knew Indian fears of another intrusion in election season and offered reassurance at Wuhan but on their terms. Chinese trade dominance has increased, their view on Arunachal and Pakistan is harder, and India is reduced to protesting meekly on Masood Azhar, without daring to name them. Do note that since Wuhan, India has not raised the issue of Nuclear Suppliers Group membership with China. If India's demand is now the banning of Masood Azhar, it does two things: Diminish India in its bilateral equation with China, and enable it to hyphenate its own India policy with Pakistan. China, therefore, has India just where it wants, triangulated with Pakistan.

To conclude, this isn't a foreign policy balance sheet of the five Modi years. It is a listing of what we see as his most significant flaws and their consequences.

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PUBG vs the nanny state



move into closer proximity with each other, heightening risks.

PBUG can be played by teams, or single players, or players who team up tactically. It requires intellectual cognition to work out some situations, as well as fast reflexes, and street-smarts. Players can adopt firstperson points of view (PoV), or third-perwith contrasting pros and cons

desi kids play it. It is arguably less violent than many Indian movies with "U" certificates. However, it has been banned for "promoting violence" in several places in Gujarat. At least 10-15 persons have been arrested across the state for playing PUBG, under Section 188 of the Indian Penal Code (Disobedience to order duly promulgated by public servant)

Nabokov, provides a fine literary description of where game addiction can lead. Serious chess-players, bridge-players, goplayers, etc., can all cite anecdotes of witnessing mental instability amongst those obsessed by their games of choice.

But chess, bridge and go are also hailed in academic studies as promoting concentration, patience, focus and problemsolving abilities with apparent links to better academic performances. Arguably, PUBG could be the same. It certainly stretches mental muscl Most disturbingly, there was no apparent process followed in this ban. There are processes for banning a book, or a movie, even if the very act of banning is distasteful and those processes are often abused. There is also a system, however arduous, for appealing such bans. This ban seems arbitrary, carried out at the whim of somebody who decided, without any hard data, that PUBG was "bad". There is no due process for appealing against it. Does this not set a precedent for banning other things, in equally arbitrary fashion? If the law treats somebody as an adult. they are allowed to make their own voting choices, and also to be arrested for committing crimes. Surely they are also adult enough to decide what games they play? It should not be the concern of the nanny state.

Dada swag

EYE CULTURE UTTARAN DAS GUPTA

frail young man ran in a halfcircle across the fecund green in an attempt to catch a mishit by a South African batsman, and 90,000 people in the stands of Eden Gardens — lulled into half-sleep by the mellow November afternoon sun and the steady batting of Gary Kirsten and Daryl Cullinan - rose up, roaring like the Bay of Bengal on a stormy evening. The young man fumbled and fell, and dropped the catch in the process. "Too much gallery show," said a wizened cricket lover sitting beside me on the concrete stairs. In 1996, Eden Gardens still did not have bucket seats. The crowds at Eden Gardens are known to be fickle. They have booed Sunil Gavaskar and Rahul Dravid. they have cheered for South Africa and Sri Lanka in matches against India. There is something gladiatorial about those getting on to the pitch – the crowds are not going to go easy on you because you are Indian, nor fail to cheer for you because you are from the rival team. The match I described in the previous paragraph was the first of many I have watched at the stadium. The young fielder was Sourav Ganguly, who had just returned from England after scoring a century on his debut at Lords, and then another one in his next innings. In the match against South Africa the second in a three-Test series — Mr Ganguly scored 6 and 0 in the two innings. The only Indian batsman to come out with some pride was captain Mohammad Azharuddin, who scored a gritty century in the first innings, saving India the blushes of a follow-on. The surprise performance was that of Anil Kumble, who hit 88 in the first innings before getting run out. The star of the match, however, was South African opener Kirsten, who notched up 102 in the first innings and 133 in the second. On the fourth day of the match, when I was in the stands, he reached his century, soon followed by teammate Cullinan, who scored 153. On both occasions, the crowd that had cheered Mr Ganguly's failed attempt also stood up to applaud the rival batsmen for their achievements. This was a lesson learnt: In sports as in life, grace is important than more futile aggression. Currently, however, Eden Gardens is playing host to a rather graceless contest — between that frail young man, Mr Ganguly, who is now the

president of the Cricket Association

of Bengal (CAB), and the Bengal unit of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Following the terror attack in Pulwama on 14 February, where 40 Central Reserve Police Force personnel were killed, BJP workers in Kolkata have been demanding the removal of a picture of Imran Khan, former captain of the Pakistan cricke team and current prime minister. Khan's picture — along with that of his compatriots Wasim Akram and Ramiz Raza - hangs in the club house at Eden Gardens, where very few people are allowed. A regular spectator, even when overwhelmed with feelings of outrage and jingoism, are unlikely to chance upon these and get offended. Reporting on a demonstration of BJP workers in late-February, The Hindu has speculated that the current imbroglio over Khan's picture was a sort of proxy war between the ruling party at the Centre and its rival. Trinamool Congress, in power in West Bengal. "Mr Ganguly was favoured by Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee when he was selected to lead the CAB, four years ago," said the report. Since there is no source cited for this, one might think of this as speculation. However, it is a little difficult to be unsympathetic to Mr Ganguly's stance. And, those demanding such token gestures as the removal of cricketers' pictures in lieu of a more serious engagement with foreign affairs and defence seem to be making futile gestures at gaining political mileage. In fact, for many self-fashioned Twitter and TV studio nationalists, the current disturbances across the India-Pakistan borders seems to be only a little more serious than a cricket match. The call for "vengeance" and "teaching Pakistan a lesson", the cheering and aggression, and blatant misreporting is somewhat similar to Roman crowds calling for the death of bloody gladiators. In the meanwhile, it seems India will have to play Pakistan in the World Cup match in June this year, else forfeit two points. The International Cricket Council has turned down the request of the Board of Control for Cricket in India to sever ties with nations such as Pakistan that allegedly harbour terror. Incidentally, India has won all six times it faced Pakistan in a World Cup match. including the one in 1992, when Mr Khan led his team win in the tournament. So, our chances this summer look good.

NATIONAL INTEREST

Two reactions to this Chinese arrogance stand out

DEVANGSHU DATTA

bunch of parachutists float down onto an island in a war zone. They pick up weapons cached in hideouts and try to kill each other. The last man standing (or the last team standing) wins. Then, they do it all over again.

That's the plot of PlayerUnknown Battlegrounds (PUBG), a popular online game. Beyond the banality, this "Battle Rovale Shooter", which is how this genre is technically classified, has very intricate, detailed subplots.

There are several islands with different geographies and all sorts of ingenious hideouts and dangerous locales built into the landscape. As the game progresses, the map area shrinks, forcing survivors to

Every replay is different. This is why PUBG is addictive. Even planes dropping the parachutists randomly vary flight paths forcing players to make good decisions about the right places to eject. The rewards (weaponry, game credits, cosmetics, costumes) increase as players take

more risks. PBUG was developed in 2017 by "PlayerUnknown", a handle used by the game developer. Brendan Greene. It was released by PUBG Corporation, a subsidiary of South Korea's BlueHole. The fullservice versions can be modified to add more twists.

Game cosmetics have been sold for real cash. Chinese hackers developed cheating software. BlueHole then developed anti-cheating software, which has been used to ban over 13 million accounts. It is that popular.

PUBG is free-to-play on mobile, which is important in the Indian context. Lots of

The ban has serious implications. There seems to be no scientific data, or anecdotal evidence, in support of the ban. There were no news reports of youths parachuting out of planes, stealing weapons, and killing each other. Nor were there any reports of players committing other crimes, creating disturbances to public order, spreading hatred against communities, or any of the other reasons usually cited for bans.

There have been no psychiatric studies anywhere under controlled conditions to indicate PUBG players are more violent than average. The plot, the plaver appearances and costumes are removed from reality, making it pure fantasy. It will not translate into a gunfight or a riot at Naroda Patiya.

Game addiction is a real thing, of course, from long before the Internet. "The Defence", a novel about Grandmaster Luzhin, by Vladimir

Twitter:@devangshudatta

Modi and the Liberals



LINE AND LENGTH

T C A SRINIVASA RAGHAVAN

his article makes a point that I have made a few times before but which seems worth repeating: Narendra Modi has been compared to many heads of government but there is one man who he has not been compared to: Richard Milhous Nixon, the 37th President of the United States.

Nixon was forced to resign from office because of the relentless pursuit by the liberal establishment of the eastern side of America — Nixon was from the West. He is now regarded as one of the most successful of the 20th century US Presidents.

Nixon had to quit because he broke some American law. But that was merely the excuse for the "liberals" to intensify the pursuit.

The hounding had begun almost as soon as he was sworn in. The American liberals had decided long, long ago that he was unfit to govern the US — as if their darling. John F Kennedy was, Nixon could do nothing right, just as for India's liberals, Modi can't.

In the end, if nothing else, that Nixon episode proved one thing: There is no one more dangerous than a liberal out on a fox hunt.

It also showed that the illiberality of the liberals is one of the greatest paradoxes of our time. A great deal has been written on the subject but the depravities of the deeply devout continue to defy explanation.

In a most disturbing echo of the Nixon experience, India's urban liberals decided long ago that Modi was unfit to govern India. And ever since May 2014, this lot has gone after him with absolute singlemindedness.

So much do they detest Modi that they are quite prepared to side with fools, villains charlatans and crooks instead. There are quite a few of them around.

His own enemy

But the whole "Remove Modi" project

seems to be going awry now. Unless there is a massive change in mood, it looks as if he will form the next government as well in a few weeks from now.

Nixon, too, had got re-elected in 1972 until his foolishness led to his downfall. The question, therefore, is if this could happen to Modi as well.

By now it is well-known that Modi loves to exaggerate, at least on public platforms. In private, however, from what I have gathered, he seems to be completely different.

Now as his second term approaches, he should ask himself what he can do to present the real Modi to the country. His Roosevelt-like Mann Ki Baat chats have clearly not done the job.

If he becomes the PM again, Modi may respond in one of two ways. He may continue to think that he doesn't need the liberals — Nixon made the same mistake because of his inferiority complex - or he could try and cultivate them.

One simple way of doing so would be to give Muslims at least 15 per cent of the tickets in the coming general election. This will douse many a liberal fire. If they lose, well, how can anyone blame Modi for that?

He should also start rewarding the liberals because most of them are anxious for recognition. To be sure, some of them may reject the rewards but I am willing to bet that most of them will be glad to be co-opted.

Even if he doesn't want to give them some official post, he can at least invite them for tea in small groups once a month on Sundays. If nothing else he will have the pleasure of ruining their weekend. The pleasure will be doubled if his guests go out thinking "Hey, he is not such a bad sort, after all."

Softly, gently

Above all, as I had written in October 2017, Modi will have to show that he can function effectively in a large coalition, which requires him to accommodate persons with different views of India in his council of ministers.

Indeed, in some ways, this is going to be his biggest challenge because so far, from the time he became chief minister till now, he has never had to do so.

To conclude, let me list three tests for judging Modi in his second term should he get one. How he approaches ideas that differ from his own; how many tickets he gives to Muslims; and how he distributes ministerial posts amongst his party colleagues and those from the rest of the National Democratic Alliance.

A good starting point would be to not give the portfolio of human resource development to a BJP MP.

Every week, Eye Culture features writers with an entertaining critical take on art, music, dance, film and sport