



## Prisoner of procedure

The in-house panel resorted to its power at the cost of fairness to the complainant

It was a test of great import that one of India's great institutions failed. The main question was whether the Supreme Court would live up to the standards of fairness it expects of all authorities while inquiring into a former woman employee's complaint of sexual harassment and victimisation against the Chief Justice of India, Ranjan Gogoi. An *ad hoc* committee, following an informal procedure, has concluded that the allegations have "no substance", but the findings will not be made public. The report cannot be reviewed judicially. No one else, not even the complainant, knows what evidence was examined and who else testified apart from herself. All that is known is that she was heard, and questioned, at two sittings. She later withdrew from the inquiry, saying she was denied the help of a lawyer or a representative, that she found the questions from a panel of three sitting Supreme Court judges quite intimidating, and that she was not clear how her testimony was being recorded. There is no doubt that the committee remained impervious to the power imbalance in the situation. Perhaps she ought not to have pulled out from the probe, despite these grievances. The panel's conclusion would have been even starker had she been present to hear how Justice Gogoi defended himself; and who among the court officials, if any, answered her specific and documented charges about the administrative harassment she was put through following the alleged incident of sexual harassment. The most relevant parts of the complaint were the transfer orders and disciplinary inquiry against her, the role of the court administration in dismissing her, and that of the Delhi Police in arresting her on a complaint of alleged bribery and initiating disciplinary action against her husband and his brother, both police personnel. It is not known if any of these officials were examined.

The manner in which the court dealt with the complaint on the administrative side has been less than fair. It is true that the in-house procedure devised in 1999 envisages only a committee of three judges to deal with allegations against serving Supreme Court judges. The fact that a special law to deal with sexual harassment at the workplace is in force since 2013 appears to have made no difference. The court could not bring itself, even in the interest of appearing fair, to adopt a formal procedure or allow the complainant to have legal representation. For all its judicial homilies on fairness, when it comes to dealing with its own the Supreme Court has come across as a prisoner of procedure and displayed an alarming propensity to mix up its institutional reputation with an individual's interest. "The abuse of greatness is when it disjoins remorse from power," wrote Shakespeare. The decision by the 'in-house committee' is an egregious instance of a hallowed institution abusing its own greatness by letting its power speak, and not the compassion for which it is renowned.

## Now there are two

As the poll process enters the home stretch, desperation and exhaustion are evident

In the fifth phase of the Lok Sabha elections, just 51 seats across seven States went to the polls, but its outcome could be critical to the fortunes of the BJP. It had won 39 of these seats in 2014, and its allies two. In fact, the BJP's hopes of retaining power at the Centre, and therefore the Opposition's hopes of defeating it, hinge a lot on their respective performances in the fifth and the next two phases. As with the previous four phases, the voter turnout was similar to that in 2014; initial estimates were that the cumulative turnout for the 51 seats was 63.26% on Monday, compared to 61.75% in 2014. One of Indian democracy's big successes has been the high number of registered voters who exercise their franchise; and as turnouts remain healthy, old theories about the incumbency or anti-incumbency potential of such turnouts have crumbled. What, however, continues to be the hallmark of Election 2019 is the sustained attempt by the BJP to prevent the campaign from being about its own record of five years in office. In an unseemly and controversial statement ahead of the fifth phase, Prime Minister Narendra Modi raked up the Bofors controversy with an uncharitable reference to former Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi. He followed it up with a challenge to Congress president Rahul Gandhi to debate Rajiv Gandhi's term in office, three decades ago. Mr. Modi also used the campaigner's pulpit to liken cross-border military operations undertaken by Indian forces during the Congress regime to "video games". In turn, the Congress charged Mr. Modi with double standards as he had earlier sought to place the armed forces beyond scrutiny and accused those who raised questions on their performance of being unpatriotic.

Politicians, dead and living, are legitimate subjects of public scrutiny as much as armed forces and the security establishment, particularly during elections. But such debates must be conducted in a civil tenor and within limits – and in a manner that informs pressing matters of governance. It is unclear whether Mr. Modi's statements would have helped the Congress in Amethi and Rae Bareilly, constituencies from which Mr. Gandhi and his mother Sonia Gandhi, respectively, are contesting and which went to the polls in the fifth phase. Mr. Modi has also tried to create a wedge in the Opposition by repeatedly stating that Bahujan Samaj Party chief Mayawati was the victim of a conspiracy between her alliance partner and Samajwadi Party chief, Akhilesh Yadav, and the Congress. The BJP's resistance to any focus on issues of livelihood and liberty has put the burden on the Opposition parties to pull public discourse back towards policy, something they have managed with varying and often dismal degrees of success.

# All for one, none for all

The marginalisation of Muslims has been appropriated to serve the BJP's nationalism outreach



HILAL AHMED

The attitude of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) towards Muslim communities in the last five years is seen in two very different ways. The rhetoric of 'sabka saath, sabka vikas' (with everyone, everyone's progress) is often invoked, particularly by pro-BJP commentators, to argue that questions related to Muslim marginalisation/representation should not be raised at all. The government is committed to 'development of all and appeasement of none' and it will take care of Muslim concerns as well. This argument is used extensively to justify every form of lawlessness, including the lynching of Muslims in the name of Hindu reaction.

### The background

On the other hand, there is an equally straightforward secular narrative of Muslim victimhood, which reminds us that the BJP is a communal Hindutva party controlled by the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). The landslide victory of the BJP in 2014, the argument goes, has given the RSS an opportunity to target Muslims simply to create a Hindu Rashtra. Establishing a link between violence against Muslims and declining number of Muslim MPs and MLAs, we are told that the Narendra Modi government is primarily anti-Muslim.

No one can deny the fact that we live in a communally polarised environment, in which Hindu victimhood is systematically nurtured by invoking anti-Muslim feelings in the name of nationalism. However, there is a serious need to go beyond this polarisation so as to systematically analyse the contours of the BJP's nationalism with regard to Muslim communities.

One may unpack the contemporary moment of Hindutva at two levels: the Narendra Modi go-

vernment's formal official response towards Muslim backwardness, especially with regard to the Sachar Committee Report; and the nature of the BJP's informal anti-Muslim discourse, which in a way constitutes the basis for its own version of nationalism.

### Minority welfare

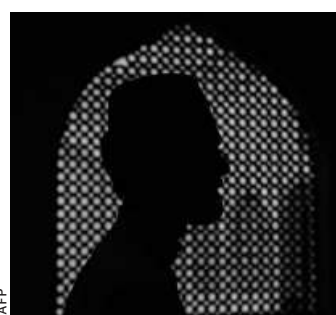
The BJP's 2014 poll manifesto recognised Muslim backwardness as an important political issue. It argued that it would take care of Muslim concerns – such as modernisation of madarasas, protection of Urdu and streamlining of the Waqf Boards. Most importantly, it was promised that the party would 'ensure a peaceful and secure environment, where there is no place for either the perpetrators or exploiters of fear'.

Although there was no mention of the Sachar Report in the 2014 manifesto, the Ministry of Minority Affairs accepted it as an important reference point for all its schemes and programmes. The government also went ahead with the post-Sachar Evaluation Committee and persuaded it to submit its report in September 2014.

The Ministry still recognises the 15 Point Programme introduced by former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh for the welfare of minorities as guiding principles to deal with the exclusion of minorities, including Muslims. In fact, a study was commissioned by the Modi government in 2016 to evaluate the impact of these 15 points on minority communities.

These technical-procedural aspects of governance, however, should not be exaggerated. The 'Action taken Report' submitted by the Ministry to Parliament with regard to the implementation of the Sachar Report in 2018 categorically rejects a few crucial and politically sensitive recommendations.

For example, the Action Taken Report does not accept the inclusion of Arzal (Dalit) Muslims into the Scheduled Castes (SC) list. It also refuses to create the proposed all-India cadre of officers for the State Waqf Boards and Central Waqf Council. However, the other 'non-controversial' recommenda-



tions of the Sachar Report are acknowledged.

This selective treatment of the Sachar Report by the BJP is not surprising. The BJP has never been interested in the Sachar Report, especially on the question of the inclusion of Muslim and Christian Dalits in the SC category. However, despite this highly critical position, the Modi government not only recognised the Sachar Report but also submitted a fully worked-out Action Taken Report.

Does it mean that the Modi government is also involved in what BJP leaders, including Mr. Modi, often call 'Muslim appeasement'?

### Link to nationalism discourse

The government's delicate position on Muslims as a marginalised/underrepresented community is inextricably linked to the media-driven discourse of nationalism which has been carefully produced in the last five years.

This nationalism has two core elements. First, it aims to recreate a new collective self-perception of Indianness. Evoking the old European-style 'one-language, one culture, one nation' framework, it is established that celebrating Hindutva (not Hinduism) in public life must be treated as a precondition for patriotism and Indianness. Since Hindus have been the main addressees of this project, Muslims are nowhere in the picture. However, this strange absence of Muslims is used to create an impression that the patriotism of Muslims needs to be probed.

RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat's three lectures on Hindutva delivered in September 2018 are a good example. Despite claiming that 'Hindutva without Muslims is meaningless', he did not deviate

from the RSS's rather known position on Muslims. He relied heavily on the controversial distinction between 'Indian religions' and the religions that originated outside to define Indianness in strict Hindu terms.

This inside/outside binary is actually linked to the second core element of contemporary nationalism: 'territorial security'. The pro-BJP media reconfigured the old rhetoric of 'foreign enemy' so as to legitimise its elusive search for internal 'enemies'. Terms like 'jihadists' for Muslims, 'urban Naxals' for human rights activists and 'sickular' for secularists were employed simply to re-establish the hegemony of the Hindutva version of nationalism.

### Use of marginalisation

The demands posed by this exclusionary nationalism for Muslims, however, can also be read rather differently. In the last five years, Hindutva forces have experimented with at least five issues that were directly related to Muslims: ghar wapsi, love jihad, cow protection, triple talaq and a Ram temple in Ayodhya. Despite launching a highly sustained and organised campaign on each of these issues, the Hindutva forces actually failed to provoke Muslim communities into any collective action/ reaction.

This failure has forced the BJP establishment to reorganise itself to produce a Hindutva-centric yet anti-Muslim discourse of nationalism. The Muslim underrepresentation in various fields actually becomes an important point of reference in this schema.

It is important here to remember that the term 'Muslim' has emerged as a legitimate political category in the last two decades. This process began in 1993 when the National Commission for Minorities defined Muslims (and other religious minorities) as a national minority. This move, in a way, strengthened the already worked out idea of a 'Hindu majority'. It had now become easier for the Hindutva essentialists to argue that the minorities, especially Muslims, are appeased and pam-

pered at the national level. This argument evolved as political rhetoric in the mid-1990s to underline Hindu subjugation.

The Modi government, it seems, has rediscovered the idea of Muslim marginalisation for a radically different purpose. Unlike the Congress/United Progressive Alliance, the BJP government does not show any interest in highlighting the achievements of the Ministry of Minority Affairs. Nor does the party overlay the 'Muslim support' card. It simply keeps the issue of Muslim underrepresentation alive for three possible political strategies.

First, the party often invokes Muslim marginalisation to legitimise its inclusiveness and accommodating approach. After all, Sabka Saath is still a slogan of the party, which has been recently rephrased as "development with dignity" in the 2019 poll manifesto.

Second, Muslim marginalisation is also appropriated to demonstrate Hindu benevolence and generosity. BJP leaders have used this strategy during the National Register of Citizens (NRC) and the Citizenship (Amendment) Bill debates to make a case for privileging Hindus and other non-Muslim minorities living in the neighbouring country. In a sense, it is a conscious attempt to produce a grand Hindu identity at least in South Asia.

Finally, the relationship between Muslim marginalisation and underrepresentation is exploited to evoke the fear of Muslim separatism. This is exactly what the BJP has been doing with regard to the debates on Article 370. The attempt of the party to polarise the Jammu and Kashmir regions on religious lines is a revealing example.

It would be interesting to observe how this relationship between nationalism and Muslim marginalisation survives after the 2019 general election.

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# On the political fringes

The exclusion of migrants from the electoral process reveals the caste- and class-driven nature of mainstream politics



MANISH K. JHA & AJJEET KUMAR PANKAJ

While political commentators have been busy analysing voter preferences in the general election 2019, one segment, namely migrants, continues to be overlooked.

The Election Commission of India (EC), on February 21, clarified that NRI voters cannot cast votes online, and that an NRI who holds an Indian passport can vote in his/her hometown after registering as an overseas voter. But the roughly 60 million people moving across the country as migrant workers find it difficult to cast their votes because their voting rights are mostly at the place from where they migrate. The scale of lost votes due to migration is large. It may not be an exaggeration to say that there seems to be a general agreement to let the votes of domestic migrants go missing in the electoral process. Migrants remain a political issue despite their poverty, vulnerability and insecurity.

Yet, we know very little about the way migrants engage with politics, especially in elections. How do migrants ensure that they remain politically relevant in the villages they leave behind? What roles do caste and identity play in their voting preferences?

### At the receiving end

Despite it being a significant contribution to the growth and development of cities, migration is perceived as a problematic phenomenon. Poor migrants often find themselves at the receiving end of 'nativist' politics. They are projected as a 'problem' for the local population around issues of employment and unemployment, use of place and space, identity and political affiliation. The physical threat and verbal abuse that migrants experience can be gauged in the numerous statements of leaders of various political parties. References to migrants often include terms and phrases such as 'infiltrators', of those who 'need to possess a permit for work' and 'lacking in values, culture and decency'. Such allusions are in contradiction to the provisions in the Indian Constitution that allow freedom of movement by ensuring the right to reside and settle in any part of In-



dia. The process of 'othering' of migrants produces heightened anxieties, and this 'manufactured anxiety' is deployed for political gains.

### In the city

Mostly working in the unorganised sector and drawing meagre wages, migrants often find it difficult to visit their home States to cast their vote. In cities, they find it challenging to make their presence felt during elections. For example, a group of NGOs (Aajeevika Bureau and its partners) found that as one moves from panchayat to Vidhan Sabha to the Lok Sabha elections, the participation rate comes down by 10.5% at each step. Unlike the family and kinship association in a panchayat election, caste and community affiliations are the driving force in Assembly and Lok Sabha elections. While candidates

or their affiliates mostly meet the travel expenditure for upper caste and other backward caste migrants, Dalit migrants are motivated to travel at their own expense and participate aggressively with the clarity of caste identity and political affiliation.

In a city, migrants rely on support from relatives, friends and fellow migrants for accommodation, employment and to negotiate wages. Through these interactions, migrants build social networks and political connections. Region, religion, village and the caste identity of migrants play a crucial role in these processes. These elements of 'identity' contribute to the mobilisation of migrants in the city to tackle hostility as well as participation in politics. For example, migrants from Uttar Pradesh and Bihar form various social organisations, such as the Uttar Bhartiya Mahasangh, the Uttar Bhartiya Mahapanchayat and the Jaiswar Vikas Sangh, to deal with migrant issues. Of these, the Jaiswar Vikas Sangh is exclusively initiated by Dalit migrants and confined mainly to the issues of Dalit migrants in Mumbai.

### Key issues

Contrary to received wisdom, migrants seldom bother about civic

problems such as water and sanitation. Rather, their primary concern revolves around macro-issues such as employment, inflation and poverty. Dalit migrants are troubled by caste-based discrimination, exclusion, atrocities and reservation, which in turn determine their political choices. They often say, "we shall align with those who speak for us", which conveys their preference. Many of them are candid about their support for the Bahujan Samaj Party. One has often heard the line, "Yadavs stay with the Samajwadi Party and the Rajput aligns with the BJP; as we are exploited we cannot go with them and hence our place is with the BSP".

The manifested political articulation of migrants often makes mainstream political parties uncomfortable, which then label them outsiders as obstacles for development and let their votes drop in the electoral process. The exclusion of migrants from the electoral process, in a way, reveals the caste- and class-driven nature of mainstream politics.

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## 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.

### Election and the EC

While the jury is still out on who the victor will be in the general election of 2019, the loser is, without much thought, the Election Commission of India (OpEd page, "The Election Commission must act tough", May 7). In the eyes of the people, its credibility as a neutral umpire in the respected exercise of elections has been dented, largely due to its own making. While it deserves to be appreciated for carrying out the humongous task of conducting elections efficiently, its lenient approach in checking the excesses of political parties, especially those of the ruling party, is

unacceptable. It did not move to take note of the explicit oversteps of the ruling party until it was rapped on the knuckles by the Supreme Court. Even after being reminded of its own powers, it did not find it fit to act. The Model Code of Conduct exists only on paper. The EC should reinvent its role.

Dr. D.V.G. SANKARARAO, Nellikarla, Andhra Pradesh

### Blows to the frame

It is cause for concern that there are negative reports about highly respected constitutional bodies such as the Election Commission, the Comptroller and the Auditor General, and the Central Bureau of

Investigation, to name a few. But what is worrying is a recent addition to the list – the judiciary (Editorial page, "A miscarriage of justice", and OpEd page, "The Supreme Court belongs to everyone", both May 7). Never could one have imagined in one's wildest dreams that there would be a complaint of sexual harassment against the Chief Justice of India. At a time when most political leaders and the executive have fallen from grace, the only bastion of hope is the judiciary. It is frightening to think of the pillars of democracy crumbling one after the other. If democracy is to survive, all the wings should display exemplary behaviour and

respectful conduct. The fourth pillar too should do likewise by keeping its moral standards above reproach.

A. MICHAEL DHANARAJ, Coimbatore

The very serious charge levelled against the Chief Justice of India is a case in which the institution itself was on trial and which demanded the highest standards of fairness. An ex-parte inquiry, after denying the woman employee legal assistance, has belied the expectations of the people. To top it all, making the procedure opaque by not releasing the findings of the committee raises questions about the right to information. There is

a real danger that the top court may no longer claim to be the sentinel *qui vive*.

D. NAGASAILA, RAM SIDDHARTH, Chennai

### Crickets and a nation

The photograph (Standalone picture, 'Sport' page, "Reliving the golden moment", May 5), of Kapil Dev posing with the 1983 World Cup Trophy during his recent visit to Lord's, instantly brought back fond memories of the unforgettable image of June

25, 1983. The striking picture still finds a place in sports publications and television documentaries, as a new era was born in Indian cricket that day. There are only a few moments in history when sport spills into cultural and political life. One thinks of how the rainbow nation was born out of the 1995 Rugby World Cup. In a sense, the 1983 win was a moment of equal magnitude for India.

R. SIVAKUMAR, Chennai

MORE LETTERS ONLINE: www.hindu.com/opinion/letters/

### CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

Editing error: In the Business Review page interview, "We expect prices to rise over time" – with Dipak Haksar, CEO of ITC Hotels - (May 6, 2019), the second deck headline erroneously referred to him as MD.

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# The National Register of Cruelty

It is horrific and undemocratic for a nation to be putting the onus on citizens to prove their Indianness



RAJU RAJAGOPAL

Fear writ large in his eyes, Shaikat Ali knelt suppliantly on the pavement, surrounded by a hostile crowd demanding, "Are you Bangladeshi? Is your name in the NRC [National Register of Citizens]?" Reports said that Ali was beaten up for allegedly selling beef and was forced to eat pork, an act of ultimate humiliation for a Muslim. Fortunately, Mr. Ali escaped relatively unharmed, but when the mob finally went home, he had lost his livelihood of three decades.

That image from the streets of Assam in April was disturbing in itself, but its import for the future of a secular India was even more chilling, as we witness a dangerous new intersection of beef, faith and citizenship on the ruling party's electoral road map.

## An unwise proposal

As if on cue, just one day later, the BJP vowed to implement the NRC all across India. The party has referred contemptuously to illegal immigrants as "termites... eating our grain... and taking our jobs". Unmindful that such reckless rhetoric is an invitation to street violence, the BJP has added fuel to the fire by promising a path to citizenship to almost all but Muslim illegal immigrants. In short, the party is seeking to weaponise the NRC even before the project has fully played out in Assam — a proposition that has been quickly rebuffed by many in the Northeast.

The ground reality is that the NRC in Assam has only recently entered its most sensitive phase of adjudicating claims and objections, involving thousands of senior government officers and data experts, with numerous companies of Central police keeping peace. More than 90% of the 40 lakh people who were excluded from the final draft have filed 'claims' for reconsideration, and 2.65 lakh 'challenges' have also been filed, questioning the inclusion of others. The Supreme Court, which is supervising the entire process, has set a hard deadline of July 31 for the final



"It is premature to declare the NRC a success in Assam and push for its implementation in other States." Those whose names were left out of the draft NRC collect 'claim' forms in Morigaon district, Assam in 2018. •RITU RAJ KONWAR

NRC, an uphill task given the sheer scale and complexity of the exercise at hand. Under these circumstances, it is premature to think of the NRC as a success in Assam, and it is unwise to push for its implementation in other States before assessing the fallout in Assam.

## What is the endgame?

No one can predict how many claimants will ultimately succeed in getting on to the final NRC, but what we do know for sure is that there is no clear plan for what happens to those who don't make it. If one were to take the BJP's manifesto seriously, non-Muslims would get a reprieve, while Muslims, possibly including many Indian citizens who are unable to produce the right documents, would be deemed stateless. Thereafter, they may get a hearing at one of the hundreds of Foreigners Tribunals yet to be constituted, and if they fail, they could be destined for the dozens of detention camps that are yet to be built. To quote Aman Wadud, a Guwahati lawyer: "A foreigner can be deported only when the country of origin accepts them... When Indian citizens are declared as foreigners for hyper-technical reasons (lack of documents), they can never be deported..." The result is indefinite detention."

As per the government's own admission, the tribunal process has not gone well in the past, prompting the Supreme Court to call the whole process a "joke". For example, of the 46,000 declared foreigners since 2015, only four were actually deported, and only 2,000 are currently in detention. As for where the other 44,000 went, even the government does not seem to know.

The court is very conscious of this reality and has been urging the government to explore more humane alternatives to prolonged detention. But unfortunately, every suggestion from the court as well as from retired bureaucrats and police officers has been summarily dismissed. That includes proposals to grant them 'refugee status', or give them work permits, or release them under sureties, or with ankle bracelets, and so on. All of this, unfortunately, lends a certain amount of credence to sceptics who claim that some of the intractable problems of our times remain unresolved only because of their potency as political wedge issues.

The court, however, seems under-terred in seeking to end what it has called "external aggression". It has been aggressively questioning the government about what comes next after the final NRC, but as of now, there is little clarity on what the endgame

is. So, here is problem one: Officials have been working hard for over three years to create a 'fair and transparent' process that is blind to an applicant's faith, language and ethnicity. They have made lakhs of house-to-house calls and pored over 6.5 crore personal records dealing with birth and marriage, citizenship and refugee status, family trees, land and tenancy, banks and LIC, and so on, often going back to the original issuers to authenticate them. But now, even before their mammoth effort is complete, the BJP has thrown cold water on them by promoting the idea that some illegal immigrants are more welcome than others. That notion corrupts the very spirit of the NRC, and can hardly be deemed a success.

## States will push back

Problem two is the assumption that the Assam experience can be readily replicated in other States. But in reality, the NRC in Assam is a direct response to its unique history as a bulwark against illegal migration, which resulted in the promises of the Assam Accord of 1985. Naturally, a majority of Assamese have been more than willing to submit themselves to the rigours of the NRC. But there is no such history nor affinity to the NRC in most other States, which are dealing with many more pressing problems than illegal immigration. In the end, notwithstanding the mandate of the Citizenship Rules of 2003, millions of poor and marginalised communities may simply be unable to comply with the onerous demands of the NRC, triggering a needless humanitarian crisis. As this reality sinks in, States will surely start to weigh the social costs of the NRC against its murky endgame, and they are bound to push back hard.

Setting aside all other considerations, the very idea that a nation should be putting the onus on every citizen to prove their Indianness 72 years after Independence is at once horrific and undemocratic. This is a proposition that must be vigorously scrutinised and debated before there is any attempt to implement the NRC beyond Assam.

Raju Rajagopal was a volunteer Civil Society Outreach Coordinator for UIDAI. He now shares his time between Berkeley, CA and Chennai

# Surveillance wars in space

Mission Shakti is a giant leap for India, but only a small step in the world of counterspace



MADHUMATHI D.S.

The dust and furore kicked up by India's Anti-Satellite Missile (ASAT) test on March 27 is yet to settle. Critics have not stopped worrying about the potential harm that floating debris may cause to other satellites around that band in the sky. Years after Russia, the U.S., and China (referred to here as the Big Three) made a mark in this area, India too has shown that it can hit back at enemies attacking from space.

Military experts say that possessing the highly difficult capability to conduct such a test is important and essential for ensuring national security in space. Mission Shakti, as it is called, has earned India a place in an exclusive club of 'space defenders'. However, a peek into counterspace, the world where such dangerous space activities are practised covertly by the Big Three, shows that while Mission Shakti is a giant leap for India, it is only a small step in that world. The new measure of space supremacy lurks in counterspace now, and not so much in planetary excursions and astronauts' outings. This is why the Big Three have been relentlessly pursuing for decades activities that enable them to rule space militarily, for offence or defence purposes.

## Playground for confidential activities

According to academic reports, policymakers and those tracking the military space, for several years now, the space between 600 km and 36,000 km above the earth has been the playground for such secret activities. Most people have no idea about what is happening up there.

Around the time Mission Shakti took place, the Center for Strategic and International Studies based in Washington, D.C. and the Secure World Foundation came out with reports detailing counterspace capabilities that different countries have today and their sense of threat to space assets. The reports document that satellites have been launched to sidle up to other satellites in the same orbit. Satellites with robotic arms or handles have touched or nudged their siblings in orbit. Mother (or nesting) spacecraft have gone up to 'deliver' baby spy satellites in orbit. Satellites have sneaked up to high perches to see, overhear and sense all that happens in space and on the ground. The intent of being in counterspace is thus surveillance and es-

pionage. In times of war, the intent could even be to capture or disable a rival's space assets in orbit.

Some say that the U.S. and Russia have always had some counterspace capabilities in their over 60-year-old space race. But this century, they have reportedly developed deadly armories that can be either unleashed into or from space.

Loud concerns have been raised over rendezvous and proximity operations (RPO) in space. The actor countries neither acknowledge nor discuss such activities and give them other names. In an RPO event, one country sends a satellite that clandestinely sits next to one of its own (or another country's) orbiting satellites. The motive could be to inspect and assess the target's nature, eavesdrop on it, or even subvert its functions. The fear is that in extreme cases, the target may even be 'abducted' or taken control of. Fortunately India is not there — for now.

## Loitering in orbit

Satellites of each of the Big Three has been caught loitering in orbit at different times, and the victims have cried foul. In September 2018, French Defence Minister Florence Parly was reported to have charged that Russian satellite Luch-Olymp was lurking too close to — and spying on — a Franco-Italian military communications satellite, Athena-Fidus, in 2017, that is, the previous year.

The U.S. has reportedly had its share of RPOs and other acts. In the foreword to the CSIS report, U.S. policymaker Jim Cooper says, "Every nation's satellites face increasing threats... The risk of a space Pearl Harbor is growing every day." He cautions that today countries depend so much on their satellites that "cripple our satellites and you cripple us".

Countries are also honing non-kinetic, electronics and cyber-based methods to prevent satellites of other countries from spying on their regions. Cyber attacks can destroy, steal or distort other satellites or ground stations. The attacker gains control of the space asset.

"No one will declare that they are pursuing these kind of technologies but all are doing it, all have to do it, specially major players," says Dinesh Kumar Yadavendra, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Joint Warfare Studies, a Delhi-based think tank of the Ministry of Defence. In times of war no one is spared, and a country must be ready with its counter-security tactics, he says.

What could India's people in military space have up their sleeve? It is most unlikely that they will tell us.

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## SINGLE FILE

### Belt and Road 2.0

With the second Belt and Road Forum, a paradox is now apparent at the heart of the initiative

DHRUVA JAISHANKAR



Six years after it was unveiled, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) assumes another avatar. In its initial form, it was all things to all people, a catch-all for China's international engagement. But in fact it had multiple, layered objectives. The first concerned

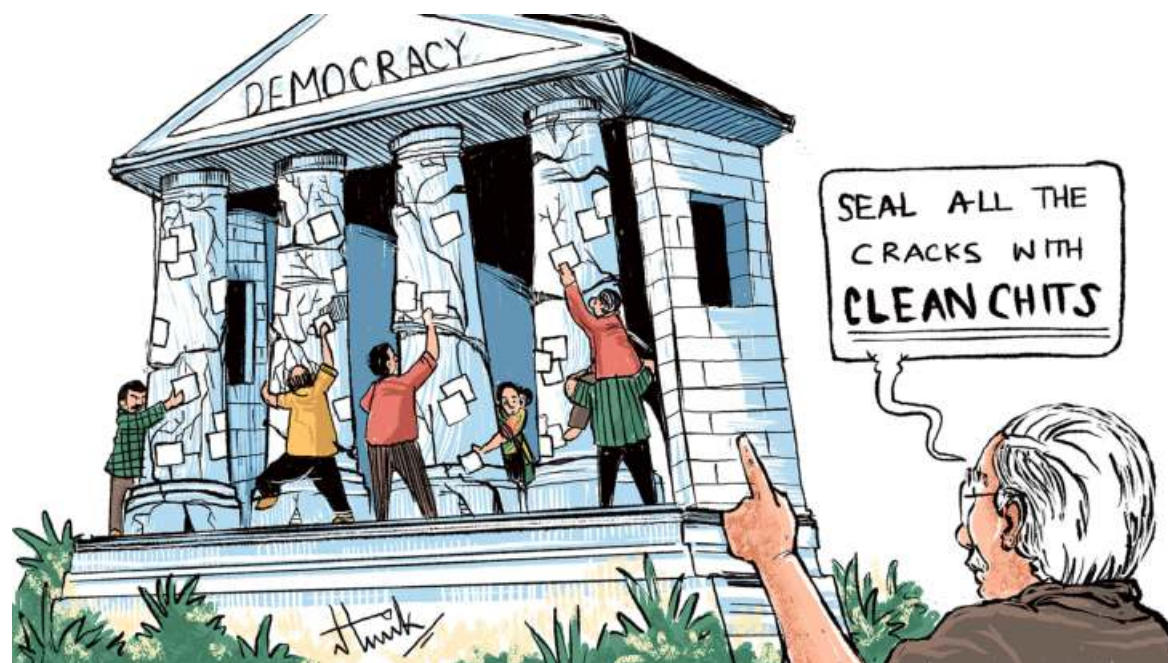
domestic economics: exporting surplus industrial capacity and cash reserves overseas to keep China's economy humming, its industrial output flowing, and its employment levels high. The second concerned domestic politics: a signature foreign initiative to associate with Chinese President Xi Jinping. The third concerned security: stabilising Western provinces and the Eurasian hinterland. And the fourth concerned strategy: leveraging China's new-found economic heft for political objectives in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Indian and Pacific Oceans, and creating new standards and institutions in a bid to challenge U.S. leadership.

But Beijing may have moved too soon and too quickly. As the second Belt and Road Forum (BRF) concludes, a paradox has become apparent at the heart of its ambitious initiative. On the one hand, there has been a strong backlash. The economic viability of Chinese projects is now viewed with considerable scrutiny. In capitals around the world, the port of Hambantota in Sri Lanka is being described as a warning sign. The BRI's sustainability is called further into question as Chinese debt, especially that held by state-owned enterprises, mounts. Additionally, security concerns have begun to predominate as far afield as in the European Union, the South Pacific and Canada. The role of China's state in its business dealings is being deliberated openly. China's military base at Djibouti has injected an overtly military element to its external engagement. And political pushback to Beijing is also discernible, whether in Zambia, the Maldives or Brazil.

Yet, despite these obvious deficiencies, the allure of the BRI remains strong. Many countries still see China as an attractive alternative to slow-moving democratic bureaucracies and tedious lending institutions. There are also political motivations at play: a minor agreement on the BRI is a useful tool for Italy's Eurosceptic government to send a strong political message to the EU. Beijing has also become more flexible, the tone of this year's BRF less triumphalist. Chinese overseas financial flows have slowed since 2017, and the focus has shifted away from massive infrastructure projects to realms such as digital technology.

Given these contrasting trends, the future of the BRI is more uncertain than ever. For India, which boycotted the BRF for the second time on grounds of both sovereignty (the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor traverses Pakistan-occupied Kashmir) and unsustainability (particularly in the Indian Ocean), it means continuing to monitor China's international engagement closely.

The writer is a Foreign Policy Fellow at the Brookings Institution's India Center



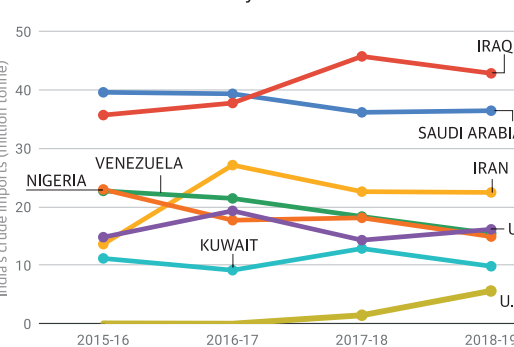
## DATA POINT

### Dearer on Indian pockets

India will be significantly hit by the Trump administration's decision to end waivers that allowed the import of crude oil from Iran without facing U.S. sanctions. Iran has been among India's top and most preferred sources of crude oil. Crude from the U.S., an alternative exporter, comes at a hefty price. By **Suman Sen**

### Crude sources from abroad

Iran has been one of India's top suppliers of crude oil over the years. In 2018-19, 10.9% of India's crude demands were met by imports from Iran. While Iraq is India's top supplier of crude oil since 2017-18, there has been a sudden jump of 288% in imports from the U.S. since 2017-18. The chart shows India's top suppliers of crude oil and their contribution over the years



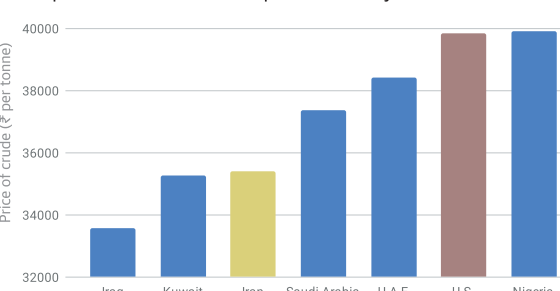
### Crude from the U.S.

The U.S.'s exports to some of the world's largest oil consumers, including India, Japan, S. Korea, and Italy, have increased significantly over time. (Figures in 1000 barrels/day (b/d))

Country	2015	2016	2017	Country	2015	2016	2017
Argentina	465	591	1158	Japan	0	8	25
Canada	427	359	354	South Korea	3	11	56
China	1	22	221	The Netherlands	5	43	92
India	1	0	26	United Kingdom	0	15	97
Italy	4	20	50				

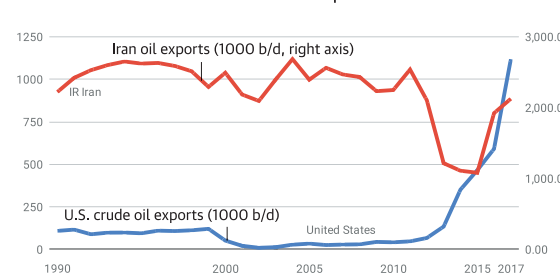
### Coming at a greater cost

While Iran's crude oil exports to India, at ₹35,395 per tonne, were relatively cheap in 2018-19, the U.S.'s crude exports, at ₹39,843, were among the most expensive. The graph shows the cost per tonne of crude oil imports from major countries



### Contrasting fortunes

There has been a huge rise of 734% of global crude oil exports from the U.S. from 2013 to 2017. Iran's crude oil exports dipped in 2013 following global sanctions, but recovered after they were lifted. The chart shows crude exports of U.S. and Iran



## FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FROM THE ISSUE OF MAY 9 AS THERE WAS NO ISSUE ON MAY 8

### Israel produces atom bombs

Israel has become the world's sixth nuclear power and has built atomic bombs, with French help, at a secret plant deep in the Negev Desert, according to the West German News Magazine Der Spiegel. The magazine, in its latest issue, said at least five, and possibly six 20-kiloton bombs had been produced at the closely guarded plant, near Dimona. Security was so stringent that a damaged Israeli jet fighter which strayed into the Dimona area during the 1967 June war with Arabs was shot down by an Israeli Hawk missile and the pilot killed, it said. Israel was already capable of delivering its atomic bomb with its A-4 Skyhawk jets, it said, and added that Israel would receive the first of 50 American built F-4 Phantoms this autumn. In Cairo, the U.A.R. officials said that the U.A.R. would produce its own atomic bombs if Israel developed a nuclear weapons capability.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO MAY 8, 1919.

### Constable Shooting Case.

Mr. Swinhoe, Chief Presidency Magistrate [Calcutta], resumed enquiry to-day [May 7] under the circumstances connected with the alleged shooting of constable Seepujan Sing. An application was made on behalf of the constable for process against Sergeant White. The Magistrate referred it to the second Magistrate who fixed the 14th instant for hearing. Another application was made for an adjournment of enquiry which was refused at which counsel appearing for the constable retired. Mr. J. Cohen, Honorary Magistrate, who recorded the statement of the constable at hospital examined said that the constable had stated he was struck by a sergeant, but he could not say whether he was struck by a bullet or knife. Three doctors from hospital who attended the constable deposed that the wounds could not have been caused by a bullet from a revolver.

## POLL CALL

### Proxy

Service voters are members of the armed forces of the Union or States, or members of forces to which provisions of the Army Act are applicable, or those who are employed under the Government of India and are outside the country. Such voters are entitled to appoint any person as their proxy to cast a vote on their behalf and in their name at the polling station. The proxy must be an ordinary resident of that constituency. He or she need not be a registered voter but must not be disqualified to be registered as a voter. The provision for voting through proxy is valid till the person making the appointment is a service voter. Once appointed, the proxy will continue until his or her appointment is revoked by the service voter.

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