

Unconvincing arguments

Now that the formal announcement has been made, the full story can be told of all the ways the bureaucracy tried to prevent the creation of the office of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and the Department of Military Affairs (DMA); and how the Prime Minister weighed in.

The outgoing Chief of Army Staff Gen. Bipin Rawat was to have become the CDS. He was to retire on December 31. The CDS was cleared by the Cabinet Committee on Security on December 24. Top bureaucrats kept advising the PM to rethink the proposal because of the "disquiet" in the bureaucracy. The retirement age of 65 and parity between the CDS and the cabinet secretary were presented as manifestations of this disquiet. It was also highlighted that unless the gazette notification was issued before December 31, Gen. Rawat could not progress from army chief to CDS in a seamless manner.

In response, PM Narendra Modi told officials he wanted it done the next day. Whatever the sense of disquiet, no bureaucrat was brave enough to disobey the PM.

A new fan

Deepika Padukone has an unlikely admirer: Former foreign minister K Natwar Singh! Singh writes that Padukone did not wrong by visiting the Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU). He says: "I have never met Deepika Padukone, nor have I seen any of her films. From time to time, I have seen her photographs in magazines. By any standards, she is a stunningly beautiful lady."

**OPINION**

MICHAEL POMPEO

'Have re-established deterrence but it's not everlasting'

I was a young soldier back during the Cold War. You can have the greatest army in the world, but it doesn't matter if you are not prepared to use it to achieve your strategic objectives. As one of your scholars here, Victor Davis Hanson, said, "Deterrence is hard to establish and easy to lose."

And let's be honest. For decades, US administrations of both political parties never did enough against Iran to get the deterrence that is necessary to keep us all safe. The JCPOA itself — the nuclear deal — made things worse. It enabled that regime to create wealth, it opened up revenue streams for the Ayatollahs to build up the Shiite militia networks, the very networks — the very networks — that killed an American and imposed enormous risk at our — to our embassy in Baghdad. Rather than blocking those efforts, the deal put Iran on a clear pathway to a nuclear weapon as well, something President Trump began his remarks by saying would never happen on our watch.

So what did we do? We put together a campaign of diplomatic isolation, economic pressure, and military deterrence.

The goal is two-fold. First, we wanted to deprive the regime of resources, resources it needs to perpetrate its malign activity around the world. And second, we just want Iran to behave like a normal nation. Just be like Norway, right? (Laughter.)

Diplomatically, allies and partners have joined us. They are today patrolling the Straits of Hormuz alongside of us in the Persian Gulf to stop Iranian attacks on shipping. Let us not forget how many ships the Iranians pulled from the straits over the past month.

Germany, France, Italy have all put travel bans on a company called Mahan Air. It's an Iranian airline that ferries military — Iranian military assets and weapons to the battle zones.

Argentina and the United Kingdom have both now declared Hizballah a terrorist organisation.

And you have seen finally, too, the economic pressure that we have put in place to cut off roughly 80 per cent of the Iranian oil revenues. We are determined to get at that last 20 per cent, too.

President Rouhani himself said that we have denied the Iranian regime some \$200 billion in lost foreign income and investment as a result of our activities. This is money that would have in large measure gone to support the very activities that would have put you and your fellow citizens at risk.

And you can see it, too. The Iranian people are increasingly angry at their own government for stealing their wealth and for the sake of violently spreading the regime at enormous cost to them.

On the military side, we've warned the Iranians repeatedly — I've done so personally myself — that an attack that took American lives would not be tolerated.

And they tested us, as they had tested previous administrations as well many times before. Past laxity had emboldened them.

But on December 27th, at Soleimani's direction, we changed that. On the 31st, Iranian-backed militias attacked our embassy in Baghdad and we changed that calculus for them.

The Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff said it perhaps best. Had we not taken that strike against Qasem Soleimani, our leadership — the recommendation that we made to President Trump — we would have been "culpably negligent" had we not made that recommendation, imposed a significant cost on the regime for their bad decision.

...And Iran hit back, and we're grateful that no lives were lost, and we will never downplay the seriousness of any attack on the United States or its forces. But judging from the type and intensity of the strike, the regime certainly must now understand what we will do if they ever again pose risk to American lives. If Iran escalates, we will end it on our terms.

President Trump reinforced that deterrence when he gave a set of remarks this past week. And these days Iran is making noise about leaving the nuclear deal.

...And our sanctions will continue until the regime stops its terrorist activity and commits to never having nuclear weapons and permits a verification regime which can give the world confidence that that will not take place.

...We have re-established deterrence, but we know it's not everlasting, that risk remains. We are determined not to lose that deterrence. In all cases, we have to do this.

We have to do this to defend freedom and liberty around the world. That's the whole point of President Trump's work, to make our military the strongest it's ever been.

We saw, not just in Iran, but in other places, too, where American deterrence was weak. We watched Russia's 2014 occupation of the Crimea and support for aggression against Ukraine because deterrence had been undermined. We have resumed lethal support to the Ukrainian military.

...For years, too, China has restricted access for American products in its markets, while demanding access for their stuff here. We've made clear that we're going to have a fair and reciprocal trading arrangement with China. We'll demand it. I hope, here in the next handful of hours, we sign the first part of what will be a significant agreement which will improve the lives of American citizens, raise wages for citizens here at home, and increase the economic relationship between our two countries on a set of terms that work for both China and for the United States.

There is a second mission, too. China has stolen massive quantities of American innovation, innovation created at campuses right like this one I'm standing on — everything from genetically engineered crop seeds to self-driving car technology. They stole it. They didn't have to invest or take risk.

We're making progress to make sure that the next part of the deal will improve on the IP protections that are in Phase One of the Chinese trade deal.

Edited excerpts from a speech by US Secretary of State, Michael Pompeo at the Hoover Institute, Stanford University, California on The Restoration of Deterrence: The Iranian Example, January 13

DID THEY REALLY SAY THAT?

"Mamata Banerjee is the chief minister of West Bengal and not the leader of the entire country. At least she should understand her constitutional duties."

Minister for Minority Affairs, Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, in New Delhi on January 16



ILLUSTRATION BY BINAY SINHA

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'Voters casting ballot on clear economic issues in many states'

Prime Minister Narendra Modi stormed back to power in 2019 — despite poor economic performance, a badly managed slowdown and high unemployment — on the back of nationalist appeal. Is it all catching up with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) now? Are street demonstrations on diverse issues a manifestation of economic discontentment?

Economic discontent is a background condition that is adding fuel to the fire of student movements and other spontaneous movements. To JNU, Jamia, Aligarh, and various other university campuses have now been added the IITs and IIMs — the issue of economic distress cannot be underestimated. Onion and vegetable prices that have driven a surge in the consumer price index, joblessness, even the worry that banks may put a limit on withdrawal, is bringing Hindus and Muslims together on the platform of economic distress. Prashant Kishore of the Janata Dal (United) was the first to point out that the National Register of Citizens (NRC) will divide India on a class basis because of the transactions costs associated with the NRC. After all, did not the Assam NRC leave a lot of Hindus out?

If the economy had been in a better shape, the protests could be muted. It is possible that Hindu-Muslim polarisation would have been even greater in that case.

To add fuel to fire, the government is behaving as if the dismal rate of growth, and the disgraceful unemployment and consumption sta-

tics are not a matter of fact. The prime minister and his colleagues pretend that all is well. Often statistics are sought to be hidden from the public gaze. But citizens must worry, when onion prices and joblessness are at an all-time high, the government is only withholding statistics and praising its own performance. Many who voted the BJP now feel the pinch, be it construction work, delayed MGNREGS payments, or factory or corporate job losses. It is noteworthy that 250 million Indians went on strike on January 8. Many students who are now opposing the government would have also voted the BJP thinking that the prime minister would deliver on his long-standing promise: *Sab ka saath, sab ka vikas* (with everyone for their development).

The strategy of distracting citizens with Pulwama, Balakote, Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the NRC has begun to boomerang in the face of poor governance. The BJP is losing state-level elections when just a few months ago it seemed that the BJP would sweep the country. At that time, Mr. Modi went all the distance to bat with the idea that national- and the state-level elections should be held at the same time. Was India going to turn into a kind of "hybrid democracy" like Bangladesh with no opposition?

This optimism of the ruling party was somewhat overturned when it could not form the government in Maharashtra. Maharashtra is an important state considering its size and wealth.

CHECKLIST**THE BJP'S NEXT CHALLENGE: RAJYA SABHA**

■ **Where:** In the Rajya Sabha where with 83 seats out of 245, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) does not have a majority on its own. Ordinarily, this wouldn't have mattered given that the party has a network of friends, visible and invisible. But in the fraught political atmosphere in the country today, being at the mercy of friends who have their own agendas is not a secure place to be in. Therefore, the government would like to ensure it has a degree of autonomy of action in the upper house.

■ **When:** As many as 69 MPs will retire from the upper house this year: 51 in April alone. Not much will change in the BJP's favour because in the interim, some states in which they had a majority are now with the Opposition. In Maharashtra, where seven MPs retire, the BJP will have to exert itself to ensure its tally does not fall, now that the Shiv Sena-led opposition alliance is in power. In Uttar Pradesh (11 seats up for grabs), the Opposition

is expected to suffer after the BJP's stunning victory in the last Assembly elections. So the Samajwadi Party's tally in the upper house might go down further. Intriguingly, there is no clarity on the seats from Jammu and Kashmir which was downgraded to a Union Territory and is under President's rule right now.

■ **How:** The Rajya Sabha elections are held indirectly on the basis of an electoral college comprising MLAs from each state Assembly. MLAs don't vote for seats — they vote for candidates based on preference. The more state Assemblies in which a party is in power, the more will be its representation in the upper house.

■ **What it means:** While the BJP will continue to be the single largest party, its hopes of getting a majority in the upper house have been dashed by a rash of recent Assembly election losses, especially in big states like Maharashtra.

Soon thereafter, the BJP lost Jharkhand. The fact that the BJP government was not working for forest rights of the tribal people did not help. No one is complaining about electronic voting machines (EVMs) any more. It seems voters in India are casting their ballot on clear economic issues in many states. The forthcoming Delhi election will test the idea of India once again.

When we attempt to study "the crowd" in the demonstrations going on all over India, we find there is little in common among it. It is not the Navnirman movement; nor is it the Naxalbari uprising. There are young people from (relatively) wealthy families as well as the middle class and the poor. There are Muslims protesting as well as Hindus. How do you read it?

These current protests are neither like the Navnirman movement led by Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) nor the Maoist revolt in Naxalbari. What was common to all these movements was political leadership. And, there were parties behind these movements. In the case of the movement led by JP, his towering and uncompromising Gandhi-like presence was a pole star.

Today's women and youth are openly expressing themselves in favour of an alternative idea of inclusive India. Muslim women in Shaheen Bagh, many of them housewives devoid of high academic credentials, could teach scholars a lesson or two in political representation. They are saying that the Muslim in India is an Indian who will not tolerate the status of a second class citizen. It is an affront to Indians if they have to produce special certificates to prove their identity under the threat of NRC. Once upon a time the slogan was "quit India" today it is "hum dekhenge" (we will see!) and "kago amra dekhabo na" (paper, we shall not show!).

The protests in Jamia and JNU have turned into nationwide campaigns. There are a number of causes to struggle for. If higher education can be free in Germany why not in India? Who will take care of the poverty-stricken and talented youth who must contribute to the country's well-being? Should academic institutions be autonomous or should they be ruled by a party-state reminiscent of ones in many former communist and authoritarian regimes?

The manner in which recruitment, appointments and the fees in JNU were sought to be managed — along with caricaturing it as an enemy of the nation — it was clear that JNU was the target of the ruling dispensation. If JNU is such an evil institution, then one must also acknowledge the two alumni in the cabinet and numerous civil servants who run the country, apart from its profound contribution to the life of the intellect. Not only is the current Nobel Prize winner an alumni, scholars in JNU have contributed to the way India has debated its problems, and some even hold chairs in the world's renowned universities.

The idea of India is much deeper than what political parties with anointed leaders can imagine. For example, Swami Vivekananda, the patron saint of the Indian renaissance, contended that the Indian tradition was so inclusive that Hinduism was not just about toleration but assimilation as well. His remarks at the Parliament of Religions in Chicago in 1893 was the boldest expression of the cosmopolitan view at that time. He articulated the Vedantic ideal lived and experienced by his Master Sri

Ramakrishna Paramahansa — all paths no matter how contradictory they may appear — all lead to the same goal. The next generation that produced Gandhi, Tagore and Azad practised the cosmopolitan version of Hinduism and Islam.

The idea of living with, accepting and learning from diversity is an integral part of national identity that cannot easily be challenged. It is the people of India who are battling for this idea of India — cherished by the founding father and inscribed in the Constitution drafted under the leadership of Dr. Ambedkar. These spontaneous protests devoid of political calculation and expressing the will of the people hold substantial promise for the people of India. Those very persons for whom the Constitution was made wish to abide by it. They foresee the threats posed by an alternative idea of India.

What do we know about spontaneous, leaderless, organisation-less movements? Is Indian democracy and the Indian state resilient and flexible enough to absorb this challenge?

We do not know much about spontaneous leaderless movements like the ones described above. One would worry that these causes may not last in the absence of political parties and leadership that naturally gives shape to social movements.

There is a positive side too. Political calculations that drive parties do not always reflect citizen needs. Opposition parties are sometimes confused regarding whether or not this overt support for the millennial idea of India will boomerang against them. After all, there could be a silent majority that might vote the BJP with even greater fervour if it buys into Hindutva nationalism as a harbinger of long-term progress for the majority population of Hindus.

In this respect, it is truly remarkable that the people of India are leading the polity where political parties often fear to tread. Was the constitution, after all, not about: We the people? The people of India have not only challenged the ruling dispensation with the constitution, they have also opened the eyes of the leadership that sits in the Opposition.

Do established political parties need to change the way they mobilise in the face of spontaneous protest? Just when they thought they had cracked the social media tool? But the story seems to have gone beyond.

Political power has battled for all kinds of ideas — such as those that produced the Hindu rate of growth, as well as, those that led to the most remarkable growth surge. India suffered substantial poverty and governance challenges. In response, politics and the state unleashed the rights-based approach to compensate the poor. Politics was leading from the front, reading the aspirations of the poor and of those who create wealth for the country.

That politics is missing today. On the one hand Hindutva nationalism seeks to alter the millennial idea of India, while on the other, the upholders of the dominant millennial tradition who can contribute to the inclusive character of India so prominent in its federal character, seem to have lost the verve to lead from the front. The people could lose despite their toil, if politics did not find a way of incorporating them. This is a serious challenge where the promise of social mobilisation must meet with politics that protects and uplifts the character of our Constitution.

Saving lives: One drop at a time

Swarnami Mondal on a Bengaluru-based organisation that is creating a database of voluntary blood donors to ensure timely supply and prevent wastage

The *Lancet Haematology* study, published in November 2019, points out that India tops the chart when it comes to unmet blood needs and that the country needs to rethink its estimation of how much blood it needs in order to match its demands. The study says, globally, India is battling a shortfall of 41 million units, and demand outstrips supply by 400 per cent; the overall global shortfall is 100 million units.

Thousands of lives each year is lost due to shortage of blood. Bengaluru-based Chethan Gowda faced a similar loss when his teacher died due to shortage of blood. He realised there was a lack of channel connecting the donors to the recipients and awareness around blood donation needed to be spread among youngsters. Chethan's first-hand encounter with blood crisis prompted him to start Khoon — an NGO which aims to resolve blood shortage in India and motivates more people to donate blood — in 2016.

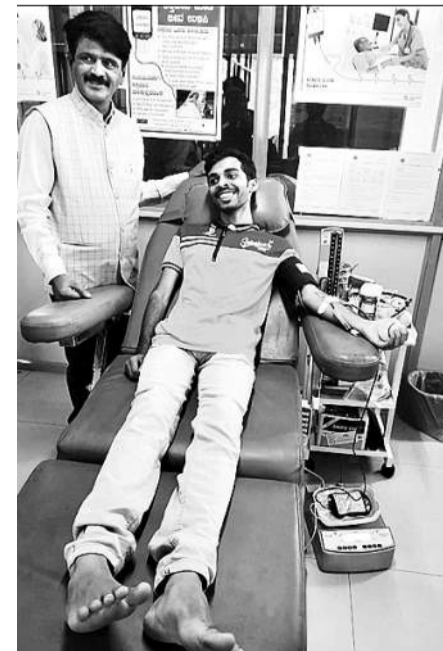
Speaking to *Business Standard*, he says, "A lack of awareness, incorrect information around blood donation in India are some of the main reasons behind us falling short of 3

million units of blood required annually. Even if 1-2 per cent youngsters begin donating blood regularly, we can bridge this gap."

How did Khoon begin its journey?

"It all began with a blood donation camp, but the USP of this blood donation camp was its theme setting," says Chethan, who is now studying for a B.Tech in mechanical engineering. The camp tried to keep the mood light with a musical concert. The turnout was above expectation and they managed to collect quite a lot of blood. "We figured this way we could attract more young people to these blood donation drives and we organised several such theme-based camps since 2016. In four years, the NGO has collected over 87,000 signatories from all over India. Now we conduct six donation camps annually," he says.

The initiative has successfully built a strong database of over 4,000 donors in Bengaluru. The organisation spread its wings to the Northeast in 2017, where a 24X7 blood helpline has been established. In 2018, Khoon forayed in Chhattisgarh's Bhillai. Blood donation camps and awareness programmes were



Gowda donating blood at one of the camps

arranged in Bhillai to bust myths around blood donation.

In 2019, Khoon stepped up its game in research and development and its area of impact was North Karnataka. It partnered with Facebook to implement the tool —

Facebook for blood donation — across all the 214 blood banks in Karnataka. The organisation is now mentoring blood bank technicians on using this Facebook tool towards creating a larger community of donors. It has also partnered with AIDS prevention society to come up with concepts to cut down wastage of blood during medical procedures such as transfusion. Khoon has come up with 100 ml and 50 ml blood sachets for blood transfusion in newborn babies who need less blood than adults.

What challenges does Khoon face? Chethan says, "Blood donation as an ecosystem needs more support. Blood donation, preserving blood and prevention of wastage — all of these needs training, mentorship and funding." He further says, "We can eradicate shortage of blood in the country only if youngsters come up, donate and mobilise others too."

Khoon is a 44-member strong team now and it has over 350 registered volunteers.

The road ahead

"Soon we want to create a similar network of donors for pets, specially cats and dogs. As of now, there are only two Facebook groups working for this cause and many pets die due to the want of blood. The plan is in process and this project will be done in collaboration with veterinary hospitals," Chethan says. Khoon also looks at creating training modules for blood bank technicians in regional languages in times to come.

Taxing the digital economy

Several corporate giants have benefited by avoiding taxes

Even as the US-China trade war appears to have paused, another dispute could be on the horizon. This time, it could be the US versus several major European Union (EU) nations, including France, Italy, Belgium, The Czech Republic, Hungary, Austria and, even perhaps, the UK. The disagreement centres on the levying of a new type of tax on digital revenue. This may escalate into a wider conflict, since the EU and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are looking at framing such taxes. This will be one of the largest areas of concern at the upcoming Davos Meet.

France has started levying a digital tax retrospectively with effect from January last year. Any entity providing a range of specified online services with revenues of €25 million in France and global revenues of €750 million will have to pay 3 per cent of its French revenues under this new tax. The services include "Provision of a digital interface, targeted advertising, transmission of user data for advertising purposes", and so on. The other nations have either imposed similar taxes, or propose to do so soon with local variations on revenue thresholds and defined services. The EU hopes to have a uniform framework for such taxes in place by end-2020,

and the OECD has started discussions among its members.

There are several unusual aspects to this tax. For one, it is levied on revenue and not on profit. It is also proposed to be applicable to any entity that performs such digital services, regardless of its physical presence. The application of relatively high thresholds in terms of revenue is meant to insulate small businesses and start-ups. The idea is to capture tax revenue from companies that incorporate in tax havens, and then supply digital services in large markets without maintaining an official physical presence. Where physical exports are concerned, the EU's laws on "inter-community acquisition of goods" mean that no VAT is payable, and profits, if any, are taxed in the nation of incorporation. This enables free movements of goods and services across the EU but using such provisions also enables digital service providers to

substantially escape the tax net.

This is called the GAFA tax in French discourse because it would directly affect Google, Amazon, Facebook, and Apple. It would also impact other companies smaller in size. The EU reckoned that a flat tax across its member nations could generate roughly €5 billion in annual revenue. Since the GAFA are US-based digital giants, the US government has naturally taken an interest. Equally predictably, President Donald Trump has threatened countervailing sanctions on France, whose exports to the US are worth roughly €25 billion. Logically speaking, if the situation is not resolved, those sanctions would be extended to other EU nations with similar taxes, and perhaps to the entire eurozone. Talks at Davos between the US treasury secretary and the French finance minister could obviate such a possibility.

It's unusual to levy a tax on revenue.

However, the very fact that large international bodies are considering this, and major countries have imposed such taxes, indicates that this has been a gigantic loophole for internet-based services. Indeed, the EU has spent several years debating such a tax before individual nations started imposing it. But several EU nations including Sweden, Finland, and Poland have expressed reservations about this sort of tax. But the OECD is even larger in terms of membership, and it has a bigger geographical spread and could suggest a tax that was global in scope. Clearly, the concept of such a tax is not going to disappear. It remains to be seen if it morphs in format, given American objections, but something akin to this is very likely to stay on the table. The digital economy has benefited from three decades of tax avoidance. Attempts to bring it under the tax net could lead to a trade war.

China and the US push in West Asia

Beijing's expanding footprint in this oil-rich region has set the stage for a competition with Washington



US President Donald Trump with Chinese Vice Premier Liu He before signing the trade agreement with China at the White House on January 15, 2020

PHOTO: PTI

HARSH V PANT

In more ways than one, the year gone by was *annus horribilis* for the Chinese Communist Party and its leader, Xi Jinping. From declining economic growth and a Belt and Road Initiative debacle to troubles in Hong Kong and Xinjiang, there were multiple fires that had to be doused. The Donald Trump Administration changed not only the American approach towards China but also the wider Western approach towards the country, by asking for a balanced relationship, using unrelenting economic pressure.

However, the first phase of a trade deal, which had finally been agreed to by Washington and Beijing in December last year, was signed on January 15. It commits China to buying \$200 billion more in US farm products and other goods and services over two years than it did in 2017, before the trade war erupted. Yet, it leaves in place many tariffs in an attempt to continue to limit the supply of Chinese goods to the US market.

Earlier, just when Beijing would have thought it could not get any worse for it, Mr Trump gave China a New Year gift by escalating a crisis in West Asia by giving orders to target the head of the Revolutionary Guard's elite Quds Force, Qassem Soleimani. This resulted in the most significant confrontation between the US and Iran in recent years, dramatically heightening tensions in a region already beset with multiple fault lines.

In an election year in America, Mr Trump would have made China a focus of his foreign policy achievements, given that he has pushed his rivals also to acknowledge problems in the traditional American approach towards Beijing. A broader debate on China

would also entail a focus on America's changing regional priorities in the Indo-Pacific.

Compared to Barack Obama's pivot to Asia, Mr Trump's concept of a free and open Indo-Pacific has held greater promise, even though a concrete policy approach hasn't fully materialised. But now, after the renewed turbulence in West Asia, America will have to focus greater attention on the region. This will once again give breathing space to China, which has continued to expand its military and economic profile in the Indo-Pacific.

Even in West Asia, where America is struggling to retain its relevance, China's footprint has been expanding. And unlike the US, it has so far managed to be on good terms with not only Iran but also the Arab Gulf states and Israel. China is not only among the top three defence partners for Iran and its largest trading partner, but it has also been expanding the scope of its bilateral engagement with Tehran. This resulted in China-Iran-Russia joint naval exercises near the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz in the Indian Ocean last month. China has provided the shield which has allowed Iran to continue to develop its defence capabilities despite global sanctions.

Beijing was quick to condemn the "military adventurist act by the US", which "goes against basic norms governing international relations and will aggravate tensions and turbulence in the region" even as Tehran hoped China could "play an important role in preventing escalation of regional tensions." But Beijing has shown only limited appetite so far in taking on the US directly, apart from defending the Iranian nuclear deal and criticising American unilateralism.

In fact, it has reduced its import of Iranian oil dramatically after the ending of US sanctions waivers last

year. China was Iran's biggest oil buyer prior to US sanctions, but after that despite Iran's attempt to convince China to continue trading with Iran, there has been reluctance on the part of Beijing to violate the sanctions regime. The payment for Iranian oil is also geared towards paying Iranian debts to Chinese companies that had invested in Iran's oil and gas sector.

The US has maintained its primacy in West Asia for the last several decades and the Carter Doctrine, enunciated by former US President Jimmy Carter in 1980, explicitly committed Washington to defend the oil fields of the Persian Gulf against external threats. Despite signals that Mr Trump might be going back on this decades-old doctrine, he has once again brought the debate on America's regional role to centre stage. And with China's rise in the region, the stage might be set for a regional competition between the two. Against the backdrop of America's recent actions, China's power and influence in West Asia is likely to grow as it seeks greater responsibility for securing its regional interests.

Yet, there is no evidence so far that China wants to take on America's role in West Asia. In fact, it would like to make sure that despite its rhetoric, it trends lightly in the region, especially as this moment presents another opportunity for Beijing to strengthen its power infrastructure, which has been growing weak over the past few years. Wars in West Asia have sapped American power while emboldening China in the past. Beijing will be hoping that history might once again repeat itself.

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How Indian IT can drive global innovation

KESHAV MURUGESH

Amid talks of a slowdown and a general air of insecurity across global economies, India's information technology (IT) and business process management (BPM) industry remains bullish about driving growth through innovation and skilling. Our ability to scale up these efforts will be essential to the growth of the sector across the world.

India is set to lead a wave of optimism and innovation for industries world-wide. Its abundant intellectual and human capital will see it become a powerhouse of global innovation.

Think digital, think India

The fourth industrial revolution that we are currently witnessing is being defined as the new age of automation, driven by unprecedented technological advances. With the entire gamut of work activities being increasingly automated, the implications for the global economy are manifold — the changing nature of work, job roles being re-defined, and certain job roles becoming redundant, leading to growth in new occupations and new roles.

India continues to prove its ability to deploy digital at scale. The role of the Indian IT industry is to position India as a global hub for innovation and co-creation by imbibing the ideology of "think digital, think India". The aim is to drive the focus towards emerging technologies, digitally skilling talent and ensuring that the pace of transformation in the country meets the global standard.

India is steadily working to become a pool of market-ready talent for the world at large, not just for domestic needs. Its ample intellectual and human capital will help it get there

The six growth drivers

The global digital transformation market is expected to grow from \$445.4 billion in 2017 to \$2.28 trillion by 2025 at a compound annual growth rate of 24.3 per cent. Every country ought to take this opportunity or threat (depending on how one sees it) most seriously. If leveraged well, you increase your competitive advantage exponentially; if not, the risk of being relegated to oblivion increases by as much as 50 per cent. What are the drivers to grab this opportunity?

There are six digital technologies which are primarily driving the industry's growth — blockchain, immersive media, internet of things, cloud, robotics and intelligent automation. India leads developed countries such as the US, UK and Japan in deployment of artificial intelligence and robotic process automation-based technologies. Ours is one of the fastest-growing internet economies, with more than 560 million internet subscribers, of which nearly 540 million are mobile internet subscribers as well. To put it simply, 90 per cent of the Indian population has access to mobile phones, half of which has access to the internet, one way or the other. The government's avowed vision of a trillion-dollar

digital economy by 2025 is actually well on target, which is likely to be 18-20 per cent of the country's nominal gross domestic product by then.

Skilling and scaling up

As India paves its path to be a global economic powerhouse, it is imperative to equip its working population with employability skills. Today, India is one of the youngest countries in the world with more than 62 per cent of the population in the working age group (15-59 years) and more than 54 per cent of the total population below 25 years of age.

That said, as a host of emerging technologies change the future of work, the IT-BPM industry faces massive disruption. Of the industry's four to five million employees, 1.5-2 million are expected to require re-skilling in the next four to five years.

Even though it's the need of the hour, re-skilling is a gradual and steep learning curve which is based on value creation and not a quantitative number. Businesses, workers and economies must finance and implement a re-skilling revolution as a critical investment. The problem is too large to be handled alone, and needs a collaborative industry-level response. The IT-BPM industry has stepped up to the challenge, propelled by Nasscom's FutureSkills initiative. The immediate objectives include transforming 100 universities to supply digital talent, and up-skilling an additional two million professionals by 2025.

India is steadily working to become a pool of market-ready talent for the world at large, and not just for domestic needs.

Overhauling the grassroots

Although industry leaders will drive innovation and technological best practices, ingenuity is a skill developed at the grassroots level. There is a need to equip young Indian minds with the perspective, talent, and resources to navigate a future marked by constant change. There is a shift from STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) to STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and mathematics). STEAM is not new, but the urgency to incorporate it in today's time is critical. Lots of hands-on learning opportunities are emerging in schools and institutes all over the world, encouraging collaboration in learning and discovery, using science and tech resources such as soft circuits, embedded video, game creation, data art, and more.

A consistent culture of innovation and growth builds legacies of the future. Despite the chatter of austerity and conservative business growth, proactive and aggressive development is the safest and smartest route to progress.

The writer is group CEO, WNS Global Services, and chairman, Nasscom

OTHER VIEWS

Begin the healing process in Kashmir, and also engage Pak

This will help prevent the dispute being internationalised

For the second time since the government's decision on Article 370 in August last year, China raised the issue of Kashmir at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on Wednesday, prompting a protest from New Delhi. In its response, the government said that Beijing should "refrain from bringing a bilateral issue into the UNSC, and accused China of working at Pakistan's behest. India's case rests on the 1972 Shimla accord, where India and Pakistan agreed to resolve the Kashmir issue bilaterally. China's repeated raising of Kashmir since last August, which includes an aborted attempt in December, is unconstructive and will impact the India-China bilateral relationship if it continues. It is also unlikely to push the government, which has already defied several international calls from friendly countries, into lifting restrictions or rolling back its measures in Kashmir.

While China's move may be unwarranted, it is yet another reason for New Delhi to take heed of the continuing and unprecedented criticism of its actions in Kashmir. Nor can India maintain the duality of insisting, on the one hand, that Kashmir is a bilateral issue and, on the other hand, rejecting all bilateral talks with Pakistan. At some point, the government



must push for normalisation of ties with Pakistan as well as for the lifting of restrictions in Jammu and Kashmir. Only when all communications are restored, all political prisoners freed and added security restrictions removed can the real task of healing in J&K even begin.

The Hindu, January 17

Crime and impunity in sport

SAI must take stern corrective action

A pay reduction of ₹910 per month was the penalty a Sports Authority of India (SAI) coach paid for being found guilty of sexual harassment, according to an RTI response sought by *The Indian Express*.

Denying increments for a year was as harsh as it got for a few other offenders who sexually abused young athletes left in their care and guardianship at residential sports camps that churn out athletes, many of whom go on to represent India. The sports ministry, under which the SAI functions, cannot escape the blame. It has been found to be too lenient on those who have inflicted life-long psychological trauma on proven match-winners with exemplary athletic prowess and unflinching on-court temperament.

These cases also bring into focus the lack of strict security protocols at these year-long camps. While there's a strict code of conduct for players, there are no dos and don'ts for the coaches. Long dragging inquiries and some dodgy acquittals have triggered talk of the SAI being more concerned about its image than the victims. This injustice should rattle the conscience of sports lovers who will start demanding Olympic medals this leap year without sparing a thought for the abusive systems where the athletes learn to give up without a fight very early in life.

The Indian Express, January 17

Right to protest is at risk

Bhim Army bail conditions puzzling

A court rebuking the police for detention without sufficient cause is becoming a rarity in India. The additional sessions judge at the Tis Hazari court in Delhi, however, did just that. At the bail hearing of Chandrashekhar Azad, the Bhim Army chief accused of inciting crowds during his *dharma* in protest against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act and the National Register of Citizens at the Jama Masjid on December 20, 2019, the judge, Kamini Lau, insisted that the right to peaceful protest was constitutional. Two points of Ms Lau's rebuke to the police stand out. One was her comment that the police were behaving as though Jama Masjid were in Pakistan. The more important point, how-

ever, was Ms Lau's reported observation that people were protesting on the streets because what should have been said inside Parliament was not said.

At the same time, once bail was granted, the conditions attached to it appeared to be puzzling. Not only was Mr Azad asked not to commit similar offences — none of which has been established and no damage to public property assessed so far — but he has also been asked not to visit Delhi for the four weeks before the assembly elections. It cannot be but disappointing that the court's clarity regarding peaceful protest does not appear to be reflected in the bail conditions.

The Telegraph, January 17