



Dangerous spiral

There will be no winner in the ongoing global trade war

The global trade war is hotting up as major economies continue to impose tariffs on each other. India is the latest to join the tit-for-tat battle by slapping tariffs as high as 50% on a list of 30 goods imported from the U.S. Earlier this week, U.S. President Donald Trump announced that he had ordered his administration to frame new tariffs on \$200-billion worth of Chinese imports. This was in retaliation to tariffs on \$50-billion worth in American goods imposed by China last week in response to Mr. Trump’s earlier round of tariffs on Chinese goods. The first shot in the spiralling trade war was fired by the U.S. in March when Mr. Trump unveiled tariffs to discourage the import of steel and aluminium into the country. The latest round of tariffs imposed by the U.S. will be the highest in terms of the value of goods. In all, U.S. tariffs will now affect Chinese goods worth \$450 billion – to put this in perspective, total Chinese imports into the U.S. last year were worth around \$500 billion. The European Union also joined the trade war this month, imposing tariffs on \$3.3 billion of American goods. While the India-U.S. tariff tiff could escalate, the amounts being discussed right now are minuscule compared to those under threat in the unfolding U.S.-China situation or even the spat between the U.S. and the EU. India’s notification to the WTO says that U.S. tariffs on steel and aluminium would cost India \$241 million, and that the tariffs imposed on the U.S. would bring in a commensurate amount. It has also indicated its preference to deal with the issue through dialogue, and not “measures and counter-measures”.

For long, global financial markets largely ignored risks of an all-out trade war among major economies, but things are changing quickly. The Dow Jones Industrial Average fell by as much as 1.6% on Tuesday, while the Shenzhen Composite Index was down 5.8% for the day. This fresh round of volatility suggests investors may be beginning to take threats of a trade war more seriously. The fact is that all sides engaged in a trade war eventually lose. The longer it goes on, the greater the cost as growth slows down under the increasing burden of taxes. The only gainers in a trade war will be special interest groups, such as the U.S. steel industry, which also happens to be a major vote bank for Mr. Trump. Even retaliatory tariffs aimed at pushing back the U.S. may only perpetuate the vicious negative-sum game instead of bringing the war to an end. Mr. Trump’s rejection of the G-7 communique that endorsed a “rules-based trading system” for the world suggests there may be no offer of truce from his side any time soon. Nevertheless, global powers must try their best to bring an end to the ongoing trade war before it gets out of hand.

Wave of lynchings

Local authorities must show good faith, and facilitate policing to deal with mob violence

The events that led up to the brutal assault on Monday of two men in Uttar Pradesh’s Hapur district on the outskirts of New Delhi are unclear – but one of them died and the other sustained injuries. The family of the dead man, Qasim, a 45-year-old cattle trader, says that he had set out when he heard about the possibility of cattle being on sale, and the next thing they heard was that a mob had set itself upon him, killing him. Sameyddin’s relatives say he had been out getting grass for his cattle when he spied the mob attack on Qasim – he tried to run to safety, but was beaten up nonetheless. Qasim’s son says his father’s death was the outcome of a conspiracy. Others in the village say locals were on edge following rumours that cow smuggling was afoot. And administration officials say it may all have been a case of road rage. Investigations are on, so what actually transpired is not definitively known yet. But given lynchings across north India by ‘cow protection’ vigilantes, it is not difficult to miss the communal dangers here. Elsewhere, from Tamil Nadu in the south to Assam in the Northeast, men and women have been lynched on suspicion that they were out to kidnap children. To give just a few examples, in May, a homeless man in Pulicat, north of Chennai, was battered to death on such suspicion, as was a car-borne woman pilgrim in Tiruvannamalai district, who offered some sweets to children while seeking directions. This month, in Assam’s Karbi Anglong district, two men from Guwahati were killed by a mob on the same anxiety that they were looking to kidnap children. In many cases – including in Tamil Nadu and Assam – such public concern was created or heightened by warnings that were circulated on social media.

Yet, irrespective of whether the lynchings are due to fear of kidnappings or are deliberate acts by cow protection vigilantes, the authorities should not treat the crime of murder and the allegations that enrage a mob with the same equivalence. Murder is murder, but the killing of another human being by a murderous crowd out to enforce mob justice or avert an imagined crime takes an extraordinary toll of the civilities of wider society. The police must make it clear, by word and action, that murder and mob violence will be strictly dealt with. Yet, the administration must also reckon with a new challenge: the use of social media, especially WhatsApp groups and forwards, to spread fear and panic. Responses such as surveillance and Internet shutdowns are not just impossible – in a free society, they are inadvisable. What is needed is an administration that reaches out to local communities to keep them in the loop in order to check trouble-makers – and that conveys sufficient good faith so individuals will trust it to keep the peace and sift real threats from mischievous rumours.

How the world explains football

The game’s potential was seen at Tehran’s Azadi stadium this week as the local council finally let women into the stands



SUHRITH PARTHASARATHY

Writing in July 2014, moments after Germany beat Argentina in Rio de Janeiro to win the football World Cup, the then editor of *The New Republic*, and author of the acclaimed book, *How Soccer Explains the World: An Unlikely Theory of Globalization*, Franklin Foer, sounded notes of an impending disaster. “Vladimir Putin loomed at the center of the Maracanã today,” he wrote. “And in a way, he’s loomed over this whole past month of soccer. Russia will host the next tournament and then Qatar the one after that, and there was always the unspoken sense that this was the last of the great World Cups – a moment of relative innocence before the fall.”

Foer, however, wasn’t the only doomsayer. Many others pointed to the apparently depraved thinking in awarding the World Cup to Russia and, in particular, to Qatar in 2022 as signalling the end of the *joie de vivre* that the tournament once brought with it. “In four years we’ll be in Russia and it’s hard to imagine that will be much fun,” wrote the Cambridge University professor David Rumciman in the *London Review of Books*.

But now here we are in Russia. And the fun, it appears, has gone nowhere. To the fan, each match has brought with it a certain thrill, and each contest has been imbued with an inner drama, with a narrative that in many of our eyes lends to the World Cup a sense of the

ethereal. Take Egypt’s tryst with this year’s tournament. In the lead up to its first match against Uruguay, all the talk surrounded the question of whether its star player Mohammed Salah, who had injured a shoulder while playing the European Champions League final in May, would be fit to start the country’s first World Cup match since 1990. As Salma Islam wrote in *The Guardian*, Salah’s magic has “transcended the pitch.” He’d managed the impossible, unifying Egyptians of all class and political proclivity – a staggering achievement when one considers the chaos that’s afflicted the country since its 2011 uprising. The country’s ouster from the tournament may devastate its fans’ dreams, but perhaps the World Cup can provide the nation a catharsis that only a sporting loss can deliver.

Potential for change

International football, as the historian Eric Hobsbawm wrote of sport in the early periods of the 20th century, can be an “expression of national conflict, and the sportsmen representing their nation or their state, primarily expressions of their imagined community.” There is more than a kernel of truth to this even today, so much so that a win on the field can occasionally even represent a geopolitical victory of sorts. But football’s potential for change goes further than simple concerns over soft international power, exemplified best perhaps by the protests of a group of Iranian women who unfurled banners in the arena in St. Petersburg during their country’s match against Morocco. They were protesting the ban in Iran on women watching the sport at the Azadi Stadium in Tehran. In the



A

months before the World Cup, an all-women reggae band “Abjeez” had even called on Iranian men to lend their support to the movement: “The empty seat by your side is my place. To have me by your side is your right. It’s my right! Consider me a part of you. I am your equal,” the song’s opening lyrics read. The Ayatollah’s dictates have been breached in the past, not always bringing with it tangible change. But this time Tehran’s local council granted permission to women to enter the Azadi Stadium to watch Iran’s second match in the tournament, against Spain, albeit on a giant TV screen. We cannot yet be sure whether this will herald a larger change, but sport, and football in particular, certainly serve as a special engine for social movement in Iran.

Why it means so much

The World Cup matters, as Musa Okwonga wrote in *The New York Times*, because it’s not just about football but about everything, about “politics, economics, social issues,” about “race and class and history” and “about corruption and nationalism, fear and joy.” But it also matters because it is *about* football. At its heart the sport re-

presents a thing of pure beauty. The Canadian philosopher Bernard Suits aptly defined games as a “voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles.” In football, these obstacles are especially arduous. When a great goal is scored, therefore, it resonates almost mythically with us. This grace inherent at the core of the sport has been typified no better recently than in Portugal’s draw last week against Spain, in a match that involved a clash of two contrasting styles, between Spain’s clever and dazzling patterns of passing and movement and Portugal’s counter-attacking approach, relying heavily on its virtuoso footballer Cristiano Ronaldo.

In the final minute of the match, with Portugal trailing 2-3, Ronaldo won himself a free kick at the edge of the box. What followed was a familiar routine: “When Cristiano poses for a free kick, he readies himself by taking those few theatrical paces back – signalling to all that something special is about to happen,” Mexican journalist Juan Villoro wrote in 2016. “And then he stands, legs astride resembling a statue of himself. It’s a pose Apollo might have pulled off, had he simply practised more.” But on 44 previous occasions spread over three past World Cups Ronaldo’s efforts at scoring directly from a free kick had come a cropper. Yet, here, on a hat trick, there seemed an unnerving inevitability about the result and, sure enough, within moments of taking his position, he curled the ball past the wall set by Spain’s goalkeeper David De Gea into the back of the net. An unsaveable shot if ever there was one. It was a moment of such sublime brilliance and skill that, at the instant when it happened, it unra-

velled the game for us, purging it of all its ugliness.

Now, not everyone finds Ronaldo especially likeable. When he enters a football pitch he seems to indulge in his own project of ostentation. He gives us an impression that the game merely exists to serve his greatness. Yet, for many of us fans the virtues of his genius invariably tend to veil his narcissism. At the centre of celebrating Ronaldo there lies, therefore, an absurdity, perhaps not dissimilar to the paradox of celebrating the World Cup: that it is possible for beauty to exist within structures that we might otherwise find indecorous or even unpardonable.

Everything’s possible

There’s little question that professional football does everything possible, as the Uruguayan writer Eduardo Galeano put it, to “castrate the energy of happiness, but it survives in spite of all the spites.” Russia isn’t going to be the end of the fun, and indeed neither is Qatar. When America hosts the World Cup in 2026 (curiously, we’ve seen little questioning of the U.S.’s own appalling human rights record) together with Canada and Mexico, the football will remain as alluring as ever. But it must still matter to us now that FIFA is a hugely corrupt organisation, that while its leadership has changed hands its wicked culture has remained unaltered. If we want to elevate football into something beyond the merely beautiful, to something truly transcendent, we’ll have to help rid the game of the many evils wrought by its present administrators.

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An old Kashmir-Jammu dilemma

The BJP was well placed to manage it, but it chose short-term political gains



SANDEEP BHARDWAJ

The Bharatiya Janata Party’s decision to break its alliance with the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and plunge Jammu and Kashmir into political chaos comes as a climax to a dilemma that the party’s government at the Centre had been facing since the State elections in 2014. On the one hand, it needed political stability and a friendly government in J&K to find a political solution to the growing insurgency and unrest in the Valley. On the other hand, the BJP needed to placate its Hindu constituency in Jammu by appearing to stand tough against Srinagar. In the end, the party chose short-term electoral gains over long-term necessities of finding peace in Kashmir.

Sadly, this dilemma is something that successive Indian governments have struggled with for many decades. Jammu politics has always cast a long shadow over national politics and complicated the Srinagar-Delhi relationship. The demographic reality of Jammu – as a Hindu majority region within a Muslim majority State, in a Hindu majority nation – makes it an

irresistible magnet for religious and identity politics, which inevitably hinders attempts to bring stability in the State as a whole.

An early brush

India was first confronted with this problem in the early days of the republic when a mixture of Jammu unrest and religious politics brought down one of the strongest attempts to bring a permanent resolution to the Kashmir problem. This was the Jammu Praja Parishad (JPP) agitation which went on for nearly a year in 1952-53.

In 1952, India seemed close to solving the Kashmir question. The J&K Premier, Sheikh Abdullah, had succeeded in establishing a stable government in Srinagar. He had also developed a good working relationship with Delhi, underpinned by his personal friendship with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. In July, both sides signed the 1952 Delhi Agreement establishing the federal framework for India and J&K. Soon thereafter, the new Prime Minister of Pakistan, Mohammad Ali, committed to finding a peaceful solution to Kashmir “within one year” and began a series of talks with Nehru.

Unfortunately, this moment of bonhomie was mired by the widespread unrest that flared up in Jammu in late 1952. The JPP, a local Hindu party founded by RSS leader Balraj Madhok in 1947, took to the streets protesting against the



THE HINDU ARCHIVES

State government. The initial agitation was over Abdullah’s land reforms, which had adversely affected the landowners in Jammu. However, soon the agitation took on hues of hypernationalism. “*Ek Vidhan, Ek Nishan, Ek Pradhan* (One constitution, one flag and one Premier)” became the rallying cry.

Soon afterwards, the national Hindu right-wing parties rallied around the issue. They included the then-powerful Hindu Mahasabha, the BJP’s predecessor Bharatiya Jan Sangh, and a little-known party called the All India Ram Rajya Parishad. Under the leadership of S.P. Mookerjee, these parties launched a nationwide campaign in support of the Jammu agitators in February 1953. In May, Mookerjee travelled to Kashmir where he was arrested. He died of a heart attack a month later under detention.

Meanwhile, Nehru found him-

self facing the Kashmir-Jammu dilemma. He continued to believe that the Abdullah government represented the best hope of finding a political solution to Kashmir. But he also had to find a way to put the Jammu agitation and its accompanying Hindu right-wing campaign to rest. For several months he continued to resist any compromise with the agitators, attacking the Hindu right-wing parties and giving full-throated support to Abdullah. However, after Mookerjee’s death, he had to give in, issuing an appeal to the agitators in July. The protests were suspended shortly thereafter.

But the damage was done. Abdullah had been severely weakened politically and his relations with Nehru were frayed. A month later, he was removed from power and put under arrest. With government records still a secret, it is not yet known who exactly ordered the arrest. However, the Jammu agitation certainly paved the way for it. A deeper legacy of the agitation was that it turned Kashmiris against Delhi. Years of efforts by the Indian government to generate goodwill in Kashmir had been “washed away by this movement,” Nehru lamented. “Nothing more harmful to our cause in the State could have been done even by our enemies.”

The only real victors of the agitation were the Hindu right-wing parties. Many within their own

camp saw the potential dangers of such a divisive campaign but the political opportunity it offered was irresistible. At the time they were seen as somewhat outside the realm of mainstream national politics. The protest campaign allowed them to expand their base and gain legitimacy in the eyes of the Indian public. Nehru’s direct appeal to them was also interpreted as a boost to their political stature.

A wasted opportunity

Today, while the Kashmir-Jammu dilemma remains, the political landscape has completely changed. The BJP is not only the ruling party in New Delhi, it is also the biggest political force in the country. It can no longer afford to play the spoiler as before because of the national responsibilities that weigh on its shoulders. The myopic decision to withdraw support from the Srinagar government betrays its old mode of thinking. It needs to take the long-term view. In fact, given its dominant position in Jammu, it is arguably better positioned to manage the dilemma than previous governments. Instead of pursuing superficial political gains, the BJP’s government at the Centre should use its unique position to find a permanent political solution for the entire State.

Sandeep Bhardwaj is with the Centre for Policy Research, 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.

CEA quits

In three years, three excellent economists have left the country after serving in top positions (“CEA resigns, cites personal reasons”, June 21). Chief Economic Adviser Arvind Subramanian’s resignation is a telling commentary on the current government, even if he has cited personal reasons for his departure.

J. AKSHAY, Bengaluru

For a peaceful mind

Yoga has become one of the most powerful unifying forces in the world (“In Japan, Zen and the art of yoga,” June 21). The way to lead a calm, creative and content life is by practising yoga. It can show the way in overcoming anxiety. Moreover, yoga does not belong to any religion. It is a way of maintaining our

health and purifying our minds. We should be grateful that yoga began in India.

C.K. SUBRAMANIAM, Navi Mumbai

Border separations

Perhaps it is logical that the U.S. quit the United Nations Human Rights Council, for the brutality unravelling at the country’s border in the name of a “zero tolerance” policy points to its utter disregard for human rights. The trauma that these children are facing today can have massive psychological implications and it is frightening to imagine how they’re going to deal with it later. Of course, the U.S. President is never going to take responsibility for it.

HEENA NIZAM, Kolkata

The U.S. is a nation of

immigrants and owes its predominant position in the present global order to its being an open society. However, President Donald Trump seems bent on destroying the liberal, secular and diverse American society through a series of draconian policy measures. As a modern, independent and sovereign nation, the U.S. has every right to defend and police its borders, but the lack of empathy with which Mr. Trump has implemented the “zero tolerance” policy towards illegal immigrants is just shameful.

M. JEYARAM, Sholavandan

Ensuring safety

Vedanta’s claim brings back terrible memories of the Bhopal gas tragedy (“Acid tanks at Thoothukudi plant could cause catastrophe: Vedanta”, June 21). It is

important that the plant be thoroughly inspected and all safety norms be adhered to. This needs to be done as soon as possible as any loophole in safety measures could put at risk the lives of thousands of people.

A. MOHAN, Chennai

Breaking away

By pulling out of the alliance in Jammu and Kashmir, the BJP has shown lack of character (“‘Public perception in J&K was in favour of Governor’s rule’”, June 21). Though the alliance was a result of political expediency, it still gave some hope for Kashmir. Walking out simply means abdicating responsibility. Whatever reasons the BJP may give to justify its decision, the pullout can only be seen as an act of political opportunism with little

regard for the aspirations of the people. The BJP’s hard-line approach to the separatists has proven to be a failure and reflects the party’s incapability in dealing with such tense situations.

VIMAL VARGHESE, Ernakulam

The alliance clearly did nothing for the people of the Valley. The last straw in the tenuous relationship was perhaps the ghastly murder of senior journalist Shujaat Bukhari. Now that the alliance has come to an

abrupt end, the BJP is criticising the PDP, which is a case of the pot calling the kettle black. It cannot claim that Mehbooba Mufti, as Chief Minister, took decisions that were not in the interest of the State when it was a part of the coalition. The BJP probably thought of the PDP as an albatross around its neck.

Kashmiris must have learned that they cannot trust either of these parties.

C.V. ARAVIND, Chennai

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS: >>The graphic that accompanied “England goes ballistic, posts record 481” (Sport, June 20, 2018) had an erroneous detail: it said England had scored 444 for 5 wickets against Pakistan in a 2016 ODI at Nottingham. The correct score is 444 for 3 wickets – as given in the text of the report.

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers’ Editor’s office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552963; E-mail:readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers’ Editor, The Hindu, Kasturi Buildings, 855 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers’ Editor are on www.thehindu.com