



A different tent

The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation is becoming vital to India's Eurasia policy

Terrorism, regional cooperation and the future of Afghanistan were major themes at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's Heads of State summit in Bishkek. The grouping, led by Russia and China, which includes Afghanistan and the Central Asian states of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, inducted India and Pakistan in 2017, and has become an important forum for India's Eurasian neighbourhood. In a world riven by geopolitical contestations, SCO membership provides India a vital counter to some of the other groupings it is a part of, balancing out its stated policy of pursuing "multi-alignments". It is a platform also for alignments on issues such as energy security, connectivity and trade. With India indicating that it sees little use for SAARC, the SCO provides the only multilateral platform for it to deal in close proximity with Pakistan and Afghanistan. While the failure of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Pakistani counterpart Imran Khan to hold substantive talks at the summit was marked, the occasion provided a setting for them to exchange what India called the "usual pleasantries" at the least. Beyond the summit, the two countries are committed to engaging at several other levels, including the SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure. Pakistan leads the effort to coordinate between the SCO and the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. In a paragraph on Afghanistan and the SCO-Afghanistan contact group, the Bishkek declaration stressed on an inclusive peace process led by "Afghans themselves". SCO countries committed to strengthening economic cooperation and supporting the World Trade Organisation structure, while building more people-to-people ties, tourism and cultural bonds within the grouping.

It is significant to see that where the group has failed to find consensus, such as on India's opposition to China's Belt and Road Initiative, the declaration has mentioned only the other countries in a paragraph praising the project. On the sidelines, Mr. Modi held bilateral meetings with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin. This month, Mr. Modi will meet U.S. President Donald Trump on the sidelines of the G-20 summit in Osaka. While the current India-U.S. trade impasse and plans for Indo-Pacific military cooperation will take centre stage there, it is likely that the U.S.'s specific demands on curbing defence deals with Russia, including on the S-400 anti-missile system, and denying access to Chinese telecom major Huawei for India's 5G network bids will also come up. India's strategy of balancing and straddling the competing interests of these emerging blocs will be tested. But the SCO collective and the bilateral meetings in Bishkek are an important indicator early in the Modi government's second tenure of the foreign policy arc it is attempting.

Missing remedies

West Bengal CM must reach out to doctors, and an upgrade of public health care is vital

An attack on doctors at a medical college hospital in Kolkata over the death of a patient has become the focal point of an agitation by medical professionals that is causing distress to tens of thousands. There can be no argument against the doctors' primary demands – a safe working environment and measures to ensure that unsuccessful treatments do not become a trigger for reprisals. The Indian Medical Association, which seeks to look after doctors' interests and the well-being of the community, has endorsed the demands and called for a strike on June 17. Whatever the provocation, the violence that severely injured a doctor is indefensible, and the guilty must be brought to book. Yet, the remedy cannot lie solely in new legal provisions for offences that are already covered by special laws in some States, and in the Indian Penal Code. On the other hand, there are clear factors that are deepening the social divide. Chief among these are neglect of the public health sector, unaffordable treatments under a predominantly commercialised care delivery system, State governments' reluctance to fill vacancies in public hospitals, and the increasingly high cost of medical education in the private sector. Some of these concerns were underscored in a review of violence against doctors by the *National Medical Journal of India* two years ago.

The effort to end violence against doctors and medical professionals must start with the understanding that doctors and patients do not have an antagonistic relationship, and barriers to care created by systemic deficiencies need to be eliminated. In the Kolkata case, it should be ascertained whether there was a delay in treatment due to manpower shortage, as the patient's kin claim. The police statement indicates that a communication breakdown aggravated the situation. It did not help that Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee took a hard line against the agitating doctors early on, without giving negotiations a fair chance. Considering the consequences of the breakdown for patients in several States where doctors have responded to protest calls, it is essential for Ms. Banerjee to reach out to the medical community and restore normality. The IMA should help arrive at a solution that can address the concerns of both doctors and patients: to institute better systems to counsel patients and remove unreasonable expectations about treatment outcomes. Structural change is needed. The NDA government's National Health Policy, which commits to raising public expenditure on health to 2.5% of GDP, must pay as much attention to scaling up infrastructure and the capabilities of government hospitals, as to providing financial protection for treatment in expensive private hospitals. It is the public hospitals that the poor come to, looking for compassion.

The Gujarat model, nationally

The 2019 outcome is proof that the Gujarat model is scalable at a national level, as long as it has a charismatic champion



VARGHESE K. GEORGE

"Minorities have been made to live in fear by those who believe in vote-bank politics," Prime Minister Narendra Modi told newly elected MPs of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), among whom members belonging to his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) command a clear majority in the 17th Lok Sabha. "We have to end this deception and take everyone along."

During the election campaign, however, on April 6, Mr. Modi had said about Congress president Rahul Gandhi contesting from Kerala's Wayanad constituency: "The Congress dynast... selected a seat where the majority is in minority." He was referring to the demographic projection of Hindus constituting less than half the electorate in Wayanad.

The strategy

Between the two statements lie clues about Mr. Modi's winning strategy. Winners in multiparty contests in a 'first past the post' system often emerge with a plurality of votes, leaving several minorities that could add up to a majority on the opposing side. Electoral strategies tend to focus on assembling a plurality of voters on one's side and preventing the consolidation of opposing voters. Groups based on static identities such as caste, gender and language are individual components that are usually aggregated to form social coalitions, while class, a more porous identity, has increasingly become an impossible instrument of mobilisation. Fresh realignments of the electorate are always possible until you define majority and minority in terms of a static meta-identity of religion, which precludes further negotiations.

The construction of that meta-

identity and potentially a permanent majority is the singular achievement of Hindutva 2.0. Mr. Modi's innovation to Hindu cultural nationalism. The pre-eminence of religion as the defining matrix to identify the minority and the majority is illustrated in the statements above. In secular politics, religious minorities were treated as monoliths, while Hindu identity was subordinate to its various components that were individually minorities. Manmohan Singh, India's first non-Hindu Prime Minister, led a coalition of religious, caste, linguistic and cultural minorities represented through a multitude of parties, from 2004 to 2014. He repeatedly demonstrated that he had the confidence of a majority of the members of the Lok Sabha. But the legitimacy of his authority was constantly questioned, notably by the Hindu nationalists, in an attempt to harvest the notion, which probably existed independently, of a minority-majority rule that harms national interest. The fact that the other prominent faces of that coalition were Sonia Gandhi, a Christian, and Ahmad Patel, a Muslim, fuelled this campaign.

In 1980, the Congress had built a mighty social coalition in Gujarat labelled KHAM – acronym for Kshatriyas, Harijans, Adivasis and Muslims – that commanded 56% of the votes. The KHAM formula eliminated from positions of power three powerful groups – Brahmins, Vaniyas and Patidars. The Congress remained unassailable until 1990, but the relentless Sangh Parivar campaign unravelled this coalition and replaced it with a Hindu identity. Turning KHA against M was the critical tool in this transformation – these caste groups were amalgamated into a hierarchical unity of the Hindus. Mr. Modi layered it with Gujarati pride and dismantled the Patidar dominance in the BJP. The violence against Muslims climaxed in 2002 and what followed was complete exclusion of the community from the mixture of electoral plurality. The 2019 Lok Sabha



outcome is proof that the Gujarat model – where the BJP got 62% of the vote in the State – is portable and scalable at a national level, as long as it has a charismatic champion.

Mapping the successes

The BJP won 37.4% of the vote and 55% seats nationally this summer. How and where these votes are garnered and how it impacts various social groups will have implications for India's survival and progress as a pluralist democracy. Of the total 84 seats reserved for Scheduled Castes (SCs), the BJP won 54; and of the 47 seats reserved for the Scheduled Tribes (STs), the BJP won 32. It is only partly explained by the BJP's outreach – the sweep of reserved seats by the party is largely due to the endorsement of the party's SC/ST candidates by 'higher castes'. In contrast, the Bahujan Samajwadi Party, an autonomous Dalit party, fared miserably in the SC seats even in Uttar Pradesh. It is clear that other castes are the determining factor in Dalit representation, a concern that weighed in B.R. Ambedkar's mind when he demanded separate electorates for Dalits. While the SC/ST representation of 15% and 7.5%, respectively, is fixed, so-called upper castes are increasing their parliamentary representation in BJP strongholds at the expense of the Other Backward Classes (OBC).

An analysis of caste representation in the Hindi heartland by Christophe Jaffrelot and Gilles Ver-

In the absence of good law

Why the Central government must pass legislation on public procurement



N.L. RAJAH

Recently, the Supreme Court expressed its growing concern over the award of tenders being challenged in writ proceedings almost as a matter of routine. In anguish it added, "It however appears that the window has been opened too wide as almost every small or big tender is now sought to be challenged in writ proceedings almost as a matter of routine."

Absence of legislation

The court's observations fail to appreciate the fact that these challenges, exasperating as they may be to constitutional courts, are the unfortunate effect of inadequacies in our national public procurement laws. Therefore, one is tempted to respond to the court's laments using the words of Portia in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*: "Tarry a little. There is something else."

The rude fact is that India has

still to enact parliamentary legislation to comprehensively deal with public procurement. Consider this. Procurement by the government accounts for 30% of the GDP; yet notwithstanding such fiscal significance, there is no comprehensive parliamentary legislation till date to regulate such public procurement by the Central government. Instead there is a maze of regulations, guidelines and rules.

In the past, instances of charges of corruption in public procurement have brought down elected governments. It is therefore nobody's case that existing processes are squeaky clean or enviably efficient. Given such a scenario, parliamentary legislation to regulate public procurements which provide adequate means for aggrieved parties to challenge inequities and illegalities in public procurement needs to be put in place. The government is also well aware of this inadequacy. For example, the United Progressive Alliance introduced the Public Procurement Bill in the Lok Sabha in 2012, "to regulate public procurement with the objective of ensuring transparency accountability and probity in the procurement process". The sad fact is that it was



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not passed by Parliament. The National Democratic Alliance, in 2015, revamped the provisions of the earlier Bill to come up with the Public Procurement Bill, 2015; it was a significant improvement to the 2012 Bill. Unfortunately, this Bill too is floundering. The significant point is that both versions had provisions for robust internal machinery for grievance redress arising out of public procurement. Sadly, they never became reality. Against such a background, it is hardly surprising that the award of tenders is being challenged in constitutional courts.

Existing constitutional provisions are themselves no great help in this area. While Article 282 provides for financial autonomy in public spending, there are no further provisions that address any guidance on public procurement principles, policies, procedures or

for grievance redress.

Inadequacies in State law

While this is the position with regard to public procurement by the Central government, laws to regulate State public procurement are not any better in providing effective alternate dispute resolution mechanisms. State public procurement is regulated by a State Act only in five States: Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Rajasthan, Andhra Pradesh and Assam. The grievance redress mechanisms provided in these Acts are not confidence-inspiring as they are neither independent nor effective. They fall woefully short of the prescriptions set out by the Supreme Court in *Madras Bar Association v. Union of India*, in which the court spelt out the requirements that tribunals must possess to qualify them as being "efficacious alternative remedy" – a phrase so wisely provided in Article 226 by our founding fathers. The emphasis being on the word "efficacious". The Madras High Court, in a judgment, while testing the efficacy of these mechanisms, denounced them as mere "Caesar to Caesar appeals".

Further, getting back to the issue of tenders being challenged, courts have imposed such strin-

gers showed that a decade-old trend of the return of the 'upper castes' over-representation and the erosion of OBC representation was reinforced in 2019. The highest representation for the OBCs and Muslims in this region in the period since 1989 was in 2004, when the Congress-led United Progressive Alliance came to power. Besides the geographical core, there is also a pan-Indian social core of 'upper castes' that drives the growth of the BJP. Hindutva, which is increasingly indistinguishable from Indian nationalism, could grow well in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, where sub-nationalism has limited appeal, but Gujarat is an example of sustaining a strong local culture as a subset of the larger pan-Indian religious identity. The success of the BJP in Karnataka, and its inroads in West Bengal and even Kerala are clear indications of the ability of the party to subsume minority cultures.

Issue of delimitation

If another principle of representative democracy, 'one person, one vote', is applied mindlessly, the representative weight of the present geographical core of the BJP could increase at the cost of regional peripheries. There is currently a constitutional freeze on a national delimitation of Lok Sabha constituencies (that is, reassignment of constituencies among States and Union Territories in proportion to their population) till 2026. Since the linguistic minorities have been more successful in stabilising their populations, they stand to lose when representation in Parliament is redistributed across State borders. It is evident that post-delimitation, Andhra Pradesh, Telangana, Tamil Nadu and Kerala will have far fewer MPs as a percentage of the total strength of the Lok Sabha. The seats that these linguistic minorities lose will shift to the Hindi-speaking States, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Bihar and U.P. All these States overwhelmingly voted for

the BJP in 2014 and 2019. The consequences of such a change have still not been adequately addressed.

The renewed debate on language education in the country only complicates the situation further. Overall, the irony is that by application of the principles of democracy, the representative nature of the democracy is being undermined.

Other than electoral politics where numbers matter, most segments of the Indian polity, such as the judiciary, media, academia and bureaucracy, have always been inadequately representative in nature. The rise of OBC politics since the 1990s increased their representation in bureaucracy and politics, held back the march of Hindutva and also tamed the most unrepresentative of all modern institutions, the market, in the following decades by forcing increased social spending. The social churn in India since the 1990s must therefore be understood not from a Mandal-Mandir binary perspective, but as a triangular dynamic that includes the market as well. Markets do not run by the principle of 'one person one vote', but by voting rights proportional to one's ownership of capital. This market principle has leached substantially into western democracies such as the U.S., where corporations are now counted as 'people' and allowed to spend unlimited money to influence elections. Electoral bonds in India are a step in this direction.

Factoring in the market

A permanent majority unburdened by constant negotiations and the need for representation could subordinate democracy to the market, rather than the other way around – that is, the Gujarat model. Hindutva politics understands the market in national, not global, terms and that could cause tensions between the two, however. But that is a whole different dynamic.

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gent self-imposed restrictions in the area of judicial review *vis-à-vis* tenders that the power to interfere is very sparingly exercised, if at all. The procuring officer is empowered by judicial principles such as "Government must be allowed a play in the joints". Given such a feeble legal framework which demands so little accountability, the award of tenders can become a happy hunting ground for the unscrupulous.

While such restraints imposed on courts by themselves would be admirable if alternative efficacious remedy is available, they, unfortunately, would only encourage the growth of other negative aspects of public procurement, in the absence of an alternate efficacious remedy to redress grievances. In such a depressing legal scenario, it is no surprise that public procurement tender awards are often challenged in constitutional courts. Till such time as a robust efficacious alternative remedy is provided, one would only appeal to the constitutional courts using the words of the Bard of Avon: "Upon the heat and flame of thy distemper sprinkle cool patience."

N.L. Rajah is Senior Advocate, Madras High Court

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.

Doctors stir

There is no crime more deplorable than an assault on the saviours of human life. A doctor who enters the medical profession taking the Hippocratic Oath will never deliberately harm a patient. Those in the medical profession must be given moral and emotional support. The government must also assure doctors that criminal acts against them will be punishable (Page 1, "Doctors stir: Home Ministry sends advisory to West Bengal", June 16).
Dr. GEORGE VAREEKAL, Burhanpur, Madhya Pradesh

■ While the concerns of the striking medical doctors may be genuine, as no doctor can discharge his or her duties properly when in constant threat of retaliation for acts

done in good faith, a tough political stance too can end up vitiating an already surcharged atmosphere. The government needs to initiate confidence-building measures. At the same time, the NDA government should not view the crisis in West Bengal as an opportunity to enhance its political prospects. Health is not an issue where one can resort to the detestable act of fishing in troubled waters.
V. SUBRAMANIAN, Chennai

GMO concerns

Genetically modified (GM) crops come with their share of concerns. Opponents argue that GM organisms have not been studied extensively to determine the effects and are pushing for GMO food labels. It is surprising how GM brinjal

seedlings were sold in Haryana ('Ground Zero' page, "The mysterious case of GM brinjal cultivation", June 15). Unregulated selling of seeds has serious consequences for India's biodiversity, especially as the country is not adequately equipped to detect GM contamination. Also, the effect of GM crops on pollinator populations remains, surprisingly, poorly understood. The paradox of India's agricultural policies is that it is still unable to conserve its present food grain, fruit and vegetables output or ensure the welfare of our farming community. Mergers and acquisitions over the last few years have given a few multinational firms a dominant position to control over 60% of global seed sales. The same seed

companies, curiously, appear to sell more than 60% of pesticides too.
H.N. RAMAKRISHNA, Bengaluru

■ While the government may claim that the case is an isolated event, it is important to investigate the nexus behind the supply of seeds. We cannot afford to be fostering a Frankenstein's monster as far as Indian agriculture is concerned. GM crops have probably entered our food chains and the situation is ripe to debate the issue transparently.
RISHAV AGARWAL, Bhubaneswar, Odisha

Water conservation

The depletion of water tables is causing unprecedented rural distress. Rainwater harvesting, conservation, recharge and increasing

green cover need to be prioritised. Farming needs to adopt scientific methods and technological techniques to get optimum yields ("PM writes to village chiefs to save rainwater", June 16).
N. SADHASIVA REDDY, Bengaluru

Go far, go together

It is the fact of being together and mutual camaraderie which gives elderly/senior citizens a lot of confidence and keeps us fully charged. Let me cite an example. A

group of us (seniors whose average age is 75 years) from the Mylapore Club, Chennai, plan almost every month to travel across India to places such as Courtallam, Kodaikanal (Tamil Nadu) and even Rishikesh in the north forgetting our age (just a number) and health issues. Much can be achieved even by a group of seniors ('Open Page', June 16).
PYRAMID NATARAJAN, Chennai

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

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

A story titled "Activists and memes push for women's reservation Bill" (June 15, 2019) erroneously said that Rakesh Sharma was the first Indian to land on the moon. He should have been referred to as the first Indian in space.

The second deck headline in a Business page interview, "Coal will remain the dominant source" (June 15, 2019), read: "We are chasing a 600-million tonne target this fiscal, says Coal India chairman." It should be 660-million tonne.

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Qualifying for Leader of the Opposition

The Lok Sabha Speaker should consider the leader of the largest pre-poll alliance



After the election of the Lok Sabha Speaker, the question of a formally recognised Opposition party and Leader of the Opposition (LoP) of the Lok Sabha under the Salary and Allowances of Leaders of Opposition in Parliament Act, 1977, will arise. The Act extends to LoPs in the Lok Sabha and the Rajya Sabha the same official status, allowances and perks that are admissible to Cabinet Ministers. In the case of the Lok Sabha, however, this is subject to recognition of the leader by the Speaker. In the 16th Lok Sabha, the largest party in the Opposition, the Congress, had 44 seats. After careful consideration, it was decided not to recognise the party's leader as LoP. Now, the matter needs to be revisited in the context of the 17th Lok Sabha.

The election to the 17th Lok Sabha was the most fiercely and bitterly fought one in the history of the Republic. The decisive victory of the ruling alliance and its leadership has been widely welcomed as being in the best interests of the polity and the people. Above everything, the nation needs a stable government and a strong leader capable of taking firm decisions to ensure security, development and good governance within the rule of law. However, for the success and survival of democracy, an effective Opposition is also a categorical imperative. It is said that if no Opposition exists, one may have to be created. Also, if there is no Opposition outside, there is every danger that it may grow within.

Leaders of Opposition over time Historically, the first officially designated Opposition party in Parliament emerged from the break up of the all-dominant Congress party in power. In 1969, when Indira Gandhi was the Prime Minister, the Congress split to form the Indian National Congress (Requisitionists) and the Indian National Congress (Organisation). The Leader of INC(O), Ram Subhag Singh, became the first person to be formally recognised as LoP in the



"An effective Opposition is an imperative for the success and survival of democracy." PM Manmohan Singh with the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Sushma Swaraj, during the golden jubilee celebrations of the Central Vigilance Commission in New Delhi in February 2014.

Lok Sabha.

In the 6th Lok Sabha, the Congress sat in the Opposition. Following splits in the Congress as well as the Janata Party, Yashwantrao B. Chavan, C.M. Stephen and Jagjivan Ram were successive LoPs.

Until 1977, there were no emoluments and perks attached to the position of LoP. There is no provision in the Constitution or even in the Lok Sabha Rules of Procedure in regard to the recognition of the LoP. Right from the first Lok Sabha, the practice has been to recognise the leader of the largest party in Opposition as the LoP provided that party has a strength that is enough to constitute the quorum for a sitting of the House, or one-tenth of the total membership of the House – at present that comes to 55 members. From the 9th to the 15th Lok Sabhas, since the requirement of having a minimum strength of 55 members was fulfilled, the Lok Sabha had duly recognised Opposition parties and LoPs, including Rajiv Gandhi, L.K. Advani, Atal Bihari Vaj-

payee, P.V. Narasimha Rao, Sharad Pawar, Sonia Gandhi and Sushma Swaraj.

The 1977 Act defines LoP as that member of the House who is the "Leader in that House of the party in opposition to the Government having the greatest numerical strength and recognised as such by the Chairman of the Council of States or the Speaker of the House of the People, as the case may be." The Speaker's decisions in this regard have so far been determined by Direction 121(c) which laid down one of the conditions for recognition of party or group as having "at least a strength equal to the quorum fixed to constitute a sitting of the House, that is one-tenth of the total number of members of the House". The Leaders and Chief Whips of Recognised Parties and Groups in Parliament (Facilities) Act, 1998 also refers to a recognised party in the Lok Sabha as a party that has not less than 55 members.

In the recently concluded election

to the Lok Sabha, the Opposition was decimated, but thankfully not obliterated. In fact, the largest party in Opposition, the Congress, has improved its position from 44 in 2014 to 52 now. It is short of only three members to reach the magical number of 55. Given the level at which ground-level politics has been operating in recent decades, it should not be difficult for the Congress leadership to augment its party strength by three members. At the same time, the ruling dispensation is expected to show magnanimity at this hour of its splendid victory, and the new occupant of the office of Speaker, realising the importance of an effective and respected Opposition in a democracy, may reconsider the content of Direction 121(c) suitably.

The Speaker's discretion

Since there is no constitutional provision, the 1977 law does not provide for the requirement of 55 members as an essential pre-requisite. As it all depends on the Speaker's directions and discretion, it may be hoped that rightful action will be taken. The simple way out is to substitute 'pre-poll alliance' for 'party' or say 'party or pre-poll alliance'. In any case, pre-poll alliances are a fact of our political life and are already being extended credibility and legitimacy in the matter of the President and Governors deciding on who to call first for forming the government in cases where no party secures a clear majority support in the House.

Incidentally, what is decided in the matter of recognition of the LoP, and in treating pre-poll alliances at par with parties, may hold tremendous potential for the growth of a sound two- or three-party (or alliance) system. It could end the present system, a preposterous one, of more than 2,000 parties being registered with the Election Commission. If and when the much-awaited law for political parties is enacted, it may provide for candidates of an alliance contesting on a common symbol and an agreed common minimum programme with only national alliances or parties contesting for the Lok Sabha. These aspects, however, call for separate in-depth analysis, consideration and debate.

Subhash Kashyap is a former Secretary General of the Lok Sabha

FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

Ethics cannot be outsourced

Why having an external news ombudsman may not work



A.S. PANNEERSELVAN

How effective is the office of the news ombudsman in this age of polarisation? Are news ombudsmen inherently liberal? Are they fair to conservative views? Some readers saw a liberal bias in my handling of complaints relating to a report in this newspaper on the food served by The Akshaya Patra Foundation. The Organization of News Ombudsmen and Standards Editors and the Columbia Journalism Review (CJR) in New York discussed these contentious issues at length recently.

Growing distance

It was a distinguished panel. Todd Gitlin, Professor and Chair of the Ph.D. programme at the Columbia Journalism School, articulated the liberal view. John Carney from *Breitbart News*, a right-wing news and opinion website, sought more space for conservative voices. Mr. Gitlin argued that workers today spend all their time in soul-crushing conditions and therefore need stimulation. Their need for sensation is fulfilled by various media, which have fostered a society of disposable emotions and short attention spans. Such a society, he said, threatens to make democracy a sideshow. Mr. Carney said that liberals due to their biases refuse to grant a fair space for conservative viewpoints on a range of issues. Kelly McBride, the Craig Newmark Journalism Ethics Chair at The Poynter Institute, was brought in as a neutral voice. The issue was not resolved, but the discussion helped in realising the growing distance between the two strands of thought and the strain of this on the information ecology.

Is there a takeaway for a Readers' Editor from such an interminable debate? How do we look at publications that are removing the position of Readers' Editor? Is it possible to externalise this role? In the eyes of CJR, Public Editors and ombudsmen have historically stood as critical advocates for consumers of news, identifying blind spots that outlets can't see themselves and operating as collectors of critical opinion when decisions go awry. CJR argued that the flameout of Public Editors in the U.S., which reached a point of despair in 2017 when *The New York Times* sent its last Public Editor packing, is the most visible sign of the growing distance between news organisations and the people they

serve. To restore a sense of fairness, and to handle difficulties in journalism in an election cycle when issues are going to be contentious, and voices partisan and vicious, the journalism magazine has appointed four new public editors, for *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, CNN, and MSNBC.

A delicate balance

While I understand the reasons that prompted CJR to have four public editors for these major U.S. media outlets, I am not sure whether it will be effective. A news ombudsman is given unbridled access to the process of news-gathering. Post-publication of a story, he or she discusses with the Editor the thought process behind the decision to publish that story. Ombudsmen, editors and reporters share the ethical framework of journalism. I am not sure what the level of access the CJR-nominated Public Editors will have to the reporting and the editing teams of



their respective news organisations. Further, to have a Public Editor is to have a self-regulation mechanism; hence, it would be better for publications to nominate a designated person with clearly formulated terms of reference, rather than have an external body. The relationship between the news ombudsman and the Editor is rather nuanced and I am not sure whether an external ombudsman can maintain that delicate balance.

As a journalist, I was not only inspired but also shaped by George Orwell's writings. Some of the phrases he used helped me understand the misuse of language in our political landscape: Newspeak, Big Brother, the Thought Police, the Two Minutes Hate, doublethink, unperson, memory hole, and the Ministry of Truth. However, as a Readers' Editor, I realise that my job should exhibit a certain level of restraint. It should not hamper the free flow of information and the blooming of diverse and contrarian ideas. A good copy editor helps the text gain its full glow without drawing any attention to the act of editing. A news ombudsman performs a similar task for journalistic ethics.

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SINGLE FILE

Self-serving nations

National interests are taking precedence over international issues such as terrorism

RADHIKA CHHABRA



Last month, China lifted its 'technical hold' on the designation of Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar, paving the way for him to be labelled as a global terrorist under the 1267 Sanctions Committee of the UN Security Council (UNSC). This marked a high point in India's diplomatic endeavours. However, there is a need to analyse the decision-making process leading to the adoption of the resolution.

Both China and Pakistan have questionable track records when it comes to condemning terrorist attacks around the world. China, on the behest of Pakistan, repeatedly refused to list Azhar, despite receiving proof from Indian diplomatic missions regarding his role in many terrorist attacks. Additionally, China labels anyone with a dissenting opinion as a terrorist, giving Beijing a free hand to suppress any kind of dissent, as can be seen through the accusations levelled against the Dalai Lama and Dolkun Isa, leaders of the minority Tibetan and Muslim Uyghur communities, respectively. The accusation against the Dalai Lama as engaging in "terrorism under disguise" was met with strong international condemnation, a fact that China chooses to ignore as it suits its domestic policy objectives regarding control over Tibet.

Pakistan has been successfully evading responsibility for the JeM's actions despite Azhar's designation. India has been unable to attribute JeM's actions to Pakistan under the Articles on Responsibility of States for Internationally Wrongful Acts and subsequently hold the country responsible for the breach of its international obligation to comply with the sanction requirements. This is largely due to the systematic loopholes inherent in the Articles on Responsibility relating to the ascription of acts of a non-state actor.

Placing Azhar on the list without formally associating him with either the Pathankot or Pulwama terror attack reduces the possibility of Pakistan being on the receiving end of strong sanctions from the international community. The UN's actions are telling of the diplomatic clout China wields in the international arena where the Chinese foreign spokesperson claims a victory for Chinese and Pakistani diplomacy, while ensuring that India's demands are not fully met.

Blacklisting terrorist organisations in the past has proven to be futile as evidenced by Hafiz Saeed's active involvement in terrorist activities despite being designated as a terrorist under the same sanctions committee.

Global challenges like terrorism require global cooperation. However, countries continue to think and act in terms of self-interest. In a bid to become powerhouses in a multipolar world, countries like China will keep dictating terms, which is bound to make the forging of any global agreement against terrorism difficult.

Radhika Chhabra is a researcher with the Observer Research Foundation



DATA POINT

Peace position

The world has been more peaceful in 2019 compared to 2018, according to the Global Peace Index. This is the first time the peace score has improved in the last five years. Afghanistan replaced Syria as the least peaceful nation following the defeat of the Islamic State. India dropped five ranks. By **Varun B. Krishnan**

Region split

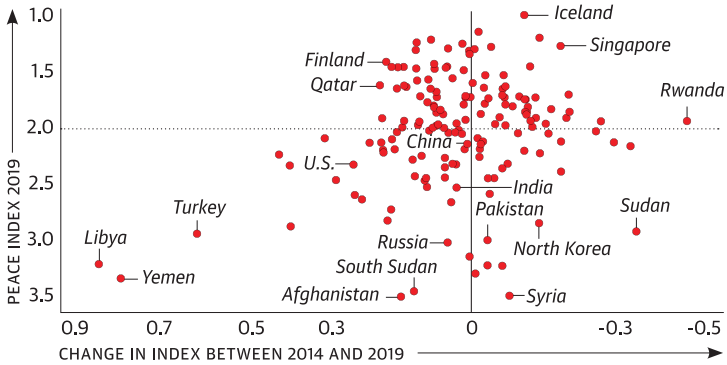
After WANA*, South Asia is the least peaceful region in the world. Central America and the Caribbean experienced the largest fall in the peace index due to civil unrest. A negative change indicates that the region became more peaceful

| Region | Score in 2019 | Change in score since 2018 | Change since 2014 |
|--------------------|---------------|----------------------------|-------------------|
| WANA* | 2.511 | -0.016 | 0.151 |
| South Asia | 2.411 | 0.009 | 0.01 |
| Russia & Eurasia | 2.301 | -0.038 | 0.008 |
| Sub-Saharan Africa | 2.252 | 0.009 | -0.017 |
| CAC* | 2.132 | 0.03 | 0.022 |
| South America | 2.101 | 0.018 | 0.062 |
| Asia Pacific | 1.897 | -0.015 | -0.026 |
| North America | 1.864 | 0.029 | 0.142 |
| Europe | 1.666 | -0.01 | 0.057 |

*CAC: Central America and the Caribbean; WANA: West Asia and North Africa

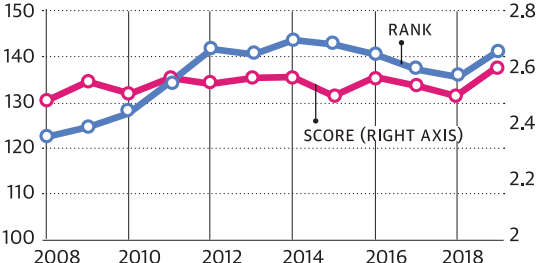
Conflict theatres

The graph plots the peace index score in 2019 against the change in score from 2014. The lower the score, the higher the peace in a nation. Countries to the left of the vertical zero line became less peaceful in this period



India slips

India's ranking and scores have deteriorated largely due to "internal conflicts", the country's relation with Pakistan, and border tensions with China. In 2018, the report noted that India's score was high on the "Political Terror Scale"



The Global Peace Index ranks 163 countries according to three broad themes: extent of conflict, safety & security, and level of militarisation. It is based on an assessment of 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators

Source: Institute for Economics & Peace

FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 17, 1969

Opposed to separate Telengana

A two-hour discussion on the Telengana issue at the Executive Committee of the Congress Parliamentary Party here this morning [New Delhi, June 16] revealed a consensus in the party against the demand for a separate Telengana State, imposition of President's rule and resignation of the Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister, Mr. K. Brahmananda Reddi. Most of the participants not only opposed the demands of the pro-Telengana leaders but also urged the Central leaders to strengthen the hands of Mr. Brahmananda Reddi and give him all assistance to deal with the agitation firmly.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 17, 1919.

Presidency Association Protest.

The Bombay Presidency Association met on the 10th and 13th instant [of June in Bombay] to consider what steps should be taken in connection with the deportation of Mr. B.G. Horniman and placing of the 'Bombay Chronicle' under an order of precensorship, and resolutions were passed by majority (1) strongly condemning the action of the Government of Bombay in deporting without trial Mr. B.G. Horniman, a leading member of the Association and also of its Council and an English journalist held in highest esteem by a large body of public opinion for his fearless advocacy of Indian aspirations and for his love of liberty and fair play and asking the Government in the interest of justice that the said order be immediately cancelled; (2) Strongly protesting against the unusual and drastic order of precensorship passed against the 'Bombay Chronicle' and expressing the opinion that the same is entirely unwarranted and oppressive and respectfully urging the Governor of Bombay in Council to cancel the order immediately in order to allay public feeling.

CONCEPTUAL Crown shyness

BIOLOGY

This refers to the natural phenomenon wherein certain trees located near each other grow in such a way that their branches do not touch each other. This causes clear spaces or gaps to form between the branches of adjacent trees, thus creating different natural patterns. Scientists have proposed various hypotheses to explain this phenomenon. Some speculate that crown shyness may be a mutually beneficial arrangement that can help prevent destructive competition between trees that are located near each other. Others believe it is the result of the damage caused to the branches when trees are close to each other.

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Watch the Tiwas of Assam celebrate their harvest

<http://bit.ly:AssamTiwas>