

Needed: A 370 type job on the economy



MARGINAL UTILITY

TCA SRINIVASA RAGHAVAN

a long line of such initiatives.

The pattern was set by Jawaharlal Nehru. He was, in every way, a fantastic man who, even though his government didn't have enough money to think big, always thought bigger than big and deeper than deep. But, alas, he completely messed up India's economy by insisting on an autarkic, capital-intensive investment model.

His daughter Indira Gandhi was exactly the same. She was a brilliant political leader and for a brief while made us all very proud. But like her daddy, she messed up the economy with her emphasis on public ownership of industrial and financial resources. If Nehru had created the problem of wrong allocation of resources, Indira Gandhi worsened it.

P V Narasimha Rao tried to fix the allocation problem but only half-heartedly. He therefore fell between two stools and was not re-elected for a second term.

Then there was Manmohan Singh who also served two terms. But he failed to fix the Nehru-Indira allocation problem in which an increasing proportion of national resources always gets misallocated.

In 2014 along came Narendra Modi. Everyone thought he would direct resources where they would be used most efficiently. But he carried on with the Nehru-Indira policies and has disappointed everyone. He has, however, avoided the Narasimha Rao trap. He was handsomely re-elected in 2019.

The real structural problem

So in economic terms, India has remained completely unchanged since 1957. It therefore continues to waste national savings, which have always been inadequate.

Economists know this and love to talk about economic structures. However, each economist has his own interpretation of the term and there is no consensus on what constitutes a structural problem.

Being economists, they also deliberately miss the point that the real structural problem is not economic but political. This is because both the Constitution and the electoral system emphasise equity over efficiency.

This has resulted in every 10-year period of good growth being followed by a decade-and-a-half of wasting the fruits of that growth on distribution. This, if you ask me, is the real structural problem, not some intellectually attractive but practically useless economic hypothesis. Our political system acts as a major drag on the economy.

We are well and truly stuck. Or, to use Gunnar Myrdal's famous 1967 description, India is a soft state. Later, Lee Kuan Yew said the same thing about India.

What Modi must do

So what can Mr Modi do within these constitutional and political constraints? Indeed, can he do anything at all?

The technical solutions provided by economics are well known. But as all prime ministers have known, they are the least of their problems because the real opposition is political, and the most difficult ones of these are posed by members of the ruling party.

Nehru faced it and had to force the pace because his party was snapping at his heels. Indira Gandhi too was under attack by her party colleagues and changed the DOS of the Indian economy.

The same thing happened to Narasimha Rao and to Manmohan Singh. Both would have liked to make a clean break from the Nehru-Indira model but it was the Congress party that prevented it. It seems likely that Mr Modi faces a similar problem — if not from the BJP, certainly from the RSS.

After all, as we all know, it is always more difficult to convince your friends when they have old-fashioned views. What I would suggest therefore is an economic *chintan shivir* where a genuine attempt is made by the government to educate its supporters. This *shivir* should pass a resolution that reverses the Congress party's Avadi resolution of 1955. It must hand the baton back to the private sector.

Or, if I may, Mr Modi must pull off the economic equivalent of his Article 370 coup. No one thought it was possible. But Mr Modi showed that it was.

This is what he must now do with the economy — move the government out of the way in the same spirit as he moved Article 370 out of Kashmir's way.

Making the most of what you have

There is much to learn from Bharat Ratna Pranab Mukherjee



PLAIN POLITICS

ADITI PHADNIS

It was hot, that evening of May 22, 2004, a day before the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) was to be sworn in. This was the first major tryst of the Congress party with coalition politics at Delhi. As television channels were going wild speculating about who was going to get what portfolio, Pranab Mukherjee was sitting quietly in his small study in his Talkatora Road residence, going through various reports on the functioning of the Union home ministry; a few party seniors had confidently told him that he would be India's Union home minister in a few

hours. Kashmir had seen a terror attack and some news channels — confident that they were interviewing the next home minister — even aired some comments from Mukherjee on the attack.

Late in the evening, as those channels flashed the portfolios of the new ministers in Manmohan Singh's council, against Mukherjee's name the legend said: Defence Minister. There was an air of disbelief at Talkatora Road. His close aides, under the mistaken impression that the Ministry of Defence was a portfolio a notch lower than the Ministry of Home, were both shocked and indignant. But what did the man himself do? He took 10 to 15 seconds to digest the new situation. Went to the toilet. Came back and ordered his assistant: "Connect me to the defence secretary."

Pranab Mukherjee, then the most experienced minister in the UPA, knew that slippery patches abound in the corridors of power — and you must take what you get, there is no time to ponder over unfulfilled possibilities.

That trait has paid off. He might have failed to become the Prime Minister of India. But he did become the President. And now he is a Bharat Ratna.

What would Pranab Mukherjee have told the Congress party to do on Article 370? It's

an easy question to answer. He has nothing to do with his visit to the Nagpur headquarters of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). He would have told the Congress to quit shilly-shallying and support the government in the larger national cause. Much in the way he dealt with a group of Trinamool Congress MPs that came to meet him in 2009.

The UPA government was conducting massive campaigns against Left Wing Extremists (LWE) in the Junglemahal areas of Bengal. Obviously this was hurting the Trinamool Congress government that was supporting the UPA at the time. Mamata Banerjee sent a delegation of MPs to meet Mukherjee to persuade him to talk to P Chidambaram who was home minister, and stop these campaigns. The delegation was led by MP Kabir Suman, Bengal's answer to Bob Dylan and a vocal supporter of democratic rights.

The group made its pitch to Mukherjee. "Dada, you have to tell the home minister to put an end to this state terror. This is just unacceptable", said Suman, ill-advisedly, as he wrapped up the delegation's collective view.

Mukherjee looked up and the light glinted off his glasses. "Chharpokka" (bedbugs), he said softly. "Peeshe peeshe marbo" (we will crush them underfoot, one at a time) he

hissed and resumed his work. The delegation left and Suman never went back to meet Mukherjee again.

Of course, there is much about Mukherjee that makes him an attractive mascot for the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). But this world view — that India is indivisible, there are no nationalities or self determination issues in this country and those who question the state must be crushed — is what brings Modi close to Mukherjee. Ironically, Mukherjee himself derives this from Indira Gandhi.

The man who has been bestowed the Bharat Ratna turned down all mercy petitions during his tenure as President. In 2016 he summoned the finance minister over the insurance Ordinance, which the NDA government was chasing as its first big-ticket reform move. He discussed fine print of the Land Acquisition Bill with the government a few months later. When the government sent the contentious enemy property Ordinance (as the bill on the issue was stuck in a parliamentary committee) Mukherjee summoned his team of legal experts and asked the government for a clarification. It was all done with complete cordiality. Home Minister Rajnath Singh visited him almost every week and sat with him virtually the entire day when he lost his wife.

Mukherjee is not getting the Bharat Ratna because he sold out. He's getting it because he made the most of the opportunities he got, without compromising his convictions. There's a lesson in that, somewhere.

LUNCH WITH BS ► CHANNA DASWATTE | ARCHITECT

Averting urban apocalypse

Daswatte tells Rahul Jacob that it is time to radically rethink zoning laws and heighten protection for water bodies to save our cities

Leading a large group through the late Sri Lankan architect Geoffrey Bawa's country home in Lunuganga, Channa Daswatte, who worked closely with Bawa, makes references to Bawa's affection for Indian design. He draws our attention to a wall hanging by Riten Mazumdar that looks like a Raza painting in its dramatic black and white and red design. Nearby are cushion covers that were designed for Bawa's home by the wife of the late Charles Correa, Monika Correa. The exhibition, part of a celebration of the centennial of Bawa's birth that started last month (www.bawa100.com) threw a pointillist's spotlight on Bawa's furniture and lamps, a little known aspect of Bawa's talent for creating a tropical modernism in private and public architecture that ranges from some of the most elegant hotels in Asia to Sri Lanka's parliament to a Buddhist temple that seems like a Japanese scroll on a lake in Colombo.

Soon we are crowded around what looks as if it were a sleek leather chair imported from Italy. It is in fact, Bawa's take on the Roorkee chair, used in the British Raj. There is another Mazumdar masterpiece on Bawa's bed, which has the word 'Ram' written repeatedly in Devanagari script as if it were a geometric pattern. In Fabindia were to recreate it, it would be a runaway best-seller.

When I meet Daswatte a few days later at a client's home that he designed in Bengaluru, it is almost as if we have been transported by a machine that freezes time and space. In a modern bungalow that seems a country estate even in Hebbal, the throttled bottleneck on the way to Bengaluru airport, Daswatte picks up where he left off. The tiles on the terraces of the home are from Athangudi in Tamil Nadu, made by the master craftsmen whose work adorns many a Chettinad mansion. But the tiles' design, which marries Italy with southern India, is by the Sri Lankan artist Laki Senanayake. Daswatte suggested these to the owner of the house, Bimal Desai, one of the country's largest beedi producers now better known as a leading proponent of mini urban forests in Bengaluru and public interest petitioner to protect the city's Cubbon Park. "We have taken something traditional like the Athangudi tile and made it contemporary," says Daswatte. I sit under a large line drawing by Senanayake that is so vivid that I feel as if I should lean forward to avoid brushing against the tree's branches, but the subject that hangs

over our conversation is the savaging of sub-continental cities by real estate moguls and brutalist public works department babus who show little respect for the local climate or the need for the conservation of water bodies and trees.

Daswatte's work as a founder of the architectural firm MICD Associates brings him to India often as he completes work for the Taj group in Sikkim, a restoration project in Odisha, but the return to the Desais' home makes him recall that he travelled as a young architect to the city with Bawa 25 years ago to look at the restoration of a fort at the request of Bimal Poddar. "What a beautiful city it was," he exclaims, as he describes driving down roads lined with tamarind and mango trees. Today, the structure has literally been cut in half to make way for a highway.

Daswatte is a pragmatist who quickly points out that the city is still 'very green' and 'very civilised.' Unprompted, he moves the discussion instead to real estate development without regard to the need to preserve wetlands — the subject of an exhibition in Bengaluru earlier this month — that lead to recurrent floods as extreme weather events come bunched together in ever shorter cycles. In Colombo, he says, it took three floods before the government addressed the issue head-on. At a parliamentary inquiry a few years ago, Daswatte was grilled, not least because some committee rooms had been flooded and "chairs were floating in two-and-a-half feet of water". Daswatte replied that the plans for Sri Lanka's parliament, which Bawa designed, had recommended the dredging of land to allow for water to be diverted during monsoonal downpours. In an echo of Krupa Ge's harrowing book on the Chennai floods, *Rivers Remember*, he says that "water doesn't recognise boundaries". It is also time for a fundamental rethink on zoning: "The zoning laws lead to a huge sprawl of the city."

Daswatte recounts how, even in suburban and rural Sri Lanka, the profusion of individual tubewells has led to water stress. This is a recurrent theme in India, where a Mint feature last Saturday put Bengaluru first on the list of cities likely to run out of groundwater, perhaps as early as next year. A Sri Lankan minister has called for rural housing to be more densely clustered to make delivering and conserving water and constructing sewage facilities easier. Daswatte exclaims in horror at reports of



ILLUSTRATION: BINAY SINHA

"water trains" transporting water from villages to Chennai.

We are interrupted from this vision of urban collapse by lunch. Veena Desai comes out with a plate of delicate Gujarati kacchoris in her hand. Before us is a south Indian vegetable kurma, green beans and a Mangalorean fish curry in coconut milk sent over from her mother's home. The family are eating inside to leave us to the interview but we are joined by the family's adopted stray dogs, whose molten, pedigreed eyes glow like

jewels as the food moves from the serving bowls to our plates.

I ask him why so little public and private architecture in India's cities is rooted in the tropics, by contrast to many Sri Lankan hotels and homes. It is a question he was asked a fortnight earlier at an Architectural Digest talk in New Delhi. With an impish grin, Daswatte reports that he "blamed it on Nehru, which is fashionable to do these days". Then he turns serious and observes that India's modernism was a conscious break with the colonial past. "We had a more gentle path to independence. We had the privilege of not having the burden of over-population." Instead of a focus on public spaces such as Le Corbusier's Chandigarh or New Delhi's Pragati Maidan, he observes that in Sri Lanka, modernism came via homes, iconically designed by Minnette de Silva. She placed a premium, as Bawa and his successors would do, on ensuring that buildings had ample airflow and did not require air-conditioning. This was combined with a spare aesthetic that celebrated local craft.

Can Bawa be described as Asia's best architect? Daswatte reframes my crude listicle-styled question and makes the case that Bawa, who died in 2003, could be Asia's most influential. Avoiding comparisons of Bawa vs Correa (the two were close friends) or Bawa vs the Japanese, he makes the point that everyone from the often insular Japanese to architects in Southeast Asia and south India lay claim to Bawa. Daswatte recounts that when he was asked to talk about Bawa in Tokyo some years ago, he called someone he knew in the city because he was sure the event would be poorly attended. The hall was packed.

On my way out, Desai shows me his densely packed Japanese tree-planting technique that he is recreating near one of the city's railway stations. A taxi then takes me to a shopping district at the centre of the city. The brutalist metro station looks like a factory grafted onto a carpark and flipped over. Water-tankers prowl the streets like rogue elephants, with their trunkS stuck on the back. The posh optician's toilet I duck into ran out of water hours earlier. It is a reminder that urban apocalypse in India is nearer than we think.

Scaling new heights, literally!



PEOPLE LIKE THEM

GEETANJALI KRISHNA

The first time I met Monika, the 15-year-old from Hutup, a village in Jharkhand, she was defying societal norms by playing and coaching soccer and paying her way through school. She had told me she wanted to design clothes for small town girls like herself — fashion that would be acceptable in their conservative society and yet be stylish enough to enable them to feel confident when confronting city girls. Some time ago, when a Muslim girl in her team wasn't allowed to play by her family because it meant wearing shorts, Monika's innate fashion sense came to the rescue. She asked her to wear leggings

under her shorts. Her ideas were fresh and her confidence inspiring. I remember thinking this feisty teen from a tiny, unheard of village would someday scale great heights. I didn't realise how literally this would come true.

Last month, Monika, now in class 12 and still a soccer player and coach, was selected to be part of an all-female scientific wilderness expedition, Girls on Ice Cascades, in Washington, USA. Sponsored by BookASmile Foundation and mentored by the good folk of Yuwa, the award-winning NGO from Jharkhand, which uses football to empower girls to overcome violence and choose their own futures, Monika spent two weeks on Mount Baker, an active volcano, learning about glacial ecology and glacier travel skills.

"In my village, girls hardly ever came out and played, let alone follow their dreams," Monika told me after she returned from the expedition. "I wanted to set an example for young girls, especially the ones in Little Sunrise, the team I coach." Initially, it wasn't easy. Monika had neither walked on snow before nor was she used to wearing heavy trekking boots. "Moreover, the other girls in my team were much better dressed while all I had were my soccer jerseys," she

recounted. Once again, Monika realised that her childhood dream of using fashion as a confidence-building tool for girls like her had a lot of scope. "But since the beginning, everyone there was so nice to me that I soon felt at ease with them."

For Monika, the expedition was a transformational experience. "My self-confidence received a huge boost when I completed the expedition," she says. Her other teammates had much more experience of trekking on snowy terrain. "They were very fit too," she said, adding with satisfaction, "but I was as fit as them." After spending two weeks with her teammates, all from different states in the US, Monika found that as girls, they too faced all manner of challenges. "Breaking stereotypes, rising above gender biases and living one's dreams is difficult for girls no matter where they live — if they can do it, so can we," she told me. "Now that I'm back in Hutup, these are the stories I tell to the players I coach."

Monika still wants to be a soccer coach and fashion designer for rural girls. But now she also wants to inspire other girls in her village to spread their wings and explore the world. "I want to tell them my story," she said. "Maybe it will give them hope that any dream is achievable for a girl from Jharkhand."

A historical wrong



PEOPLE LIKE US

KISHORE SINGH

My grandparents never discussed matters political at home though they must have grappled with contrarian views seguing between the personal and the professional. When he retired in 1939 as an honorary officer from the British Indian Army — a rare distinction at the time for Indian soldiers — my paternal grandfather sailed to London to receive his Order of British India and the title of Sardar Bahadur accompanied by a pension payable over three generations. That annuity may have dwindled to a minuscule value in foreign exchange but still commands respect in the clan. Around the same time my maternal grandfather, who was serving

in the Ganga Risalla, a royal camel corps, was commandeered for action in the Second World War, and held as a PoW in Italy. Photographs from the period show him with a full beard over an already receding hairline, tall and strapping in the manner of a native warrior.

Though they retired from service three decades apart, both returned to their ancestral homes, fiercely loyal to the idea of home and country. I kick myself now for not having the wisdom then to ask how they reconciled to the idea of serving the imperial army while seeking liberation from it. How was one form of loyalty replaceable with another? With the blood of fierce combatants in their veins, how could they serve the very master from whom they demanded discharge? Both led by example, the one stoic and hardy, the other via discipline channelled through horse riding, *shikar* and sartorial preferences. Our generation was taught to use gun — I chickened out — or cutlery with equal felicity.

How did they view Independence, the collapse of the princely order and the rise of a self-serving political class? How did their view of nationhood align with its reality? One was too austere — and fierce — to ever let his views be known. The other too gentle and mentoring to bring a negative discourse to the table. Were they

happy with the way their children's lives shaped? Or disappointed by the shallow ambitions of their grandchildren?

My own father, I would like to believe, reflected their aspirations for the forthcoming generation. My father and I did match our wits over matters political, often from opposite ends of the pole. I thought him liberal but inflexible; he considered me unorthodox but historically illiberal. "Same-same," my children said. "Stop fighting." We never did.

He too served the army and was posted in J&K, but not in the valley. I toured Srinagar with him (also Ladakh and Jammu). He viewed Kashmir as a betrayal, a sign of India's weakness. The cost of lives in Kashmir agonised him. Let it be known, civilian lives mattered, but soldiers' lives mattered more to him. So, what would he have made of the abrogation of Article 370 by sleight of hand? Would he have commended the move? Or been dismayed by what felt like a political rather than a statesmanlike maneuver? My inability to arrive at a conclusion indicates that though I knew him well, perhaps, after all, I did not know him well enough. A historical wrong may have been righted by a party flexing its muscle power, but the way it was undertaken would, I believe, have saddened my father as much as his forebears.

Fixing the demand slump

In the midst of a demand slump, the like of which the economy has not seen for some time, there will be many experts offering reasons and solutions. This is a modest contribution to the debate. Indian consumers are up to their neck in debt (refer "Borrowed money" in *Ruminations*, May 25). EMIs (equated monthly instalments on loans) have been taking an ever-larger share of take-home pay because a steadily larger share of consumption has been fuelled by borrowed money. Making matters worse, many people are paying EMIs on loans taken for lakhs of houses or flats lying incomplete for years.

Second, consider the effects of lower inflation. Pay hikes get smaller, so the easing of the EMI burden that used to happen over time is now absent. Also, because interest rates too have come down, people are pushed to save more for their senior years, and spend less now. Third is the negative wealth effect. Real-estate prices have dropped by 25 per cent and more. Stock market indices too are lower than they were a year ago, and many mutual funds have given poor if not negative returns. When people feel poorer, they spend less.

Fourth, the employment structure has changed because there are fewer women in the workforce. Whatever the mix of reasons (women studying for longer, gentrification, lack of safety during the commute, and a shortage of work available), there are now fewer working adults in the typical family. This must affect family incomes. Fifth is the possible impact of people living longer. The population in the 60+ age group is growing at about twice the overall population growth rate (more than 35 per cent in a decade). This must raise health costs for families as they take care of the elderly. Consider the sharp increase (154 per cent over four years to 2017-18) in household debt for reasons other than housing, vehicles, consumer durables, and education. Some of this might be for marriages and other social occasions, but some would certainly be to cover medical bills.

Sixth is the point that Rathin Roy made on this page yesterday, that much of the demand for goods and services is confined to a thin upper crust. Not as thin as he says, because the consuming cohort is 30-35 per cent of the total population. As an indicator, the 2011 Census showed that 21 per cent of the 246 million households owned a powered two-wheeler. That percentage would be appreciably higher today, as about 6 per cent of households — 17 million in 2017-18 — have been buying two-wheelers every year. Only some of that would be replacement demand. Still, Dr Roy is right that the spending cohort is not growing fast enough. One reason would be that the growth of labour-intensive manufacturing (which has the capacity to deliver a living wage rather than just a minimum wage) has not been able to create a larger spending category at the lower-middle class level. The gig economy, typically with lower productivity and therefore incomes, is no substitute.

Finally, there is the transition in agriculture. Farmers now produce more than domestic markets can absorb. In the absence of exports as a sufficiently large spillover outlet, the changing domestic demand-supply balance has created price pressures that limit farm incomes despite higher production (which comes with higher costs and more variable prices, and therefore greater uncertainty). Again, if labour-intensive manufacturing had succeeded, and pulled people into factories from farms, there would have been fewer farm mouths to feed.

It boils down to the changes needed to facilitate wage-intensive manufacturing (including labour law reform, a competitively-priced rupee, efficient infrastructure, supply-chain development, etc). The government has an agenda on some of this, but — to take one example — it is not enough to reduce multiple labour laws into four codes. Mere compilation/number reduction without a change in the content of the codes will make no difference. Under pressure to revive the economy, the government might look for quick fixes. That's understandable, but no one should labour under any illusions. Without structural change, sustainable economic growth will continue to trend downward.

Pakistan gets a Modi yorker

Until now, it was Pakistan that always set the pace on Kashmir. Modi has turned the tables by scrapping Article 370 and Pakistan is struggling for a response

At the risk of drawing the charge of schadenfreude, let me note some delight at the amount of time, attention and emotion I saw the Pakistani National Assembly spend over intricacies of the Indian Constitution last week.

This meltdown over the Indian decisions on Articles 370 and 35-A were striking for a bunch of reasons, and cheap partisan thrill isn't one of them. It was, first of all, the incredible irony for a nation, where a ruler is often known by the constitution he junks or writes, showing such concern for India's.

The high point for me, of course, was Imran Khan himself accusing India of violating the Simla Agreement. I track Pakistan politics like it was India's "internal affair" and have no recollection of a ruler there swearing by what they often describe in their political rhetoric as an outdated and irrelevant piece of paper.

Even better, it came within days of the fast-bowling genius — never mind the bottle cap — himself saying just days earlier, from the White House that India and Pakistan had failed to resolve Kashmir bilaterally for 70 years, so the "most powerful man", you Mr Trump, should mediate.

Now, the three solemn bilateral agreements between the two countries over 31 years — Simla (1972) to Lahore (1999) and Islamabad (2004) — add up to just a handful of pages. And, diplomatic verbiage and platitudes apart, all three rest on one central pillar: Settling all issues, including Kashmir, bilaterally. Other Pakistani leaders have also freely broken this commitment. But, since Zulfikar Ali Bhutto signed the Simla Agreement, none of the 12 Pakistani chief executives — elected, re-elected or military — has explicitly junked the Simla Agreement. That pretence is maintained.

The Lahore and Islamabad declarations essentially reaffirm the bilateral commitment of Simla. By stating publicly to the world that both countries could not resolve Kashmir bilaterally and that Mr Trump should take over, Imran became the first Pakistani leader to formally disown the three earlier agreements. Having torn up the Simla Agreement and thrown its shreds in the reflecting pool, he is now charging India with violating it. It may sound like I am turning the knife, or a cheap shot, but this is the exact definition of *nau sau choohe kha kar billi hajj ko chali* (the cat goes for a holy pilgrimage after eating 900 rats).

The substantive point here is, the fundamental strategic and political equation on Kashmir has now fully reversed. Since 1947, it is Pakistan that set

the pace. It invariably made the first move. With sending the pillaging and raping raiders in 1947 to the regulars in mufti as (Op Gibraltar), and then tanks into Kashmir (Op Grand Slam) in August-September 1965. Pakistan made all the first moves on Kashmir until the Simla Agreement 1972.

Seventeen years of peace followed, but Pakistan was preparing, and not for permanent peace. It was developing its nuclear deterrent, and then, fortuitously, helping the US-led coalition win the Cold War against the Soviets in Afghanistan.

Nukes were ready by 1989, coinciding with the Soviet defeat. One jihad won, to the west, a nuclear-armed Pakistani establishment was now ready to launch another to its east.

And then Kargil, the IC-814 hijack, attack on the Indian Parliament, 26/11 in Mumbai, Pathankot, Pulwama and so on, Pakistan made every single move first and India was left searching for a response. We will debate the prudence of India's latest turn at another point. But we must acknowledge that for 70 years India had been the status quo power, despite its size and muscle, whereas Pakistan worked steadfastly to alter it. Last week, India changed that.

Now Pakistan is struggling for a response. Because its strategic establishment's head isn't wired for response, it is already over-loaded with proactive mischief. A week after Imran dished in Washington the Simla, Lahore and Islamabad Agreements, Narendra Modi has rewritten the Indian playbook by not protesting, but, in a dramatic (devious it would seem if you are Pakistani) way, agreeing with him. If those agreements made Pakistan and the global community believe that Kashmir's final status was still open to debate and negotiation, that misconception is now buried. So are the agreements, Imran was right.

Pakistan has to now find a new set of ideas beyond its standard operating procedures (SOPs): Provoke, deny, offer to help, negotiate, let things calm. Repeat... In the past India sought the big power help to press Pakistan to mend its ways. Now, Pakistan is doing so.

And realising its limitations and diminished stature. It is such a basket-case now, it is bartering its economic sovereignty for \$6 billion from the IMF. For simplicity of understanding, this is less than the amount ArcelorMittal is paying to buy the bankrupt Essar Steel. Its politics, society, institutions are all broken. Balochistan it can handle en passant. But Pashtuns' uprising is mainstream,



NATIONAL INTEREST
SHEKHAR GUPTA

mass-based, and peaceful.

The one leverage it has with the world, becoming Afghanistan's local guardian and helping Mr Trump flee without seeming to do so, comes with a big price. If Pakistan has to deliver on Afghanistan, it cannot be distracted in Kashmir. It cannot fight a two-front battle. Not with the Financial Action Task Force deadline for meeting its commitments against terror just weeks away. This isn't what he was mentally prepared for. It is also beyond his capacity. We should qualify this, however, by adding that he isn't the one taking any calls here. It is the powers that be in GHQ. Do they want action on both fronts?

Former Pakistani diplomat Husain Haqqani used a line in an article for ThePrint that I wish I had conjured up. He said that for Pakistani strategy was always to "internationalise" the Kashmir issue and India fought to keep it bilateral. But the Modi government has now reduced Kashmir to an internal affair in both India and Pakistan.

In India, it is being debated and contested between the Modi majority and the vocal political and intellectual minority which sees the action as undemocratic. In Pakistan, it is now about, how did this happen, how did the "No 1" spy agency in the world fail to get a whiff, did someone sell out, what the hell to do now? That exasperation echoed in Imran's outburst in his National Assembly, when he asked, so what do you want me to do? Attack India?

It isn't my argument that everything is perfect in India, or with the latest moves on Kashmir. Just that it isn't relevant to where Pakistan finds itself today. The more it pretends to mourn Article 370 (which it called illegitimate in the past), the more it extols the jailed mainstream Kashmiri leaders (whom it called stooges) and the more it screams about civil liberties in Indian Kashmir, the more ridiculous it sounds.

Think about it. Protesting the arrest of some separatist usual suspects and the detention of some political leaders in Kashmir when you have thrown two former prime ministers (Nawaz Sharif and Shahid Khaqan Abbasi) and one former president (Asif Zardari) in jail and banished another (Musharraf) into exile. Nawaz's daughter and the main opposition leader Maryam is now in jail, too, as is Rana Sanaullah, former deputy chief minister of Punjab, three other MPs from Nawaz's party, two Pashtun MPs, among others. None of these (apart from Nawaz) is convicted. Most haven't even been put on trial. Most have been locked up for months, and in real jails.

This isn't working for Pakistan. The status quo has shifted. Either Pakistan accepts it, or launches into something reckless. Or, pray for things really going out of control in the Valley once restrictions are lifted, leading to an almighty popular insurrection where Indian forces lose their nerve. That is now Pakistan's only hope.

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Chill wind in the Valley



AL FRESCO
SUNIL SETHI

The irony is that till the precipitate evacuation of pilgrims and tourists that prefaced the "integration" of Jammu & Kashmir by parliamentary vote, the Valley was having its best summer season since the killing of terrorist-turned-martyr Burhan Wani in July 2016.

The hotels and houseboats of Srinagar were packed, hardly a spare room available in Gulmarg and Pahalgam, and the bazaars buzzed with shoppers and holiday-makers. Friends and colleagues returning from vacation reported that (despite the paramilitary presence) a mood of relative calm prevailed. No major protests or encounters took place and travel to the

Mughal gardens and monuments in provincial districts of Anantnag and Baramulla was unhindered.

Perhaps it was this lull, a fleeting illusion of normalcy, that prompted Home Minister Amit Shah to execute his elaborate plan of "unifying" Kashmir with India — part of a long-held BJP promise to abolish its special status — with electrifying stealth and speed. Almost overnight the Valley went dead, an eerie chill wind funnelling the might of the Indian state with massive troop reinforcements.

It may well be that Article 370 serves no particular purpose in ensuring the security or progress of the Valley's Muslim majority; but revoking it by smothering their voices — and arresting their leaders — is another turn of Narendra Modi's Hindutva juggernaut moving inexorably forward. The withdrawal of special status for J&K has found both popular and political support among opposition parties — dividing the Congress in its ranks — because many regard it as an unfair privilege. (Swathes of voters who handed the BJP its spectacular victory in May tend to regard many Valley-dwellers as spoilt, self-serving and unpatriotic.)

While dumbing down the J&K legislature from statehood to union territory — and unshakably putting it under New Delhi's thumb for the foreseeable future — Mr Shah in the Rajya Sabha thundered: "[Kashmir] was heaven on earth and will remain so... Give us five years and we will make Jammu & Kashmir the most developed state in the country."

Mr Shah's reference to Kashmir as paradise (albeit a bleeding, violent one) isn't new. Further fishing in troubled waters he evoked a clichéd vision of *akhond* Kashmir: "When I talk of J&K, Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK) and Aksai Chin are included in it. Don't you consider PoK a part of J&K... I will give my life for it... We are ready to give our lives..."

Therein lies the rub: Amit Shah's nationalist rhetoric supersedes his knowledge of topographic ground reality. Anyone who has been to Muzaffarabad (as this columnist has) will testify how dull, dusty, and featureless the hilly area on the banks of the Jhelum is. Its Mirpuri inhabitants don't speak Kashmiri but a dialect of Punjabi, akin to Dogri and other hill dialects of the Jammu region. Nor do they bear any resemblance to the people of

the Valley being, as one analyst writes, "culturally and linguistically... totally different from Kashmiris. To that extent the term PoK is also a misnomer and should be appropriately called PoJ&K."

The contrast between PoK and the Valley is so glaring that it is patently obvious why no one really wants PoK (except possibly Amit Shah) and everyone down the ages has coveted the fabled vale of alpine meadows, saffron fields, lake-studded peaks, and picturesque *shikaras* and houseboats. Certainly Nehru's sentimental attachment to the land of his forbears led to expedient political compromise as did "Sher-e-Kashmir" Sheikh Abdullah's grasp in founding a regional dynasty.

The ban on outsiders buying property is an old restriction and, in fact, led to the advent of houseboats as popular holiday homes for colonial administrators and outsiders. (Similar restraints exist in many northeastern states and also in parts of Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand.)

Despite the prime minister's assurances of investors' summits and a host of opportunities for the disaffected Kashmiri youth, development in the Valley has been skewed since the rise of insurgency in the late 1980s. While it is true

that J&K is ahead on social indicators as compared to backward parts of the country (thanks to generous infusions of Central subsidy) there are few jobs outside the government sector, no industry to speak of other than tourism, fruit-growing and handicrafts, and zero investment in skill development or business promotion.

Corruption has grown manifold during decades of militancy and on-and-off civil administrations have been paralysed by the overwhelming dominance of armed forces. Most small businesses that flourish during the summer's tourist season wait for a surge of visitors in late August-September, when the Valley's gigantic *chinars* catch fire in a blaze of breathtaking autumn colours.

An enthusiastic young entrepreneur I know who has converted his charming family house and garden on the shores of Nigeen Lake into a successful small hotel was telling guests in June that he was forced to turn down bookings as he was full up till October.

But a sudden blast of chill wind from New Delhi has ruined his chances of profit and struggle in holding his family legacy together. There are many such who face an uncertain future with frustration and hopelessness.

was, and remains, king at CCDs. More exotic introductions followed over the years... Devil's Own Cocoa Cream, Tender Coconut Lemonade, Tropical Iceberg, Cool Blue... plus a whole range of breads, munchies, meals and desserts that ranged from Frittata Omelettes to Spicy Srilacha Chicken to Peri Peri Ciabatta to Wok Tossed Oriental to Rice Sizzle Dazzle Brownie. CCD evolved as it reached more diverse audiences in more diverse geographies, offering a new experience not just in beverages but also more exotic and inviting food choices that were both aspirational and a tad more expensive, hence premium.

Most importantly, CCD pioneered the "hang-out" generation in India over the past two decades. It introduced free wi-fi (initially for limited time) but then kind of made it as a standard offering. I personally attended at least two meetings with VG Siddhartha in 2011/12 on creating wi-fi hotspots at all CCDs. Siddhartha was fully cognizant of the value of the wi-fi freebie to young millennials. We discussed various advertiser funded models to make the wi-fi free to all CCD customers, while concurrently offering third-party brands a captive younger audience. I remember

sharing my experience of *keitai* (kill time) from Japan and how the coffee shop culture had mushroomed in that country because of youngsters just sitting around and literally killing-time on their mobile phones. Siddhartha had been fascinated. I did not however need to preach to the converted.

The coming in of Starbucks did shake-up CCD somewhat. The global brand's offering was much classier, albeit costlier. But the better heeled customer almost immediately switched loyalties. While there have been claims in media that 94% of all CCDs are cash-positive on a stand-alone basis, I would take that statistic with a pinch of salt. Of late CCD has started to lose momentum. Too many stores. Sparser foot-falls. Somewhat frayed interiors. No new innovations on the menu. A brand beginning to look somewhat stagnant, weary and tired.

I don't know where CCD is headed. I do hope it survives. And prospers. It really has been one of the best Indian brands created post liberalisation. A brand that 'youngified' India and let a lot happen over coffee.

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A lot can happen over coffee



YES, BUT...
SANDEEP GOYAL

In a tribute to VG Siddhartha, Captain Gopinath of Air Deccan wrote, "Before (Café) Coffee Day, even in the South, the middle class went to Udipi hotels to read papers over coffee and chat and sip coffee with friends. The Udipi hotels were the favourite hangout places for Kannada writers. The journalists and writers of English press went to a few select coffee houses in the cantonment area. The modern youth never visited them. Siddhartha changed all that — the entire cultural landscape — through his ubiquitous coffee shops, both in the South and the rest of India where very few drank coffee (but

spent hours over books or laptops or simply unwinding with friends".

When little-known entrepreneur Siddhartha opened his first Café Coffee Day (CCD) outlet at Brigade Road in 1996 at Bangalore — which was fast developing into the "pub capital of India" at the time — youngsters at first sneered at the idea of spending hours hanging out over a coffee but realised pretty soon that "a lot could happen over coffee". Coffee and an hour of internet surfing cost ₹100 — not cheap by the standards of those days (no wonder CCDs were initially called "internet cafes") but then nobody gave anyone dirty looks for hanging around for hours over that cup of coffee, nobody frowned when you just sat there sipping the coffee and doing your assignments and your homework in the ambient air-conditioning, nobody chided you for talking loudly or laughing or just sitting there watch the world go by. Nobody disturbed you if you were there with a girl; no one bothered if a foreigner just sat cross-legged in one corner immersed in a philosophical tome.

CCD birthed a completely new phenomenon in the India of the 90s: "my-space, my pace".

Barista followed. Then Coffee Bean & Tea Leaf, Costa Coffee, Georgia Coffee, Gloria Coffee, Coffee by Di Bella, Café Mocha... McCafé. And of course, Starbucks. But CCD outpaced them all. By 2008 CCD had opened 595 outlets; by 2012, the count was 1400; today in 2019 CCD has nearly 1700 cafes, around 48,000 vending machines, 532 kiosks and 403 ground coffee selling outlets. By comparison Barista has today just 220 outlets; and Starbucks 136.

CCD's biggest achievement has been to get a predominantly tea-drinking country (especially the North & West) to take to coffee with such gusto. The introduction of a menu of choice that ranged from Café Latte to Café Americano to Café Mocha to Macchiato to a Vanilla Cappuccino in hot coffees to Café Frappe to Dark Frappe to Kaapi Nirvana in cold options was quite a leap forward from the Nescafe hot coffee that used to be available in plastic cups from vending machines at airports and offices. Teas are available too, but coffee

Bookish nostalgia

EYE CULTURE

UTTARAN DAS GUPTA

On the first Sunday after I moved to the National Capital Region nearly six years ago, a friend offered to take me to Old Delhi for a special treat. I did not know where I was going — I wasn't even familiar with the roads or areas in my new city. And, I was down with a severe case of nostalgia for my hometown, Kolkata. But my friend promised that the place she was taking me to that morning would be a perfect antidote. "You'll love it!" she said. We boarded a yellow line metro from Malviya Nagar to Chandni Chowk, and then took a rickshaw to Daryaganj. Our destination that morning was the weekly book market.

My first instinct was to compare this temporary market to the more permanent one on College Street in central Kolkata. As a student, I would frequent the shops selling second-hand books in the locality around Calcutta University, often dropping into the famed Coffee House for a *chicken kaviraji* or Paramount for green coconut sherbet, having purchased a coveted volume. Perhaps quite naturally, my first reaction that Sunday was one of disappointment. "That's it?" I said, standing on the footpath opposite Delhi Darwaza and casting a glance towards Netaji Subhash Marg. But my disappointment was soon belied; like every treasure of Delhi, Daryaganj revealed itself to me slowly, over the years.

A couple of years after my first visit, I began taking people to the market when they asked me to show them around my adopted hometown. Not only outsiders visiting Delhi but also natives who were either unaware of this urban treasure or had never visited it despite knowing about it. For booklovers, of course, this was a treat, but also for those planning to pick up stationary at a discount. At least two shops on Netaji Subhash Marg sell paper by the kilo. There are also notebooks to be got, as well as pencils, pens, ink, folders — all the paraphernalia with which you need to clutter your writing desk before you can call yourself a writer.

But this privilege will be denied to old timers such as me or newcomers discovering our city. *The Hindustan Times* reported on August 3 that following a July order of the Delhi High Court, the temporary shops which occupied the footpath along Netaji Subhash Marg every Sunday would

not be there anymore. "The order came in response to the Delhi traffic police submitting a report to the court suggesting that the [road]... is a very busy road which sees high traffic volumes at all times and that book sellers occupy the footpath, leaving no space for pedestrians," the report said.

Over the years, I developed a protocol of how I would show people around this place. The trip would usually begin on a winter afternoon, near the Delhi Darwaza, about which there are several urban legends. I would begin by narrating the most famous one: "If you happen to find yourself around these parts on a rainy evening, do not seek shelter under the Delhi Gate," I would tell them. "The roof leaks, and what drips on your head or shoulder will not be water — but blood." The legend was that the sons of Bahadur Shah "Zafar", the last Mughal emperor, were hanged here in 1858, after the British recaptured Delhi in the First War of Independence. I'm told the story can send a chill down your spine even on a sunny afternoon.

Once you had bought your books and stationary, it was quite natural that you would be hungry. And then, I would take you — no, not to Moti Mahal, where butter chicken was apparently invented — but to Changezi Chicken. If you were accompanied by one or more women, you could enjoy lunch in the relatively quieter mezzanine floor. Else you would be confined to the ground floor. The usual order: A quarter plate of *changezi* chicken, *khamiri roti*, and *zafrani kheer* for dessert. The legend is that the recipe apparently travelled to India with the Mongol conqueror Genghis Khan. This is, of course, sheer mythopoeia — Genghis Khan did not attack Delhi; Timur did in 1398, capturing the city and unleashing a massacre.

Of course, I have a personal legend as well. On my first Sunday at Daryaganj, as I was perusing the stock of one of the booksellers, I came across a hardbound copy of Iain M Banks's *Whit* (1995). Flipping open the book I found that the half-title page had the author's autograph. "How much for this?" I asked the disinterested bookseller, my heart almost in my mouth. "Fifty rupees," he said, nonchalantly. I quickly took out a crisp note and handed it over to him. A minute later, I was excitedly showing my loot to my friend and she was smiling. "So is Daryaganj better than College Street?" she asked. In some ways, yeah, it was.