



Something special

India and Bhutan have a good thing going; each must take the other's concerns seriously

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two day visit to Thimphu affirmed a long-standing tradition between India and Bhutan, where the leaders of both countries have given visiting each other a major priority early in their tenures. Mr. Modi returned a state visit to India by Bhutan Prime Minister Dr. Lotay Tshering in December 2018; this visit was actually delayed to include outcomes such as the inauguration of the 720 MW Mangdechhu hydropower plant. The relationship is indeed built on a traditional closeness, one that is unique in today's world. Open borders, close alignment and consultation on foreign policy, and regular, open communications on all strategic issues are the hallmark of the relationship that has maintained its consistency for the past many decades. Bhutan's unequivocal support to India on strategic issues has meant a lot to India on the international stage and at the United Nations. Equally, Bhutan's leadership has not flinched in opposing threats to India; for instance, the former King's efforts in 2003 to drive out ULFA rebels or more recently, support for India's stand against Chinese troops on the Doklam plateau. India's assistance to Bhutan's planned economy, to constructing its highest revenue earner of hydropower generated electricity, and then buying the electricity generated has also ensured a symbiotic and mutually beneficial base to the relationship, which has been nurtured by the leaders in both countries, in a manner Mr. Modi called "exemplary".

It would however, be a mistake for New Delhi to take the relationship with Thimphu for granted. In the past few years, ties came under a strain over India's sudden change in its power purchasing policy, rigid rates and refusal to allow Bhutan to join the national power grid and trade with third countries like Bangladesh. These issues are being addressed now. Another concern that could create differences is over Bhutan's worry that too much trade, transport and tourism from India could put its environment at risk. India's plans for a Motor Vehicles Agreement (MVA) in the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal grouping have been held up, and a Bhutanese proposal to levy entry charges on Indian tourists could cause differences with India. Earlier generations of Bhutanese students never looked beyond India, but in recent years young Bhutanese have shown a preference for education destinations in Australia, Singapore and Thailand. There is thus much to repair in the ties. More importantly, New Delhi will have to remain alert to strategic powers which are courting Bhutan assiduously, as is evident from the high-level visits from China and the U.S. In a world of growing options, it remains in India's and Bhutan's best interests to make each other's concerns a top priority.

Soldier Number One

The creation of the post of CDS is a comment on the security environment

The creation of the post of the Chief of the Defence Staff, which Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced in his Independence Day address, fulfils a long-felt and consistently articulated need to strengthen India's defence posture. Considering that the Prime Minister underlined this announcement by saying that this was an "important" development, it gives legitimate pause to wonder why this has taken so many decades. Indeed, Manohar Parrikar, as Defence Minister, had said this was on the cards. Yet, two Defence Ministers came and went, Arun Jaitley and Nirmala Sitharaman, and this logical step was not taken. Since this is to be a 'single-point' advisory position to the government, there must have been entrenched opposition to this becoming reality. Ultimately the decision must have been thrust centre stage by the current strategic environment. What was always desirable became an urgent necessity. Pulwama and Balakot, the repeated offers for mediation in Kashmir by the U.S. President, the imminent pull-out of American troops from Afghanistan, which would leave Pakistan and its proxies the dominant players on the ground with a strong chance of blowback into Kashmir, as well as the abrogation of Articles 370 and 35A, are factors that have come together to confer urgency to taking this step. The forces will no doubt have to be on a heightened sense of alert and in a seamless state of coordination to meet the challenges.

Now, the ambit of the office, the tenure, and who will hold the post, will have to be decided soon. Consider briefly what transpired during Kargil, after which the Kargil Review Committee strongly recommended setting up the CDS: It took a fortnight after the incursions were initially detected before the Indian Air Force (IAF) could be pressed into countermeasures: the then Indian Army Chief was away on a foreign tour, there was inadequate appreciation of the ground situation by the Indian Army, and poor sharing of intelligence, and the squabbling between the IAF and the Indian Army over whether to use helicopters or fixed wing aircraft and how and who should call the shots, comprehensively blunted the initial response. The CDS is expected to bridge such dangerous gaps and reduce response time. It is envisaged he will keep the Defence Minister, continuously and fully briefed and effectively advised, be part of the adjunct apparatus of the Cabinet Committee on Security Affairs, and better link the three services in terms of planning, coordination and execution. It will certainly leave the three service chiefs to focus on running their arms of the forces more efficiently. This move will no doubt bring the strategic forces under the CDS as well. The government should use the opportunity to ramp up the intelligence apparatus that is concomitant to this office.

The far right's disruption of globalisation

Donald Trump's emulators have tapped into globalisation's long-standing discontents



C.P. CHANDRASEKHAR

By launching a trade war against China, the United States government that had pressured many a country to liberalise trade and globalise seems to have turned against its own agenda. In a series of aggressive moves, the U.S. — the one-time votary of freer trade — has put in place and widened the coverage of a protectionist shield aimed at stimulating domestic production and reducing the country's trade deficit. While these moves initiated by the Donald Trump administration were on occasion targeted at multiple countries and involved rewriting the North American Free Trade Agreement with Canada and Mexico, the focus of the trade and technology war has been China.

Steps against China

China-specific tariff aggression began with a 25% tariff on imports worth \$50 billion, out of the total of \$540 billion imported by the U.S. from China in July 2018. Soon, an additional \$200 billion worth of imports from China were subjected to tariffs of 10%, and those levies were also raised to 25% in May this year. Most recently on August 1, the balance of around \$300 billion worth of imports from China were subjected to a phased 10% levy, with a clear threat that these levies too can be raised to 25%. China's responses to U.S. actions, which came at every step of the trade war, have in turn led to the \$120 billion of goods it imports from the U.S. being subject to a

25% duty. The U.S. has also imposed sanctions on and shut off business relations with individual Chinese firms, such as Huawei, on grounds varying from national security to alleged theft of intellectual property from U.S. firms. This prevents the firms targeted from either selling in U.S. markets and that of its allies or buying goods, services and technology from U.S. firms or those of its allies.

Parallel to all this, based on the allegation that the Chinese authorities have deliberately allowed the yuan to depreciate *vis-à-vis* the dollar to support its exporters, the U.S. Treasury has designated China as a currency manipulator. What additional action that would lead to is yet unclear. What is clear, however, is that given the importance of China as a global manufacturing hub, these measures have disrupted global value chains and production networks that are the hallmark of globalisation. De-globalisation may yet be a distant prospect, but the fact that the world's leading superpower is willing to disrupt globalisation provides both an example and the justification to other governments that find the need to move in that direction.

The U.S. argument

The U.S. justifies its actions against China by citing that country's significance as a source of inadequately reciprocated imports into the U.S. Imports from China account for more than a fifth of aggregate U.S. imports. With exports to China being nowhere as large, the U.S. runs an annual trade deficit with that country of around \$420 billion, which 'imbalance' is attributed to Chinese policy.

There are, however, two important facts that this argument sidesteps. First, the gains to the U.S. from its economic relationship



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

with China are inadequately captured by the trade figures. A major gain for U.S. companies, even if not for the U.S. per se, is the local sales by subsidiaries of American multinationals located in China. Official statistics from the U.S. indicate that U.S. multinational affiliates based in China notched up local sales of \$222 billion in 2015, which do not figure in trade calculations. Second, these subsidiaries are responsible for a chunk of China's exports to the U.S. According to one estimate, more than half of Chinese exports to the U.S. originate in foreign invested enterprises which are either U.S. multinational arms or firms with parents in other advanced economies. That is, the U.S. trade deficit with China is the result of the off-shoring associated with globalisation, rather than to Chinese policy favouring its own firms.

Reading Trump

Not surprisingly, it troubles the neoliberal policy establishment that the fallout of this kind of trade aggression can set back globalisation across the world. Members of the G20 other than the U.S. have strenuously and unsuccessfully tried to get the latter to sign on to another call for strengthening free trade. The International Monetary Fund, the World Trade Organisation and a host of international institutions have warned of the dangers of the

new protectionism. Implicit in their reasoning is that the tariff aggression is an error being made by a maverick or misguided administration. But that does not take into account the fact that Mr. Trump had been railing against trade agreements that hurt the U.S. even in the course of his election campaign and withdrew from the Trans-Pacific Partnership Agreement days after he took office. It also ignores the fact that a section hurt by the Trump tariffs — U.S. farmers for whom China was a \$6 billion market in 2018 with it absorbing 60% of U.S. soyabean exports — still support him. A survey by the Purdue Center for Commercial Agriculture found that 78% of farmers held that the Trump tariffs will in time benefit them and a Pulse survey by *Farm Journal* found that Mr. Trump had a 79% approval rating among farmers.

The faith in Mr. Trump and rejection of economic liberalism are telling. These farmers along with U.S. industrial workers have for long felt they had been left behind in the neoliberal years when elites in developed and developing countries alike captured all the benefits of growth and inequality increased hugely. With the increase in income and wealth at the top of the pyramid accruing largely through transactions in the financial sector, productive activity that could have delivered benefits to others has been lagging.

The idea that the benefits of whatever growth occurred under the neoliberal regime would trickle down to the poor and lower middle classes was shown to be what it was: patently false. Seen in that context, Mr. Trump is no maverick, despite his wild twitter and vocal outbursts. He tapped into a genuine grievance and railed against elements of a regime he too was a beneficiary of. That

brought him to power once. It may well return him to power again. When in power he needs to adopt at least some policies that go against the grain of free market philosophy and the globalisation that flows from it.

In Europe

This is not confined to the U.S. comes through from the rise of what is dismissed as "right wing populism" in Europe, which is not just sceptical of free trade even within the European Union but is coming out against the fiscal conservatism promoted by financial interests that leaves the continent mired in a trajectory of low growth and high unemployment and individual countries reeling under austerity. Combining this with anti-immigrant rhetoric delivers a toxic mix that is helping them gain popularity and even a seat in some governments. On the other hand, sections of the centre left that had bought into the neoliberal paradigm are being shown the door. The pleasure derived by the advocates of neoliberalism from the significant decline of the left in the decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union (which deprives the progressive critique of neoliberalism of a strong political base) has proved short-lived.

Needless to say, the far right is hardly committed to the anti-globalisation strain implicit in its rhetoric. It is as wedded to the hegemony of capital and the markets as are the neoliberal dogmatists. Their ideological pragmatism is opportunistic and fickle. Yet for the moment, their actions, especially that of Mr. Trump, have disrupted globalisation.

C.P. Chandrasekhar is Professor at the Centre for Economic Studies and Planning, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

Democracy under siege

Liberty, equality and fraternity are becoming subservient to a new idea of sovereignty



DUSHYANT DAVE

The Constituent Assembly formation was the culmination of the final stage of the struggle for freedom and independence, which was won by the supreme sacrifices made by millions of Indians. People across the length and breadth of the country made sacrifices in one way or the other. On January 26, 1950, India got its Constitution. Every succeeding generation in India owes an eternal debt of gratitude to the country's forefathers for this 'sacred text'. There is absolutely no doubt that we must keep the spirit of this text as well as the letter, while also protecting Constitutional values and its morality.

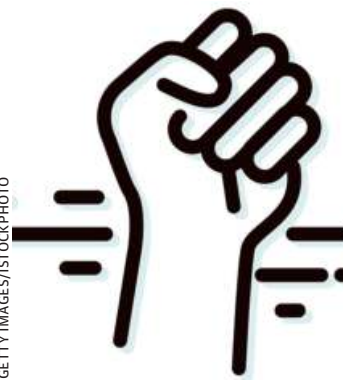
However, the current state of affairs in the country is an example of how the Constitution is slowly and steadily being made to wither away. Parliament, the judiciary and the executive are all under stress. Things are going wrong in these fast-changing times. People are moved, and getting moved, by

an ideology which is apparently in conflict with constitutional ethos and basic human values. As a result, people are tired of a government by the people and are instead leaning to support a government for the people. They are indifferent to whether it is a government of the people and by the people. Dr. B.R. Ambedkar warned us "not to be tardy in the recognition of the evils that lie across our path and which induce people to prefer Government for the people to Government by the people". But have we paid heed to this warning?

A missing debate

Today, liberty, equality and fraternity are becoming subservient to a new idea of sovereignty. Ultra-nationalism has trampled over basic human rights and the dignities of citizens, especially of the "down-trodden" and the "minorities". Constitutionalism is being forgotten. As a result democratic principles are unable to check legislative, judicial and executive powers. Each organ is paying lip service to this fundamental principle. Examples are writ large in front of us and happen everyday.

The government's focus on certain ideological issues to drive home its agenda is a serious point



GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

to be debated. A political party that is in power can push through its policies. But when it becomes an obsession to the point of neglecting real issues, it poses a challenge.

The ruling party cannot be satisfied with chest thumping on Triple Talaq or the abrogation of Article 370. Where are the much-needed discussions on poverty, the economic slowdown, hate crimes, the rise in population and agrarian distress? Why not 'wage war' on these issues?

The government's strategy on the abrogation of Article 370 is by far the most serious challenge to federalism. The bifurcation of Jammu and Kashmir is most condemnable. Does this not pave the way for any government with a majori-

ty to carve up States based on a whim?

Stepping back

The judiciary, especially the Supreme Court of India, is the custodian of the fundamental rights of citizens under the Constitution. But the problem is not the absence of the law but of its implementation. The judiciary's blanching over protecting the fundamental rights of the citizens of Jammu and Kashmir points to its abdication of carrying out its duty.

The judiciary itself has held that a judicial review of actions by the Executive is a part of the basic structure and has even proclaimed that "there are no unreviewable discretions under the constitutional dispensation". If one can go by various judgments, it is dutybound to inquire into the legitimacy of the exercise of powers.

Article 21, which is about the "protection of life and personal liberty", has been infused with new and enriched life by the judiciary. But in Jammu and Kashmir, restrictions virtually amounting to a deprivation of the liberties of the citizens of Jammu and Kashmir over the past fortnight are not "according to procedure established by law". Using Section 144 of the

Code of Criminal Procedure Code, 1973 in a blanket manner is wholly insufficient as a justification for all that has been done.

Then why is the silence of the higher judiciary so deafening? The reason is not far from fathom. The distance between the judiciary and political and executive leaders is blurring. Where is the expected aloofness?

It was B.R. Ambedkar again who said, "Because I feel, however good a Constitution may be it is sure to turn out bad because those who are called upon to work it, happen to be a bad lot." His strong warning — "It is quite possible for this new born democracy to retain its form but give place to dictatorship in fact. If there is a landslide, the danger of the second possibility becoming actuality is much greater" — does not seem to have registered with our constitutional functionaries. The election result of 2019 is the proof of Ambedkar's prophecy coming true. But sadly, the real protectors of the Constitution do not seem bothered. They are content with allowing the government to have either the last say or the last laugh. Democracy is certainly losing out to populism.

Dushyant Dave is Senior Advocate, Supreme Court of India

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Unrest in Kashmir

It is a matter of concern that the situation in Kashmir is still not normal ("Curbs on movement back in Kashmir following clashes", August 19). Closing incidents of disturbances, even if they are mild, should be taken seriously. If the Centre had taken into confidence the local leaders before abrogating Article 370, the situation could have been handled better.

The Bharatiya Janata Party was never in power in the State except for a couple of years. It is difficult for it to read the pulse of the people on its own. It is time the Centre involved local leaders in decision-making. Whatever happens in Jammu and Kashmir reverberates not only in other parts of India but also along the globe.

V. SUBRAMANIAN, Chennai

It is typical of the middle class to go with the flow as

they are always more likely to side with the powerful rather than the powerless. This has always been the case, irrespective of which party is in power (Editorial page, "The Idea of India is failing", August 19). What happens in Kashmir has very little relevance in the lives of middle-class citizens in India as they are not directly affected.

KARTHIK G., Chennai

It's important that we merge J&K with India completely because it borders a nation that has the intention of disturbing our internal security by making Kashmiris victims of terrorism. The writer says we think of Kashmir only as a tourist spot but that was because of the hurdle of Article 35A. If no one was allowed to make Kashmir their home, how could they develop a bond with the place? The move by the government was definitely not

constitutional but the motive is right, which is to secure the interest of the Union of India.

AUM CHHAYA, Rajkot, Gujarat

It is because of a majoritarian mindset that Indians now believe that whatever Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah do is what the country really needs. Announcing suddenly drastic moves such as demonetisation and the abrogation of Article 370 while keeping an entire State in the dark is not how a democracy functions. Due to this one-man (or two-men) show, there is a decline in the spirit of secularism and fraternity.

ELOWN M. ALWYN, Bengaluru

Policy of No First Use

Is the government contemplating a change in its 'No First Use' policy to checkmate Pakistan or is this mere posturing to lure the

people into believing that it can go to any extent to protect the nation from foreign aggression, be it from Pakistan or China (Editorial page, "An intervention that leads to more questions", August 19)? There must be clear enunciation of the policy in order to clear confusion and open up the issue for wider debate and discussion.

V. PADMANABHAN, Bengaluru

India has so far remained a responsible nuclear power despite not being a signatory to the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. India's bid to enter the Nuclear Suppliers Group has been supported by several countries only because of its clean nuclear record. It's unfortunate that the Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's ambiguous statement will undermine India's credibility in the global arena. The change in the 'No First Use' policy could create an arms race in the region. This

would also betray the vision of former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee.

VIDHYA B. RAGUNATH, Thanjavur, Tamil Nadu

A rebellious Hooda

In spite of its poor performance in the 2019 Lok Sabha election and knowing well that it is a sinking ship, the high command of the Indian National Congress party has still not learnt how to revitalise the party to take on the BJP. The grand old party seems to be committing a mistake in former Haryana Chief Minister Bhupinder Singh Hooda's case ("Hooda keeps everyone guessing", August 19). Mr. Hooda has been the Chief Minister twice and has a large following, so the Congress should not be egoistic; it should try to solve the issue amicably. His comments on Article 370 should be treated as his personal view. It will be a testing time for the interim president of the party, Sonia Gandhi, to set

things right in Haryana. D. SETHURAMAN, Chennai

Head coach again

The reappointment of Ravi Shastri as Team India's head coach was on expected lines and is wise ("Sport" page, "Ravi Shastri's tryst with head coach post extends", August 16). Perhaps the best aspect of Shastri is that he has struck a rapport with not only Virat Kohli, but also other senior players as well. This is a huge asset for Indian cricket as the team cannot afford to be dragged in directions by various personalities. Besides, there is a need for cohesiveness not just between coach, captain, players and support staff, but with selectors as well. This is where Shastri's experience, communication skills and knowledge on modern coaching methods would come in handy.

R. SIVAKUMAR, Chennai

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