

One purpose, many differences

Taking on the BJP is not enough; the Opposition must work on its common agenda



SMITA GUPTA

The Opposition parties that have banded together against the BJP need to go beyond State-level alliances. They must present not only a common pre-poll agenda with a storyline distinct from that of the ruling party, but also a united front, minimising competition among their members in key States.

Despite the Narendra Modi government losing some of its sheen, the BJP's well-oiled machine presents a formidable challenge to the Opposition. But it is becoming apparent that the Congress, which is still riding high after its 2018 electoral victories in Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan and Chhattisgarh, is doing all it can to strengthen itself even as it tries to rally the other secular Opposition parties to take on the BJP.

Some fraught relations

The resulting tension has manifest itself in the Congress's equation with the smaller parties. Barring the States where the Congress is in a direct fight with the BJP, its interests clash with those of the Trinamool Congress in West Bengal; the Samajwadi Party (SP), the Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) and the Rashtriya Lok Dal (RLD) in Uttar Pradesh; the Left parties in Kerala and Tripura; the Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) in Delhi; and even the Janata Dal (Secular) in Karnataka, where the two are currently sharing power. In some other States, the Congress's relationship with its allies — whether the Rashtriya Janata Dal, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam, the Nationalist Congress Party, the Jharkhand Mukti Morcha, or the National Conference — is somewhat less strained. As things stand, it will fight against its "national allies" in at least three States — U.P., Kerala and Tripura — and is likely to have a seat-sharing agreement with the Left parties in West Bengal against the Trinamool.

The fraught relations between the Congress and some of its allies were visible in Parliament. On February 12, the SP and other Opposition parties were upset when the Congress did not join their protest in the Rajya Sabha after SP chief Akhilesh Yadav was prevented by the BJP government in U.P. from board-



"The Congress is doing all it can to strengthen itself." Rahul Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi Vadra at a road show in Lucknow. — RAJEEV BHATT

ing a flight to Allahabad. A day later, Congress MP Adhir Chowdhury accused the Trinamool on the floor of the Lok Sabha of involvement in the chit fund scam; only NC leader Farooq Abdullah intervened. An incensed West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee confronted UPA chairperson Sonia Gandhi in Parliament House, "I won't forget it." Taken aback, Ms. Gandhi sought to placate her: "We may accuse each other, but we are still friends." Even as this was playing out in Parliament, the Congress declared it would fight the elections in U.P. "on the front foot", rather than meekly accept the two seats left for it by the SP-BSP-RLD combine. A circumspect Mr. Yadav welcomed Priyanka Gandhi's entry into full-time politics, but BSP supremo Mayawati fired her first salvo against the Congress last week: M.P.'s Congress administration and U.P.'s BJP government, she tweeted, were alike as both had used the draconian National Security Act against Muslims accused of cow slaughter.

This has upset the Opposition parties, as U.P.'s 80 Lok Sabha seats hold the key to forming the next government at the Centre. They are also concerned that this tension will adversely affect the momentum that the Opposition got after the swearing-in of the Congress-JD (S) government in Karnataka in 2018. At the Opposition protest at New Delhi's Jantar Mantar on the closing day of Parliament, Mr. Abdullah advised his colleagues: "Defeat Modi first, then think of the Prime Minister's chair. Big causes need sacrifices. The days are over when there was the flag of one party across the country." Ms. Banerjee took the hint and responded that while she would

not concede an inch in West Bengal, all the Opposition parties are willing to come together "nationally".

In the Congress, however, leaders and party workers alike believe that as members of "the only national party with an inclusive agenda", they must first strengthen their own organisation. They say that they cannot be "held hostage" by regional parties such as the SP, BSP and RLD in U.P.— or, for that matter, in any other State. They are optimistic that the ideology that binds the Opposition parties will ensure that even those who contest against each other in the elections — for tactical or other reasons — will come together after the results are in.

A common minimum programme

In the absence of a substantive pre-poll alliance, Opposition leaders who met at NCP chief Sharad Pawar's residence on February 13 discussed whether a common minimum programme could hold the constituents together in a "pre-poll alliance" to avoid "post-poll irritants". The Opposition parties have realised that this is critical as it will not only ensure that voters take them more seriously after the elections if they forge ahead of the BJP-led NDA, but the President too will be compelled to call them first to form a government. In the absence of a pre-poll alliance with a common agenda, he is likely to call the single largest party, which may well be the BJP, despite predictions that its numbers will slump.

What is driving the Opposition today is the energy and combativeness of younger regional leaders, particularly Ms. Banerjee, the Telugu Desam Party's N. Chandrababu Naidu, and the AAP's Arvind Kejriwal. Mr. Abdullah, Mr. Pawar and former Prime Minister H.D. Deve Gowda are playing the role of elder statesmen. There is also a grudging acceptance from some Opposition leaders that Mr. Gandhi's steadfast attack of the BJP, and particularly Prime Minister Narendra Modi, on the Rafale deal has not just dented Mr. Modi's seemingly immaculate image, but also provided a "political line" for the Opposition.

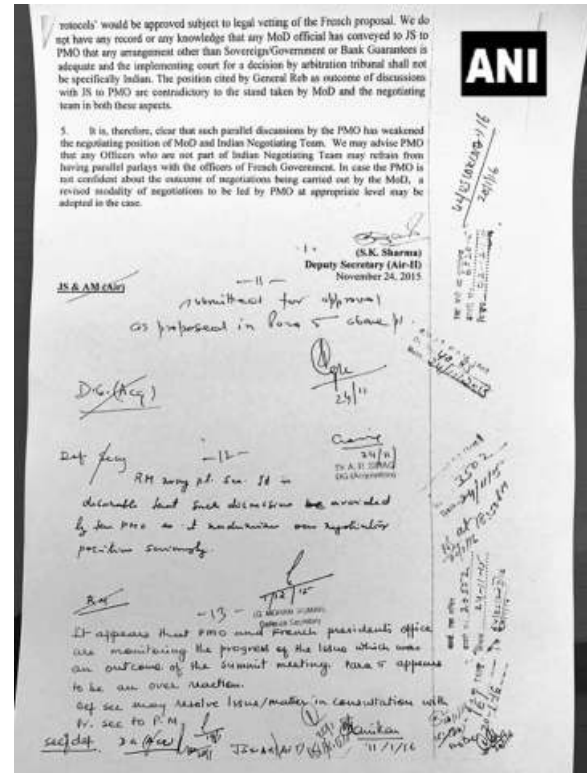
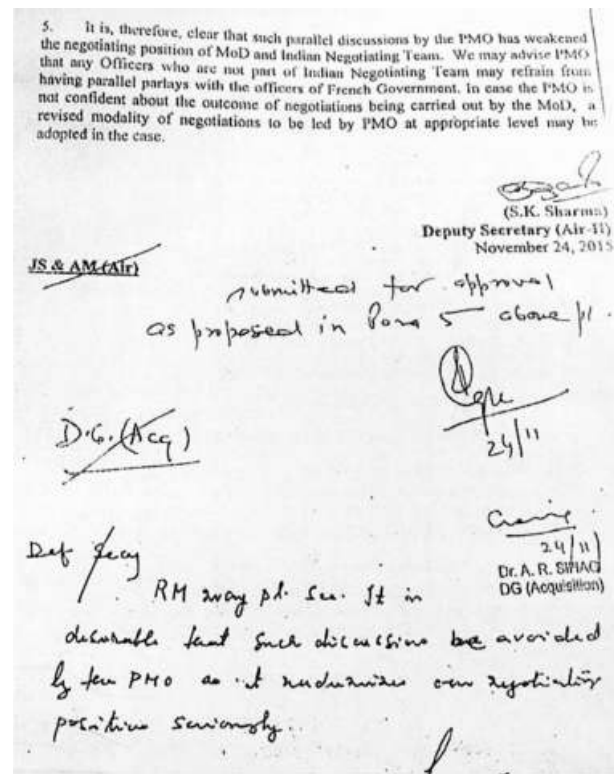
Today, the Pulwama terror attack poses a fresh challenge to the Opposition. It will require the combined political skills of leaders to ensure that the BJP and the RSS do not use this carnage to polarise voters on religious lines.

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FROM THE READERS' EDITOR

Neither vainglorious nor venturesome

An image published in 'The Hindu' was not doctored, as some have claimed



A.S. PANNEERSELVAM

A reader referred to my column, "Means and ends matter" (Sept. 22, 2014), and cited a tweet by the political commentator Abhijit Iyer-Mitra to question this paper's investigation into the Rafale deal. My column was not only about what journalists report, but also about how they gather information. Mr. Iyer-Mitra's provocative tweet was: "I have to register my STRONG PROTEST with @the.hindu. It's one thing having an editorial line but cropping out photos to avoid inconvenient facts like here where @manoharparrkar clearly instructs the DS MoD to coordinate with PMO (courtesy @ANI) is BLATANTLY UNETHICAL."

As a staunch defender of the regime, Mr. Iyer-Mitra is free to arrive at his own conclusions from the given documents, but he cannot level charges against others without going through the documents in the public domain carefully. Jeff Jarvis, professor at Craig Newmark Journalism School, New York, wrote

about journalists: "It is the sacred duty of journalists to listen to the public they serve. It is then their duty to bring journalistic value — reporting facts, explanation, context, education, connections, understanding, empathy, action, options — to the public conversation. Journalism is that conversation. Democracy is that conversation." I believe that this column has become a forum for readers and journalists to have a meaningful conversation that tries to break the polarising narrative that is corroding our public discourse.

Before explaining the shortcomings in Mr. Iyer-Mitra's allegations, let me explain the core editorial values that guide this newspaper's handling of images. Any unethical cropping or digital altering is seen as an act of dereliction. For instance, on April 1, 2009, a senior staff photographer doctored an image of two mynas in sync. This was carried on page 2. But some sharp eyes noticed the discrepancy, and the internal investigation by the then Readers' Editor (RE), K. Narayanan, which included a study of the picture enlarged 200 times, firmly established that the image was manipulated. The editor-in-chief apologised and the RE wrote a scathing column, "Venturesome, vainglorious" (April 13, 2009), about the permanent scar created by this act of duplicity.

In his desire to justify his earlier stand of defending the Rafale deal, Mr. Iyer-Mitra is oblivious to some of the crucial forensic details that distinguish the Defence Ministry's internal note dated November 24, 2015, in a facsimile carried by *The Hindu* on February 8, 2019 (in image 1), and the image showing the file noting by then Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar in response to the Ministry's note on the negotiations, which *The Hindu* carried on February 9, 2019 (in image 2).

A close look at the note published by N. Ram, as part of his investigation, reveals that the document was from an earlier date. In that, officials of the Defence Ministry draw the attention of the Defence Minister to the fact that there was a parallel negotiation being led by the Prime Minister's Office. The page has only the observation of the officials. There is no numbering or sequencing of opinions. In the note released by the government through ANI, every opinion is numbered, and Mr. Parrikar's opinion is clearly marked 13, which means it was a subsequent document. The numberings, which are quite conspicuous in the ANI document, prove that *The Hindu* published both documents without any doctored.

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SINGLE FILE

Making art inclusive

Events like the Kochi-Muziris Biennale serve a vital purpose

KUNAL RAY



Art ought to be an enabler but that is perhaps utopian. Exhibitions have now proliferated and there is a plethora of art events, but whom or what are these events for? For a privileged few who access these spaces which are deeply hierarchical in nature? Galleries in a traditional sense have remained the preserve

of the elite. This has led to the emergence of non-normative, alternative art spaces where newer alliances and engagements can be embraced. The Kochi-Muziris Biennale, which began in 2012, feels like redemption in many ways. It is one of India's biggest achievements in making art inclusive. Hordes of people show up at the venues every day, many of whom have limited or no prior exposure to the visual arts. These are the common masses who turn their Sunday trip to the city into a visit to the biennale.

One of the major initiatives of the biennale during each edition has been to reflect stories of the local people and their histories. Thus, besides a lot of otherwise perplexing art from far removed contexts like Romania or Hungary, the visitors also find a representation of themselves in paintings, videos or photography.

For instance, in the ongoing edition, Nilima Sheikh's painting 'Salam Chechi' is a tribute to the ubiquitous Malayali nurse. Artist Vipin Dhanurdharan has portraits of local people who had welcomed him into their home for meals. He organises a community cooking and dining event every week by inviting experts to cook traditional recipes unique to various communities living in Kochi (in picture). The current edition curated by artist Anita Dube is titled 'Possibilities for a Non-Alienated Life'. Dube's politics are at the forefront. She has tried to make the marginal visible, to situate the unheard and the unseen at the centre of her discourse.

Art without politics is no art at all and could you think of a better place than Kerala to rise up to the challenge? Feminism, identity politics, gender rights, LGBTQ representation and farmers' issues are replete in this edition. This is art of our 'contemporary' ethos because it is reflective of the times we live in. Contemporary is just not cutting-edge art practice, but art that takes a distinct position vis-à-vis the current sociopolitical climate of the country. Amidst shrinking spaces of debate and dialogue and growing apathy for compassion, spaces like these are the need of the hour.

In her curatorial note, Dube writes, "If we desire a better life on this earth — our unique and beautiful planet — we must in all humility start to reject an existence in the service of capital. 'Possibilities for a Non-Alienated Life' asks and searches for questions in the hope of dialogue." Through dialogue, we shall thrive.

The writer teaches literary and cultural studies at FLAME University, Pune

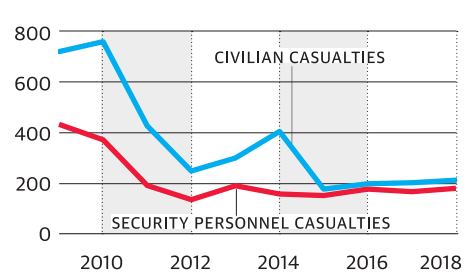


DATA POINT

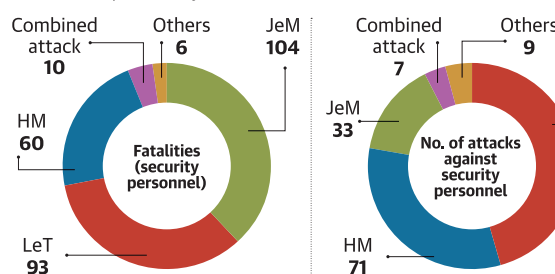
Terror targets

Civilian fatalities in terrorist attacks in J&K have come down over the years, while casualties among security force personnel have remained more or less the same since 2013. The majority of the attacks that caused the deaths of security personnel in the State were perpetrated by the JeM and LeT. The incidence of casualties of security personnel has been higher in Maoist attacks. By **Varun B. Krishnan**

Changing target | Insurgents have been targeting security establishments more than civilian areas in recent years. This has resulted in lower civilian casualties in Jammu and Kashmir



Perpetrators | Fatalities in attacks led by the JeM were the highest, while the highest number of attacks in the past decade were carried out by the LeT (in incidents where organisations claimed responsibility)



Most casualties | In J&K, the Pulwama incident was the worst in terms of casualties in attacks against security personnel. A look at the five incidents with the highest number of casualties in insurgent-led attacks in J&K



Maoist insurgency | However, the most casualties for security forces in insurgent violence have occurred due to Maoist attacks. A look at the five incidents with the highest number of casualties in Maoist-led attacks



* JeM: Jaish-e-Mohammed; LeT: Lashkar-e-Taiba; HM: Hizb-ul-Mujahideen | Source: South Asia Terrorism Portal

FROM The Hindu ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 18, 1969

President warns against 'danger of violence'

The President, Dr. Zakir Husain, to-day [February 16] declared that the problems of integrated economic development in the country required political stability. He called upon all political parties in the country to endeavour to strive towards this end and promote rapid social and economic development. Addressing the joint session of both the Houses of Parliament, which assembled to-day [February 17] for its budget session, Dr. Zakir Husain expressed concern at what he called the "danger of violence from certain political groups" and said that the doctrines propounded by these groups were clearly subversive of the Constitution and the rule of law and detrimental to orderly government and progress.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO FEBRUARY 18, 1919

Schools and Depressed Classes.

For some time past a strong agitation has been kept up against the elevation of the depressed classes in which their Highnesses the Maharaja and Yuvaraja [of Mysore] are personally interested. At Sringeri, the head-quarters of the successors of Sankaracharya, Mr. C.R. Reddy, the new Inspector-General of Education, permitted the admission of three Halepyka boys belonging to the community above the depressed classes to the Government Anglo-Vernacular School. But as a protest against this, parents of other boys withdrew their children from the school and started a new national school and prayed for Government grant. A [Mysore] Government order on this subject dated 29th November, 1918, says: The Government cannot uphold the view that any one shall be excluded from public schools on the ground of caste as the schools maintained from public revenues are intended for the benefit of all classes of people in the State in the same way as railways, hospitals, courts of law, and other public institutions.

CONCEPTUAL

Naturalistic fallacy

PHILOSOPHY

Also known as the "is-ought" fallacy, this refers to a logical fallacy wherein people falsely derive moral values regarding what is right or wrong based on certain objective natural facts. A person committing the naturalistic fallacy may believe that since people are endowed with different abilities by nature, it is morally justified to discriminate among them. A political conservative, for instance, may believe that it is justified to discriminate between men and women since they are gifted with different abilities by nature. The naturalistic fallacy was first proposed by British philosopher George Edward Moore in his famous 1903 book *Principia Ethica*.

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