

Opinion

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YOU HAVE TO give it to Prime Minister Modi to throw up issues that will distract the attention of the people. He bets on the fact that the Opposition will respond by speaking in multiple voices and not always with irrefutable facts or logic.

Pulwama was a telling example. By every account, there was a massive intelligence failure. The governor of Jammu & Kashmir admitted as much when he said on February 15, 2019, "We could not detect or check the vehicle full of explosives moving on the highway... The fact that we did not know that there was a *fidayeen* among them (local militants) is also part of the intelligence failure."

No government could keep quiet after the attack. Balakot was the answer, the Pakistan Air Force was half-prepared, the Indian Air Force hit the targets, and Pakistan shot down an IAF aircraft. The doubts are not about the strike but about the number of casualties. So, what do we have? — a worrying failure in Pulwama and a significant success in Balakot.

Distract attention

Mr Narendra Modi successfully fused Pulwama and Balakot. Anyone questioning the intelligence failure in Pulwama (and the tragic loss of 40 lives) was mischievously interpreted as if he was questioning the IAF's success in Balakot, and labelled an anti-national. The Opposition — at least in the Hindi-speaking states — was not able to respond to this clever election tactic and make the people understand the distinction between the Pulwama failure and the Balakot success. Mr Modi successfully distracted the people and took the election discourse away from the sluggish economy, unemployment, farmers' distress, communal hatred, lynching, etc.

After the election to the Lok Sabha, the focus should return to the sluggish economy, unemployment, farmers' distress, communal hatred, lynching, etc. That should have been the thrust of the President's address; that should have been the core of the Prime Minister's replies in Parliament; and that should be the theme of the pre-Budget debates. Alas, it is not so, and what is hogging the public space is Mr Modi's slogan of One Nation, One Election. It is the new distracting tactic.

Unconstitutional

In a federal parliamentary democracy, the council of ministers in the Central government and the state government shall be collectively responsible, respectively, to the House of the People [Article 75(3)] and to the Legislative Assembly [Article 164(2)]. The 'responsibility' to the Legislature means that the council of ministers must enjoy the confidence of the majority in the Legislature every day and every hour. The moment the council of ministers loses the support of the majority, it should go. The notion that such a council of ministers can continue in office until another council of ministers proved it has the support of the majority is antithetical to the fundamental principles of a parliamentary democracy. Suppose a government is voted out, but no other person can muster the support of a majority in the Legislature, will the defeated prime minister or chief minister continue in office? That would be parliamentary sacrilege. Mid-term

ACROSS THE AISLE

P Chidambaram



One Nation, One Election, Many Fears



Women holding placards and candles during a protest against the recent mob lynchings in Ahmedabad

REUTERS

election is the only legitimate answer.

Equally antithetical to a parliamentary democracy are suggestions to the effect that the tenure of a Legislative Assembly can be extended or curtailed despite the prescribed term. The people elect candidates for a prescribed term: it will be an affront to the people if the term is extended or curtailed.

Evidently, the campaign for One Nation, One Election has been launched with the full knowledge that it is unconstitutional under the present Constitution. Although the protagonists will not admit it yet, their real intention is to change the Constitution. The direction of change is also visible: unitary, not federal; stronger Executive, weaker Legislature; uniformity, not diversity; common identity, not multiple cultures; and majoritarian, not consensual. The direction is toward a presidential system of government.

Bewarned of changes

All of the above can be achieved only by amending, extensively, the present Constitution of India. It appears that the BJP is not averse to the idea of drastically amending the Constitution because they believe that, since the RSS was not represented in the Constituent Assembly, they are not obliged to take ownership of the present Constitution. It is obvious that the RSS and BJP want a Constitution of their liking and the One Nation, One Election campaign is a precursor to changing the Constitution.

No comparable country with a federal system of government has simultaneous elections to the national parliament and to the state/provincial legislatures — notable examples are Australia, Canada and Germany. The United States has a presidential system of government and hence is not comparable. Besides, the US has simultaneous elections and non-

simultaneous elections (one election every four years and one election every two years). The argument that a country cannot be in perpetual election mode is also hollow: what does it matter if in a handful of state elections are held when due? If any country is in so-called perpetual election mode, it is the US where the House of Representatives is elected every two years! The US seems no worse for it.

The BJP should make plain its intentions. If it wants a presidential system of government, let it say so openly. Let the people decide if the priorities before the country, at this stage, are the sluggish economy, unemployment, farmers' distress, communal hatred and lynching, or installing the first Executive President, subservient Cabinet and powerless Parliament.



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INSIDE TRACK

COOMI KAPOOR



Congress in limbo

The Congress is in limbo with Rahul Gandhi remaining adamant that he will not continue as party president. A few alternative scenarios are being talked about. The old guard is pushing three names for president — Mallikarjun Kharge, Ashok Gehlot and Sushil Kumar Shinde — since they are considered loyalists and have the requisite experience. Kharge's performance as the party's leader in the previous Lok Sabha gives him an edge, particularly as he is from the south. Another proposal is for Manmohan Singh to be made party chief. His name has been floated by backers of Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, who want her to eventually take over the party. An alternative is that Sonia Gandhi becomes party chief temporarily. Meanwhile, there is a buzz in the Congress that someone close to the Gandhi family could jump ship. Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury's appointment as Congress leader in the Lok Sabha has not been well received. No name has been announced as deputy leader in the Lok Sabha since Manish Tewari and Shashi Tharoor are most reluctant to work under him.

Poetic advice

With opposition parties yet to recover from their devastating defeat, the mood is palpably glum in Parliament. Kapil Sibal, the Congress's legal brain and the party's in-house poet, has, however, not lost his equanimity. When asked if he had composed a poem to suit the occasion, he rattled off a verse: "*Chal chod batein kal ki/Mat pooch kiski gali/Is mein milega na kuchch bhii/Har kadam pe kismat badalti* (Forget yesterday's events/ Don't ask whose fault it is/ You will get nothing out of this/ With each step, one's fortunes keeps changing)."

No room left

A group of first-time YSR Congress MPs were noticed in Parliament's Central Hall, intently studying portraits on the wall of some of the biggest names in Indian politics. They especially examined the placement of a recently installed portrait of Atal Bihari Vajpayee. The YSR Congress wants to put forward a demand that the portrait of the late Y S Rajasekhara Reddy, former Andhra Pradesh CM and father of party president and present CM Jagannathan Reddy, be installed in Central Hall. The problem is that there is not an inch of space to accommodate another frame. Vajpayee's portrait had been

squeezed in with great difficulty. A friendly journalist suggested that the party should instead petition for a statue of YSR Reddy to be erected in the Parliament complex.

Limelight stolen

Trinamool leader Derek O'Brien is used to being the centre of attention in Delhi. But last week, first-time Trinamool MP Mahua Moitra stole the limelight. O'Brien tweeted and re-tweeted his speech in the Rajya Sabha but it was Moitra's maiden speech in the Lok Sabha which grabbed all the attention. The former investment banker's hard-hitting address on fascism was noticed and went viral on social media. Though he was not in the chair when Moitra spoke, the new Speaker, Om Birla, has been praised for letting first-time MPs speak at length. Among those to avail of the opportunity to make a maiden speech, this time in the Rajya Sabha, was K J Alphons, who was Minister of State for Culture and Tourism in the last government. But as minister, Alphons was never able to answer questions or make statements on behalf of his ministry due to continuous disruptions.

Notable omission

With S Jaishankar and Jugal Thakor filing their nominations for the two Gujarat Rajya Sabha seats, which have been vacant since the resignations of Amit Shah and Smriti Irani from the Upper House, Gujarat OBC leader Alpesh Thakor's nose is slightly out of joint. Thakor, who heads a popular anti-prohibition movement and helped a resurgent Congress during the last Assembly polls, recently quit the party. It was expected that he would join the BJP and be suitably rewarded. Thakor, along with two other Congress MLAs, should normally have been disqualified for violating the anti-defection law by quitting the party. However, Gujarat Assembly Speaker Rajendra Trivedi of the BJP is yet to give his ruling.

Back soon

Manmohan Singh's Rajya Sabha term expired on June 14. The Congress had planned to bring back the former prime minister to the Upper House from Tamil Nadu. There are three vacancies from the state and the DMK is reportedly agreeable to offering its extra votes. But with the death last week of Rajya Sabha BJP MP Madan Lal Saini, the Congress does not require the DMK's help. Singh can now be elected from Rajasthan.

The long and short of it

Ace golfer Gary Woodland rediscovers touch and wins the US Open

OVER THE TOP

Meraj Shah



THE JUMP SHOT. There's probably no closer equivalent in sport to the golf swing when it comes to athleticism, artistry, and skill, than basketball's paean to grace. In 2013, while following Gary Woodland's group at the CIMB Classic in Malaysia, (like all of golf's long hitters, Woodland had a large gallery following him) I heard a sports columnist mention that Woodland had played collegiate basketball in the US before changing track to golf. Curiosity piqued, I spent the evening digging through Washburn University's sports archives. Woodland played for the school's Division II for a year and I finally found footage of a game in which Woodland played and scored. I watched, waiting to see an explosion of fast twitch muscles, a fast break...something that would serve as a harbinger to the powerful action Woodland has been known for since he became a professional golfer in

2007. To my surprise, Woodland the basketballer showed absolutely nothing in common with Woodland the golfer—he didn't have any prodigious speed on the court, and spent the game pitching in for defense.

And then, he got a free throw: he bounced the ball three times, stopped for a couple of seconds, internalising the hoop, and leapt high into the air. Some shots deserve a slow motion replay: the ball rolled back on his palm, and then flew without a wobble, perfectly on its axis, and, in its dying moments softly plopped through the basket. A perfect three-pointer.

At the CIMB that year, Woodland used his length to completely overpower the course, but was outsmarted by Ryan Moore in a playoff. And that was the last time I wrote about him.

In the last six years, Woodland has acquired a reputation for not finishing the job. Before he teed it up at Pebble Beach in sole possession of the lead on the final day, he'd held the 54-hole lead six times and squandered it. And that's why the punters, your columnist included did not give the big man much of a chance against a stellar chasing group on the final day. Nipping at his



Gary Woodland plays his second shot on the 14th hole during the first round of the Rocket Mortgage Classic golf tournament

USA TODAY SPORTS

heels was world number one Brooks Koepka—who believes, firmly that Major events are his exclusive turf; and former world number ones Adam Scott and Justin Rose. For the record, Koepka, Justin Rose and Adam Scott, have spent

a combined 37 weeks at the top of the men's world rankings.

Scott, made the first move with an eagle and two birdies in a front-nine 31, but lost steam on the back nine. Rose, the 2013 champion, evened things out with

an opening birdie, but bogeyed the second hole and never caught Woodland again, who played the first eight holes in two under. Koepka started the day four strokes back but, in a reprise of the kind of play that's seen him win four of the last nine Majors, knocked in eight one-putts in the first 11 holes to pull within a stroke of Woodland. "All right, man, we've got a ballgame now," Koepka said he was thinking at the time. Koepka shot four rounds in the 60s at the US Open—an amazing achievement that only goes to show just how well Woodland played. "Props to him for the way he hung in there," Koepka said.

It all came together in my head watching Woodland sink his 30-footer for birdie on the 72nd hole at Pebble Beach. Suddenly, I was reminded of that jump shot—the measured grace of it. And that's when it occurred to me that Woodland has always had that ability and touch—it just got repressed somewhere, obscured by the man's abilities to hit the ball long.

Woodland, confessed Saturday that he never stood over the ball on practice greens as a youngster pretending he was putting to win his national championship. "I don't know if I spent any time on a putting green when I was a kid," he said with a laugh. "I was too busy hitting driver."

Woodland, still has the power: He's been ranked seventh to 13th on the PGA tour in driving distance in the last five

seasons. In the final round, he on the 582-yard par-5 14th he pummelled the ball 314 yards down the middle off the tee and then sent a 5-wood just over the green. But it was the chip that followed that really demonstrated why he won—downhill from the rough on a fast green that he calmly hit to three feet. On the par-3, 17th hole, his tee shot landed a world away from the pin (91 feet) but he had no trouble getting down in two. For all his explosive shots, Woodland's new-found abilities to scramble helped him restrict bogies to a paltry four all week. "I have a short game now I can rely on," Woodland said. "I don't have to focus on ball striking."

Things have come full circle for a man who gave up on a career in basketball after the Washburn team got rolled over by Kansas University. Apparently, in an interview he said to TaylorMade, "They were so much bigger and faster than we were. I quickly realised I wasn't going to be able to play basketball as a professional — I probably could've gone overseas and played, but I wasn't going to be able to do it as a career."

He certainly made a career as a pro golfer but for the final push to the summit, he didn't need to be faster or bigger; nor did he need speed and power, but touch. Which is exactly Woodland the basketball player always had.

A golfer, Meraj Shah also writes about the game