

AI garage?

To realise India's potential in the field, a strong buy-in from policymakers is needed

The NITI Aayog has published an ambitious discussion paper on kickstarting the artificial intelligence (AI) ecosystem in India. AI is the use of computers to mimic human cognitive processes for decision-making. The paper talks of powering five sectors - agriculture, education, health care, smart cities/infrastructure and transport – with AI. It highlights the potential for India to become an AI 'garage', or solutions provider, for 40% of the world. To pull this off, India would have to develop AI tools for a range of applications: reading cancer pathology reports, rerouting traffic in smart cities, telling farmers where to store their produce, and picking students at high risk of dropping out from school, among them. It is a tall order, but several countries have similar ambitions. The U.S., Japan and China have published their AI strategy documents and, importantly, put their money where their aspirations are. China, for example, plans to hand out a million dollars in subsidies to AI firms, as well as to run a five-year university programme for 500 teachers and 5,000 students. The NITI Aayog does not talk about how India's ambitions will be funded, but proposes an institutional structure to get things going. This structure includes a network of basic and applied research institutions, and a CERN-like multinational laboratory that would focus on global AI challenges.

These are lofty goals, but they beg the question: can India bring it to pass? In answer, the NITI Aayog offers a sombre note of caution. India hardly has any AI expertise today. The paper estimates that it has around 50 top-notch AI researchers, concentrated in elite institutions like the IITs. Further, only around 4% of Indian AI professionals are trained in emerging technologies such as deep learning. And while India does publish a lot, these publications aren't very impactful; India's Hindex, a measure of how often its papers are cited, is behind 18 other countries. This is not encouraging, considering that returns on AI are not guaranteed. The technology has tripped up as often as it has delivered. Among successes, a recent study found that a Google neural network correctly identified cancerous skin lesions more often than expert dermatologists did. India, with its acute shortage of specialist doctors in rural areas, could benefit greatly from such a tool. On the other hand, studies have found that AI image-recognition technologies do badly at identifying some races, because the data used to train them over-represent other races. This highlights the importance of quality data in building smart AI tools; India lacks this in sectors such as agriculture and health. Where data exist, this is poorly annotated, making it unusable by AI systems. Despite these formidable challenges, the scope of NITI Aayog's paper must be lauded. The trick will be to follow it up with action, which will demand a strong buyin from policymakers and substantial funds. The coming years will show if the country can manage this.

Prevailing in Paris

Rafael Nadal's 11th French Open title is a testimony to the transformation of his game

There is a tendency among tennis fans to take Rafael Nadal's clay court dominance for granted. Ever since he won his first French Open in 2005, the Spaniard has single-handedly drained out almost all the suspense that Paris may have otherwise offered. On Sunday, when he held aloft the Roland Garros trophy for the 11th time in his career, after defeating his touted heir apparent Dominic Thiem, it was more of the same. The 32-year-old, ranked No. 1 in the world, was the overwhelming favourite ahead of the tournament and during the course of the two weeks there wasn't an inkling of any change as Nadal lost just one set in the capture of his 17th Major overall. The victory pulled him level with Margaret Court for the most number of titles at a single Grand Slam tournament and made him only the second active men's player - Roger Federer being the other – to win three or more after turning 30. The men's field today is diminished and the oft-repeated argument is that with Federer absent and Novak Djokovic and Stan Wawrinka severely compromised, there was only so much that Nadal had to do. The truth, however, is never as simplistic. Probably no current player has changed gears and made as many tactical switches as Nadal, and it explains why along with Ken Rosewall and Pete Sampras he remains the only one to have won slams in his teens, 20s and 30s.

When Nadal arrived on the scene, he was deemed a player with a limited arsenal, stamina and muscularity his standout qualities. In his 20s he improved as a shotmaker, slicing and volleying better as he recorded five final appearances at Wimbledon from 2006 to 2011 and won two of them. As he neared his 30s, he elevated his serve and added more aggression to his game, especially on the forehand side. Now it is his backhand – once a liability - that stands out. With age, Nadal has tended to get more anxious and tight, and even choked on an occasion or two. But what has separated him from the rest is his courage on big points, the ability to loosen up and summon a winner when required. The hard-earned win over Thiem - despite the scoreline suggesting a routine straight sets affair – was yet another example of how Nadal has reinvented his game. On the women's side, it was the turn of Simona Halep to reassess and recalibrate hers to claim a first Grand Slam title. The Romanian World No.1 had in fact lost three prior finals, including two in Paris, each of them in three tight sets, calling into question her mental make-up. On Saturday against American Sloane Stephens, she appeared down and out until midway through the match, before gaining a second wind to triumph.

The story of two ceasefires

It is important to invest in negotiations, political concessions and soft power within Jammu and Kashmir



HAPPYMON JACOB

₹he Narendra Modi government in New Delhi has decided to make a host of political concessions - in the form of conciliatory moves, positive responses and toned-down rhetoric – *vis-à-vis* Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), and Pakistan. More notably, we are also perhaps witnessing a cautious, and sensible, adoption of diplomacy and soft power in the final lap of the Modi government's term in office. While that is indeed welcome, has its willingness to play down its aggressive rhetoric and dismount from the moral high horse come a bit too late in the day to make a difference?

Over the past month or so, New Delhi has offered to reach out to the separatists in Kashmir (junking its earlier resolve not to engage them), reportedly carried out backchannel parleys with the separatist leadership in Srinagar, declared a ceasefire during the month of Ramzan, and agreed to maintain the 2003 ceasefire agreement on the Line of Control (LoC) and International Border (IB) with Pakistan. The India-Pakistan ceasefire was declared on May 29, which has so far continued with a few exceptions. The tone and tenor of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leadership's statements towards the Kashmiris has suddenly demonstrated some much-needed warmth and 'love'.

Context of the ceasefires

These conciliatory moves have come against the backdrop of several worrying developments within J&K and on the border. For one, the intensity of ceasefire violations

damage to civilian habitats and civilian and military casualty rates going up. India reported 19 military casualties and 12 civilian casualties due to ceasefire violations last year, and Pakistan reported 50 civilian casualties (Pakistan does not report military casualties on the LoC/IB but unofficial data show higher military casualties than India). Past experience suggests that fire assaults and crossborder raids on the LoC are fraught with potential for bilateral escalation.

Within Kashmir, an increasing number of local boys are joining the ranks of militancy, and terrorist attacks on civilian and military targets have been on the rise. In 2013, the number of Kashmiri youngsters joining militancy was 16, which rose to 126 in 2017, and 27 in the first three months of 2018. In 2013 there were 170 terror-related incidents in J&K, which went up to 342 in 2017.

It is in this broad political and security context that we should assess the significance and desirability of the bilateral India-Pakistan ceasefire and the internal Ramzan ceasefire.

Why now?

There is little doubt that the two ceasefires and the associated peace moves make perfect sense in helping normalise the situation both internally and bilaterally. However, the crucial question is this: why has the Modi government, which has derived domestic political mileage from a hawkish and aggressive posture, suddenly decided to change track and experiment with conciliatory moves?

First, there seems to be a counterintuitive rationale behind it. While the BIP has traditionally benefitted from a hardline policy in Kashmir, and towards Pakistan, the diminishing returns of such a policy have started kicking in. Not only has government not delivered the ceasefire 1,252 times till May



on its hardline promises (such as the abolition of Article 370, or keeping infiltration and terror attacks under check), but the use of force has failed to achieve its objectives. Hence, the potential to use the Kashmir or Pakistan bogey for electoral gains is limited for

In fact, the reverse logic has gained salience: it would be risky for the government to have a violent border and a troubled Kashmir going into the 2019 campaign. For the BJP, it's time to focus internally, and a semblance of peace on the border and in Kashmir would help. More so, with the 'Modi wave' on the wane, it needs to keep its allies close: the BJP's coalition partner in J&K, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), has been insisting on both the internal and India-Pakistan ceasefires

Second, while the BJP's hardline policy on the border initially received popular support in the Jammu region, such support is drastically fading now, given the displacement of tens of thousands of civilians from the border villages and the attendant misery for the local population.

Third, India's policy of disproportionate bombardment against Pakistani forces, especially last year, has also not helped. For instance, India violated the ceasefire more than twice as Pakistan did in 2017 (i.e. India fired twice as much), but tables have already turned in 2018: Pakistan violated

this year whereas India violated the ceasefire on 1,050 occasions. In other words, India's policy of disproportionate bombardment on the border has not only not helped matters but it has now become a major problem for the locals. (It is equally true that Pakistani civilians also suffer but that may not create problems for the civilian government in Islamabad).

Similarly, both infiltration into J&K and militant attacks in the State have been on the rise. In 2014, 65 terrorists infiltrated into I&K, with the number steadily rising since then. In 2016 it was 119, and last year it went up to 123. In other words, New Delhi's hardline policy has not only not worked, it has actually had the reverse effect.

Finally, India and Pakistan have been signalling to each other for some time about the possibility of a rapprochement. Pakistan's Army Chief General Qamar Javed Bajwa, has on several occasions spoken of the need to build peace with India. Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, in responding to his suggestion for the peaceful resolution of India-Pakistan disputes, recently said that "any comment on wanting peace will definitely be taken seriously". This desire for rapprochement is also a continuation of positive bilateral engagement since the resolution of the diplomatic row arising over the harassment of each other's diplomats.

What next? Clearly, both India and Pakistan, and in particular the people of J&K, will immensely benefit for these two ceasefires. But how long will they last? As for the internal ceasefire, I am skeptical about New Delhi's ability to engage Kashmiri dissidents in a durable dialogue process. New Delhi may have reached out, but does it have a clearly-articulated blueprint for bringing peace to Kashmir? In particular, the BJP may find it excep-

ing 'concessions' in Kashmir, and Kashmiri dissidents may not be able to come on board without major political concessions from New Delhi.

The bilateral ceasefire is also not without problems. First, experience suggests that without political dialogue between India and Pakistan, especially on Kashmir, ceasefire agreements tend to break down. More so, there are fundamental structural flaws in the India-Pakistan ceasefire agreement which make it prone to breaking down even when the decision-makers in India or Pakistan do not intend to break it. If indeed such 'local/tactical' factors do trigger ceasefire violations, a number of measures – such as formalising the ceasefire agreement through a written down document and regular scheduled meetings of Directors-General of Military Operations, among others - would need to be taken by the two countries to ustain the ceasefire.

Finally, and perhaps most important, there is an undeniable direct link between the Kashmir insurgency on the one hand, and India-Pakistan dialogue, maintenance of the ceasefire agreement, terrorist infiltration into J&K and terrorist violence in Kashmir on the other. Put differently, unless New Delhi takes effective measures to reassure Kashmiris, there is no guarantee that the two ceasefires will survive. With hawkishness and aggression having evidently failed, it's time to invest in negotiations, political concessions and soft power. And Pakistan must make efforts to control terrorist infiltration into Kashmir for these to

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India re-defines its regional role

It is recasting its approach to the Indo-Pacific and building deeper links with continental Eurasia



ZORAWAR DAULET SINGH

ecent foreign policy moves by New Delhi indicate an inby New Denn marches flexion point. Combining orthodox ideas from the Cold War era along with 21st century pragmatism, it appears that India has decided that the emerging multipolar world is becoming far too complicated for the binary choices and easy solutions that some had envisioned for the country's foreign policy. Not only has it recast its approach to the maritime Indo-Pacific but as the recent Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit exemplifies, it is also building deeper and more constructive links with continental

Setting a new tone Prime Minister Narendra Modi's speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore on June 1 laid out a framework that might outlast the present government. The speech was dominated by four themes that collectively tell us about the evolving foreign policy. First, the central theme was that at a time when the world is facing power shifts, uncertainty and competition over geopolitical ideas and

political models, India would project itself as an independent power and actor across Asia. One of the most important parts of the speech was when Mr. Modi described India's ties with the three great powers. Russia and the United States were called as partners with whom India has relationships based on overlapping interests in international and Asian geopolitics. And, India-China relations were portrayed in complex terms as having "many layers" but with a positive undertone that stability in that relationship is important for India and the world.

The intended signal to all major capitals was that India will not be part of a closed group of nations or aggregate Indian power in a bloc, but will chart out its own course based on its own capacity and ideas. Notice, for example, the following phrases: "our friendships are not alliances of containment" or "when nations stand on the side of principles, not behind one power or the other, they earn the respect of the world and a voice in international affairs". For some this portends a renewed emphasis on non-alignment. The Prime Minister himself used the more agreeable term "strategic autonomy". In essence, what it really means is that India has become too big to be part of any political-military camp whose design and role in Asian affairs is being conceived elsewhere, upon ideas that India might not fully share, and where India has a



cy implementation.

The China factor

Second, even as China's rise has undoubtedly increased the demand and space for India to increase its region-wide engagement, India's role in the vast Indo-Pacific is no longer envisaged as a China-centric one. Mr. Modi removed any lingering impression of an impeding crusade or an ideological sub-text to India's Act East policy in the coming years when he remarked, "India does not see the Indo-Pacific Region as a strategy or as a club of limited members. Nor as a grouping that seeks to dominate." If anybody imagined that India's identity as a democracy would position it naturally towards one side in the emerging world order, Mr. Modi clarified that misperception quite emphatically: "India's own engagement in the Indo-Pacific Region – from the shores of Africa to that of the Americas – will be inclusive... That is the foundation of our civilisational ethos - of pluralism, co-existence, open-ness and dialogue. The ideals of democracy that deway we engage the world."

India's Ambassador to Beijing expressed a similar message on the eve of the SCO summit: Big countries "can peacefully coexist despite differences in their systems and that they can work together". In other words, India's democracy is far more comfortable with a world of diversity than the spectre of a clash of civilisations or great powers locked in ideological contests

Third, despite this policy adjustment, India's approach to the region is not going to be a handsoff policy or one devoid of norms. We continued to hear an emphasis on a "free, open, inclusive region" and a "common rules-based" Indo-Pacific order. Some believe this is aimed squarely at China but it is more accurate to interpret such rhetoric as directed at the type of order India would like to see and actively support. Significantly, Mr. Modi asserted that such "rules and norms should be based on the consent of all, not on the power of the few". Again, this underscored Delhi's belief that the normative basis of the region's future political-security architecture would only find legitimacy if it were based on a consensus among all stakehol-

either, Mr. Modi urged both the

U.S. and China to manage their rivalry and prevent their "normal" competition from descending into conflict. "Asia of rivalry will hold us all back. Asia of cooperation will shape this century. So, each nation must ask itself: Are its choices building a more united world, or forcing new divisions? It is a responsibility that both existing and rising powers have." He made it clear that while India would pursue many partnerships "in the region and beyond", it was not going to choose "one side of a divide or the other" but would remain wedded to its principles and values that emphasise inclusiveness, diversity and of course its own interests.

Did Mr. Modi's speech constitute a turning point in India's foreign policy? As analysts debate this question, the messaging was unmistakable. After drifting towards the U.S. for the past decade, Delhi is rediscovering a posture and policy for a multipolar world as well as taking greater responsibility for its own future and destiny. Reflecting its unique geographical position at the rimland of Eurasia and at the mouth of the Indo-Pacific, India's foreign policy is likely to be driven by a dual attention to the balance of power and order building in the continental maritime around the subcontinent.

Finally, without mentioning Zorawar Daulet Singh is a Fellow at the Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi

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.

Being data-driven

The faith being placed in the 'datafication' of business needs to be tempered with a recommitment to upholding democratic values (Editorial page, "Open data, open government", June 11). While it may be perfectly reasonable for corporations to plan and act upon the emerging dictum (about data being the new oil), constitutionally bound and responsible governments have a wider remit which includes the protection of privacy - something which may itself be compromised in the deluge of data development. For a common citizen who finds the RTI Act being diluted and tamed by the government, it is difficult to believe the claims by the

same regime of good intentions behind the push of open data. What people will appreciate much more when it comes to data sharing are simple things such as public processes in decision-making and selfdeclarations about public funding. Lastly, any proposal that assumes the use of Aadhaar at its centre does stir up legitimate concerns. There must be checks and balances for any idea that is overtaken by an obsession with capital which then masquerades as development ('Columnwidth' page, "The Age of Perversion", June 10) FIROZ AHMAD,

A picture of hope There could be a new dawn in Jammu and Kashmir

J&K's sports enthusiasts", Iune 8). The photograph of young, international kickboxing star Tajamul Islam sharing an emotional moment with the Union Home Minister, with Chief Minister Mehbooba Mufti beaming in the background, was particularly heart-warming. This could serve as a seed of inspiration to alienated youth to give up the destructive path of stonepelting and insurgency. In fact, there have been remarkable achievements by youth from the State in various competitive examinations and endeavours. Kashmiri youth must return to the mainstream and realise their immense untapped potential.

NALINI VIJAYARAGHAVAN,

has been facing one of its rise in non-performing assets (Editorial, "No easy solutions", June 11). The of capital infusion have worn off. Setting up a Public Sector Asset not offer a permanent solution as banks will loans that have to be banks are not allowed to debit interest in these accounts. It is incorrect that bad loans have multiplied because of small/ medium borrowers. It is the big fish, and who are out of reach.

The 'bad bank' idea

The Indian banking system Rafael Nadal's 11th title at Roland Garros is a fitting biggest challenges in recent reply to all those who wrote times with the unchecked him off. His ferocious forehand, stamina and unshakeable self-belief are what make him invincible situation has reached such on clay. One struggles to a pass that even the effects find examples of such domination in other racquet sports. Rudy Hartono (badminton), and Rehabilitation Agency will Jahangir Khan and Jansher Khan (squash) are some names one can think of. continue to accumulate bad NAGARAJAMANI M.V., classified as NPAs. Further,

■ It's Rafael Nadal yet again, and a player who doesn't alter the familiar script at Roland Garros. His performances are a testament to his fitness, athleticism and determination, especially after returning from an injury layoff. His pre-match praise of his rival and admission that he needs to be at his best to win are traits of sportsmanship at its best.

MORE LETTERS ONLINE:

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS: The Business page story headlined "Majority of CEOs say GDP growth to cross 7% in FY19" (June 11, 2018) carried the picture of Ranjan Bharti Mittal instead of Rakesh Bharti Mittal (the CII

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Thiruvananthapuram

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