



THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE

AN INTELLIGENT AND CONSCIENTIOUS OPPOSITION IS A PART OF LOYALTY TO COUNTRY.

— BAINBRIDGE COLBY

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Reason to remember

Intent behind 'Partition Horrors Remembrance Day' matters. It should not be to cast hostilities in stone



SHYAM SARAN

ON AUGUST 14, Prime Minister Narendra Modi solemnly declared that henceforth every August 14 will be observed as the "Partition Horrors Remembrance Day". Of course, it was not lost on anyone that the new anniversary also happens to be the day when Pakistan celebrates its independence. The Partition of India into two independent states had been announced in June 1947, but the physical contours of the two successor states of India and Pakistan became known sometime after their formal independence on August 15 and August 14 respectively.

We should certainly keep alive the tragic memories associated with Partition because the blood-letting that scarred people of both countries must never be repeated. The horrors of Partition did not occur on a single day but spanned several weeks and months, both preceding and succeeding the declaration of independence of Pakistan and then India, just one day apart. If the new anniversary intends to ensure that the monumental human tragedy is not repeated, then it may be of some therapeutic value. If the intent is to cast India-Pakistan hostility in stone, as may well be suspected by the choice of the date for its commemoration, then it can only spawn negative domestic political consequences while seriously limiting India's foreign policy options.

The announcement comes at a time when we are witnessing an upsurge in anti-Muslim communal incidents in various parts of the country. Just a few days ago, activists allegedly belonging to the Bajrang Dal assaulted Afsar Ahmad, a rickshaw-puller in Kanpur, even while his young daughter clung to him and cried for his life to be spared. He was collateral damage in a feud between two neighbouring families, Hindu and Muslim, though he himself was not involved. There have been similar incidents in other parts of the country. We have also witnessed the rabidly communal slogans raised at a recent Jantar Mantar gathering in the capital. As parties gear up for the crucial Uttar Pradesh elections next year, communalisation is once again being seen as a potentially winning strategy by the BJP despite its recent setback

in the Bengal elections. As the date for the UP elections draws closer, the communal card will be seen flashing more and more in the state. The PM's declaration on the Partition Horrors Remembrance Day should be seen in this context.

Remembrance can be a prelude to healing from a tragedy, to foster a determination among people to never allow the tragedy to repeat itself. Remembrance can also be used to reopen the wounds of yesteryear, to reignite ugly passions, where past horrors are regurgitated so they may be re-enacted with renewed passion. The date chosen for the remembrance of Partition horrors — Pakistan's independence anniversary — may fall in the latter category.

Such a brand of politics is dangerous and carries within it the seeds of India's possible unravelling as a nation. Writer Sadat Hasan Manto described the dangers spawned by Partition most evocatively: "... human beings in both countries were slaves, slaves of bigotry... slaves of religious passions, slaves of animal instincts and barbarity."

Do we want to conjure up that dangerous world once again by using a selective and curated memory to reignite violent communal passions? Or should this tragic history be used instead to heal the wounds of yesterday and resolve never again to become slaves to ugly passions ignited through a cynical political calculus?

On the occasion of India completing 74 years of independence, it is time to recall what is truly remarkable about our country — that it is home to an extraordinary spectrum of ethnicities, religions, languages and cultures and yet proudly and expansively Indian. Any attempt to impose an arid uniformity over this vibrant and colourful diversity will fail. Worse, it may unravel a national fabric whose myriad strands celebrate a complex tapestry which is the legacy of an extraordinary mingling of races, faiths and philosophies without compare in the world. The Partition of India in 1947 is a warning of what can happen when the politics of exclusion overwhelms the culture of inclusion. There are many partitions waiting to happen

if we, as a people, do not derive the right lessons from 1947 and recognise the ugly scars that it has left in its wake.

At the moment, we are focused on the dangers of communal passions that are being unleashed in the run-up to the UP elections and which will be followed by others. Other fault lines are simmering under the surface. These relate to caste divisions, regional and linguistic identities and economic and social inequalities. There is an unspoken assumption among some political managers that a Hindu-Muslim binary will somehow enable the political consolidation of other constituencies under the Hindu banner. This is a failure to understand how political and social dynamics work. The continuing farmers' agitation is a case in point as is the electoral outcome in West Bengal, despite the immense and intense political and communal investment made by the BJP, led personally by Prime Minister Modi himself.

The response to this perceived decline in political capital has been to double down on the communal platform, and the announcement of the "Partition Horrors Remembrance Day" may well be a part of that effort. There is also an effort to gain political advantage through the use of the levers of a security state and the Pegasus affair points to that. The beauty of a security state is that every security failure leads to the enhancement of its role rather than its retreat. Every failure leads inexorably to further limiting the freedom of citizens while enhancing the power of security agencies. This is quite visible in the slew of legislation that has been already passed or which are on the anvil.

We may end up with a coercive state which tries belatedly to prevent the fragmentation of the country's social and political fabric, which its own policies have spawned. This is not the vision of India that the Constitution of India envisaged. It is not the miracle of unity in diversity that has been the calling card of India through the ages.

The writer is a former Foreign Secretary and a Senior Fellow, CPR

UNGRACEFUL RETREAT

In President Biden's speech, there was no acknowledgment of uncertain future that Afghan people — and region — now face

HERE COULD BE many ways to bid goodbye, and United States President Joe Biden did not find the best words. His 18-minute speech defending the decision to withdraw US troops from Afghanistan by August 31, a decision that led to the collapse of a costly two-decade experiment with democracy and the Taliban taking back Kabul almost exactly 20 years after their ouster, will go down in history as a stark lesson in how a superpower does business with the world: It always acts from self-interest. This is well understood but Biden underlined it. His definition of the objective of the war in Afghanistan as not nation-building but for "preventing a terrorist attack on the American homeland" contradicted years of US policy and involvement in Afghanistan, pouring of cash into holding elections and propping up chosen leaders in Kabul. But Biden's speech was most egregious for the manner in which he dismissed Afghans as a people who do not have the will to fight their own war, but instead want American soldiers to fight it for them. Apparently, Afghan soldiers who were killed fighting alongside US and NATO troops count for nothing, and neither do the efforts of ordinary Afghan civilians who threw themselves into the same "nation-building" project that Biden dissed, and the risks they took in the hope that it would help to keep the Taliban out forever. There was no acknowledgment, even for form's sake, of the uncertain future the Afghan people and the entire region now face. What he conveyed unequivocally, though, is that the US has closed this chapter in its history.

For India, this is a new challenge. On the back of the American presence in Afghanistan, India had built on its age-old ties with the country to win back the influence it had lost after the exit of Soviet troops and with the advent of the mujahideen, and eventually the Taliban. Delhi's three-year-long confusion — to talk to the Taliban or not — was finally overtaken by the speed of events over the last few days. As of Tuesday, India has zero diplomatic presence in Afghanistan. Re-establishing it will depend upon the kind of dispensation that takes shape in Kabul over the next few days, and on whether India decides to engage with it.

Pakistan, which has finally achieved the objectives of its Afghanistan policy with the Taliban victory, will want to clip India's wings. India is now virtually friendless in the region, cut off by the China-Pakistan axis, and more or less by Russia too. Even South Block's friends in the erstwhile anti-Taliban Northern Alliance have seen the writing on the wall, taking the first opportunity to visit Islamabad. What India wants to achieve by courting an increasingly pro-China Iran remains to be seen. Overall, India has a tough task ahead, re-balancing equations in the region and beyond, even as it shores up its security. In its severity, the situation recalls Delhi's moment of reckoning with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. This is no less a test of India's foreign policy.

UNITY IN ADVERSITY

Nagaland ceases to have an Opposition as parties unite to pursue a peace deal with rebels. It's problematic

NAGALAND BECAME A virtually Opposition-mukt state on Monday after the ruling People's Democratic Alliance that includes the BJP, and the chief Opposition party, the Naga People's Front (NPF), signed on a resolution to form a Nagaland United Government (NUG). The NUG constituents say they have set aside their rivalry to form a united government "to achieve a peaceful solution to the Naga Political Issue". The NPF, which insists that it has joined the alliance only for the sake of the peace deal, had lost office in 2018 though it won 26 seats in a House of 60 MLAs.

The intent behind the NUG is laudable, but it seems a tall and problematic claim. Two questions arise in this context. One, the Naga peace deal, referred to as NPI by political parties, has always been negotiated by the Centre with the insurgent groups, mainly the NSCN (I-M). The state government has hardly any role. This is understandable since the main issue of contention concerns national sovereignty: The NSCN (I-M) seeks to establish an independent Nagalim, with territory carved out from Assam, Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh and even Myanmar, where Naga tribes reside. The Centre announced a framework agreement with the NSCN (I-M) in 2015 but a closure has eluded the agreement since the rebels have refused to eschew their demand for a separate flag and Constitution. There is no evidence to suggest that the NUG constituents have the heft to influence the NSCN (I-M); on the contrary, many legislators are dependent on the rebels to win elections. The second question is the role of the legislative assembly in the absence of an Opposition. The assembly is also a platform to scrutinise legislation, public policy and delivery of public goods. The Opposition is mandated to hold the government to account on behalf of the people. Until this June, the NPF legislators were seen to be punching holes in the claims of the administration regarding Covid management and posing tough questions to the PDA government. However, as preparations began for the realignment of parties, reportedly after a meeting with Union Home Minister Amit Shah, the Opposition withdrew into silence.

Peace is a non-negotiable goal, but so should be enforcing accountability of government. In any case, political parties in Nagaland have a patchy record on this matter. Coalitions of convenience, often dictated by the ruling party/alliance at the Centre, have been the norm, and few of them have governed with distinction. The onus is firmly on the NUG to prove the sceptics wrong — it has time till 2023 when assembly polls are due next.

THE QUARTET

India's pace bowlers are coming into their own. It's a shiny new cricket moment

THE VICTORY AT Lord's is not merely a win that Indian cricket will remember for years, it was also a forceful statement of quality and willpower of Virat Kohli and his team. From every setback, they have emerged victorious, much like the Australians in the first decade of this century. To bowl out England inside two sessions on a benevolent surface seemed an improbable proposition, but India's pacers put out a collective performance of high-class skills, and unrelenting intensity. It is as if the Indians are the new Aussies of world cricket.

It was as much a triumph of their physical skills as a reflection of their mental strength. This team is simply unwilling to quit. Not on the final morning, when Rishabh Pant got out and a defeat loomed. The much-mocked Indian tail-enders showed they have steel as well as sting. They took blows on body and helmet, and fought on valiantly till India was safe. The unexpected batting heroes — Mohammad Shami and Jasprit Bumrah — might never morph into all-rounders, but they showed the guts to dig in their heels in the face of adversity.

Later, when England battled defiantly, after the early collapse, a draw lurked. Just about 10 overs remained, and India seemed to be running out of ideas. Then came in Jasprit Bumrah with a laser-guided off-cutter from around the stumps to break the resistance. Mohammed Siraj overpowered the last two batsmen in the space of four balls to ring in an unforgettable victory. It has been the pattern throughout the game; whenever India buzzed SOS, someone would invariably get the job done. Every member of the quartet had a match-deciding moment in the game, be it Siraj's triple twin-strikes, or Bumrah's spell from hell at the start of the second innings, or Ishant Sharma's two-wicket burst in the first innings, or Mohammed Shami deceiving a well-set Rory Burns in the first dig. Like for all the world-conquering sides of the past, a halo is beginning to grow and shine around India's pace-bowling quartet. The halo of world-beaters.

THE DEFEAT OF DIFFIDENCE

The real triumph is that India's Test win over England is no longer a surprise



SRIRAM VEERA

INDIA'S SLEDGEHAMMERING of England at Lord's isn't a sporting miracle or an underdog story to populate this hallowed editorial space, but one reason supersedes any reservations — it's a welcome evisceration of a diffident memory. This Test win feels like a triumph to a generation of fans who once banged their leather-covered radios to tune into the crackle of short-wave commentary; and the storming of the famous Grace Gates at the ground where Sunil Gavaskar was brusquely sent back by rude stewards does feel sweet. But the real joy lies in its greater significance: The pleasant loss of reverence about overseas Test victories.

It doesn't feel like a surprise anymore. It doesn't feel like something to crow about. That's the real triumph at Lord's. Indian cricket has the most overflowing coffers in the world. A semi-consciously designed feeder system has been able to tap into the ambitions of a population that obsesses about a well-democratised game. Such wins should be the norm, and it is now.

When they stretched out battered bodies in Australia after the loss of captain Virat Kohli, nobody told them that they weren't supposed to win that series with a second-string team. Match after match, they kept bleeding out supposedly irreplaceable players. Yet, they triumphed. When they started

Once, Ravi Shastri was all agog because the most imperious cricketer of his times Viv Richards told him that he appreciates the attitude and the fight in this Indian team. This was before Australia and Shastri cooed, 'King Viv *ney bola*, boss!', the only validation that would please the man who threatens to be forever frozen in joyous adolescence.

the final day at Lord's by losing Rishabh Pant, England thought it was time for personal payback for the peppering of James Anderson by Jasprit Bumrah a couple of evenings ago. You couldn't really fault them for that feeling of revenge as they, perhaps, thought they had the game sewn up. They went for Bumrah and Shami's heads and lost their own in the process.

This Indian team has that curious effect on the opposition. It triggers inchoate emotions in battle-scarred teams who know their ideal headspace should be silence, a beautiful nothingness that aids in tunnel vision. Instead, they almost get emotional and lose their bearings like Australia's captain Tim Paine did at the start of the year and now England's Joe Root. It's not entirely due to the in-the-face presence of pumped-on-adrenalin Kohli, as he wasn't there in Australia, but it perhaps has something to do with it — his presence, even in his absence, at least in the minds of the opposition. Maybe.

A couple of years ago, the South African opener Dean Elgar, a tough professional who has captained his country, captured that feeling. "I see you guys aren't yet used to the way of this Indian team, but I can tell you there is huge respect for their kind of cricket and attitude in our team. We know we are in for a real hard battle on the field." Once, Ravi

Shastri was all agog because the most imperious cricketer of his times Viv Richards told him that he appreciates the attitude and the fight in this Indian team. This was before Australia, and Shastri cooed, "King Viv *ney bola*, boss!", the only validation that would please the man who threatens to be forever frozen in joyous adolescence.

The effect of that in-your-faceness might be debatable — it has certainly led many to love to hate this team, as deep inside many want their heroes to be graceful. But there is no question about the talent and the fight in the team. One example would suffice. During the phase where they peppered his head, not once did Bumrah back away to the leg. When a bouncer crash-landed on his helmet and rolled to third man, he didn't take the single and waved back Shami. In the past that would have been interpreted as an Indian tailender being dazed, the after-effects of the hard impact. It is telling that now it was almost universally seen, without a shadow of a doubt, as a statement. That he meant to do what he did. "I am not going to skulk away to the safety of the other end, bring it on, I am here". Just like this team. Swinging Lord's or pacy Gabba, they will stay, fight, and win. And it's no longer a surprise.

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AUGUST 18, 1981, FORTY YEARS AGO

LANKA VIOLENCE

PRESIDENT J R JAYewardene on August 17 declared an island-wide emergency in Sri Lanka following a spate of violence, looting and arson in the last 10 days. Earlier the police reported to the President that there have been seven deaths because of violence, 196 incidents of arson, 35 incidents of looting and 15 incidents of robbery. Unofficial figures are much higher. The incidents have been reported from parts of the country with Tamils being the worst affected, a spokesperson of the Tamil United Liberation Front said. Under the emergency, the government has special powers to deal with the situation. There has been no announcement of curfew, but a gov-

ernment spokesperson said that the police could impose curfew in troubled areas.

PANT QUILTS

K C PANT and Mohammed Shafi Quraishi, former Union ministers of state and Congress-U general secretaries, resigned from the party. Pant, a member of the Rajya Sabha, also submitted his resignation to the Congress (U) parliamentary party. He proposes to sit in the Rajya Sabha as an independent member. Neither Pant nor Quraishi have given any reason for resigning from the party. Pant's going will reduce the number of Congress (U) members in the Rajya Sabha to 15.

WORKERS' MARCH

THE OPENING DAY of the Monsoon Session of Parliament saw thousands of workers demanding angrily that the ordinance banning strikes in essential services should be withdrawn completely.

UP CABINET EXPANDED

THE UP Council of Ministers was expanded with the introduction of one cabinet minister, Nau Nihal Singh, four ministers of state, Gulab Sehara, Ranjit Singh Judeo, Praveen Kumar Sharma and Premwati Tiwari, and one deputy minister, Om Prakash Richharia. Their portfolios have not been announced.

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY
 “The grim images of Afghans crowding departing American aircraft at the Kabul airport, hanging on to the planes as they took off and falling to their deaths will remain etched in the world’s memory for a very long time.”
 —DAWN

The tremors from Kabul

Taking over a country by force is one thing, governing it effectively is quite another matter. The Taliban will face challenges. Change in Afghanistan has security implications for India and the region



SUJAN R CHINOY

THE WORLD OVER, television screens are full of images of the extraordinary takeover of Afghanistan by the Taliban. This time, the Taliban have done it even faster than in 1996. An unfolding humanitarian tragedy has engulfed the country. Thousands of Afghan citizens are fleeing in an attempt to put distance between themselves and the Taliban. With neighbouring countries still averse to admitting refugees from Afghanistan through overland routes, air travel out of Kabul seems the only option. Chilling images of stampedes at Kabul airport, including of people running alongside a US Air Force plane and desperate stowaways plummeting to their deaths have shaken the global conscience.

The Afghan government and its defence forces have completely collapsed. Key leaders have fled the country. In staying on, Hamid Karzai, Abdullah Abdullah and Gulbuddin Hekmatyar are perhaps banking on their personal networks.

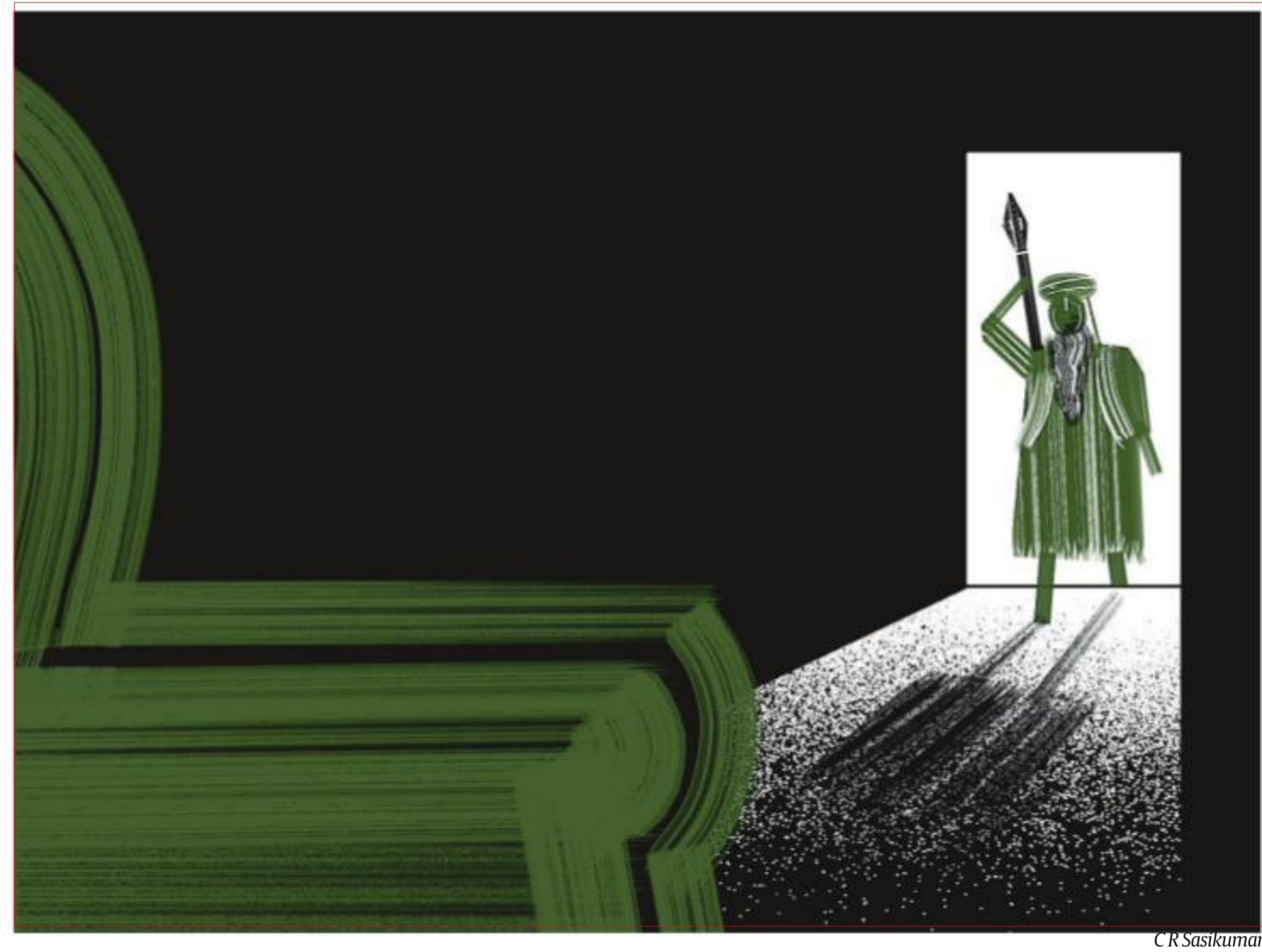
The US has expended much treasure, and shed much blood, over the last two decades. The original trigger for the US military intervention in Afghanistan was the 9/11 attacks. The objective then was to eliminate the al Qaeda sanctuaries hosted by the Taliban. That goal was quickly attained, as was another one — the elimination of Osama Bin Laden in Abbottabad, Pakistan, in 2011.

The US was thereafter sucked into a vortex in which its mission oscillated between counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency. Even under four consecutive Presidents, US policy towards Afghanistan remained in flux. The military presence in Afghanistan has been questioned by the US political firmament for a decade. The US has long been searching for an honourable exit. Meanwhile, the trillions of dollars pouring into Afghanistan into development and reconstruction programmes had led to vested interests in the form of private security contractors, service providers and NGOs.

Today, the rise of China is the main geo-strategic threat for the US. In 2001, the US had taken its eye off the ball in diverting its attention to the global war on terror. Beginning with Afghanistan, it meandered through Iraq, Libya and Syria, with mixed results.

The US now regards China as its principal strategic competitor. The latter’s muscle-flexing in the East and South China Seas calls for a renewed effort by the US to protect its stakes. China’s recent ratcheting up of pressure on Taiwan has also sounded the alarm. The US can ill-afford the continued burden of a military presence in Afghanistan, that too of little avail, if it has to tackle China effectively in the Indo-Pacific in order to secure its interests.

China had shrewdly invited Taliban leader Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar early on in an attempt to secure assurances that prevent Afghan territory from being used to host Uighur separatists. In welcoming the latest developments, the spokesperson of the Chinese foreign ministry has expressed willingness to “continue to develop friendly and cooperative relations with Afghanistan”. The engagement with the Taliban may pay dividends. At the same time, China cannot be unmindful of the fact that the US, having rid itself of the albatross of Afghanistan



CR Sasikumar

from around its neck, will have better options and greater resources in dealing with China.

It should come as no surprise if a Taliban government in Afghanistan were to be friendly towards China and Pakistan. The new regime in Kabul is likely to open the door to economic investments from China. At the geopolitical level, the BRI may well receive a boost, given China’s interests in connectivity that could straddle the region, from Pakistan to Iran.

In 1996, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Pakistan were quick to recognise the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan established by Taliban 1.0. This time around, too, Pakistan has shown alacrity in welcoming the change of guard in Kabul. Prime Minister Imran Khan’s remarks about Afghans having freed themselves of the “shackles of slavery” may irk the US. At the multilateral level, the UN Security Council’s press statement issued on August 16 by India’s Permanent Representative, in his capacity as its rotational President, calls for “an immediate cessation of all hostilities and the establishment, through inclusive negotiations of a new Government that is united, inclusive and representative”. In recognition of the hard-earned gains made over the last two decades, it also underscores the need for the continued participation of women in governance. The statement also expresses concern about the violation of human rights and international humanitarian law.

The Taliban juggernaut is endeavouring to project a more moderate image of itself to a global audience that has vivid memories of its draconian rule in the 1990s. By announcing that there would be no reprisals, the Taliban have sent out a signal to this effect. However, the world will need more than just words by way of evidence in the coming months. The Taliban cannot afford to alienate the global community through a repeat of its retrograde policies, particularly on matters concerning safe havens for terrorists and the rights of women and minorities.

Taking over a country by force is one thing

but governing it effectively is quite another matter. Through the recent campaign, the Taliban revealed a proclivity for violence. They will now have to demonstrate a capacity for governance. They will have to show moderation if they wish to be accepted as a member of the global community and to retain the talent nurtured in recent years. Maintaining the vastly improved communications network, energy infrastructure, hospitals and healthcare facilities, and efficiently running the many community development projects in place will otherwise emerge as major challenges.

Obviously, the change in Afghanistan has security implications for India and the region at large. A spill-over of any chaos and instability in Afghanistan beyond its borders could give terrorism a shot in the arm. It could also singe Pakistan if it does not review its malevolent practices, which favour terror as an instrument of state policy. India should prioritise the welfare of the Afghan people, whenever the opportunity presents itself. Currently, about 2,500 Afghan students are enrolled in educational and vocational institutions across India. They will no doubt wish to extend their scholarships. Hundreds of fresh students in Afghanistan may be waiting in the wings to come to India, having already secured admissions. One wonders if they will be able to leave Afghanistan under the present circumstances.

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As a close neighbour, India has been stakes in ensuring a stable, secure and developed Afghanistan. As the rotational President of the UN Security Council for August, India has an opportunity to engage important stakeholders on the way forward. Beyond that too, India’s presence in the UN Security Council till the end of 2022 will provide a platform to explore options with greater flexibility.

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Till no one is left behind

Spirit of Atmanirbhar Bharat and pandemic’s lessons will guide the country to true independence



SHIVRAJ SINGH CHOUHAN

“I DREAM of an India that is prosperous, strong, and caring. An India, that regains a place of honour in the comity of great nations.” In the last 14 years of my government, I have often reflected on these words by Atal Bihari Vajpayee. As we celebrate India’s 75th year of Independence, we must chart a route that will not only create a progressive, prosperous, and caring nation, but will also give us the necessary strength to hold this greatness intact for future generations.

Not long ago, Prime Minister Narendra Modi exhorted us to partner with him to create an “Atmanirbhar Bharat”. The tumult of the last year and a half has given us the opportunity to galvanise our efforts to create a strong, secure, and self-reliant Bharat.

Over the years, I’ve become firmer in my belief that true independence lies in being able to choose the right response in dire straits. When we were hit by Covid last year, we stood by the people and fought the pandemic. It was only after successfully containing the virus that we rested. While we were still celebrating, the virus returned in a more lethal avatar. We did not lose hope and fought, despite the losses. We sought all possible help from the Centre, and the state government, the bureaucracy and the people came together to stop the virus. Victory was won when we clamped down on its further onslaught.

As I write this, we are in a much better position with robust preparedness against an imminent third wave. We have developed the Sarthak portal for capturing real-time facility-wise patient data for monitoring oxygen consumption. In order to ensure oxygen availability, we have ordered 186 PSA plants from the Government of India and other sources, with a total capacity of 229 MT.

It has been heart-wrenching to witness so many deaths. As a result, we have augmented the healthcare facilities to ensure widespread coverage by increasing the oxygen-supported bed capacity to 11,185 beds, with a plan to further augment this by 3,063 beds. The government has also provided healthcare staff training and development. We have trained over 1,50,000 healthcare workers to amp-up our efforts against the third wave, and over 700 doctors and nurses to treat paediatric Covid cases.

As we rally against this health emergency, it pleases me to note India’s historic win at the Tokyo 2020 Olympics Games, with seven medals in all. I am overjoyed about Madhya Pradesh’s contribution in securing a bronze medal through Vivek Sagar Prasad’s remark-

able performance in field hockey. News like this makes my chest swell with pride, as I repose my trust in the power and imagination of our youth.

Our PM had said, “the youth will become the strong foundation of India’s future.” I am committed to serving the youth of Madhya Pradesh by ensuring that they are provided with state-of-the-art sports facilities so that they can aim for gold in the Paris Olympics in 2024.

In the past few months, I have reflected much upon my work to create Madhya Pradesh as “*prema aur pragati ka pradesh*”. Parallels can be drawn between the *atmanirbharata* that Modiji speaks of and the self-reliance that Mahatma Gandhiji referred to. In fact, I believe that atmanirbharata is the bedrock of Gandhiji’s call for “Swaraj”.

Every government before us developed numerous schemes for the state’s people. But were these well-received and beneficial for all stakeholders? Were people able to choose what they needed? Within the responses to these questions is a nugget of administrative wisdom which says that until we put the freedom to choose in the hands of the people, our plans and policies will not result in the desired progress and growth, least of all in achieving Swaraj.

Therefore, in the 75th year of Independence, I commit to ensuring that the freedom to choose from a bouquet of government



schemes will lie with the people of my state — the end beneficiary

aries. It is my deep desire that Madhya Pradesh lead from the frontlines as India sets out to become the *vishwaguru* in all spheres of life. With our political will, efficient administrative capabilities and the pervasive model of *jan-bhagidari*, we can achieve this.

The public has invited me to lead the state from strength to strength. To honour this mandate, my cabinet and the administration have worked together to build and execute a strategy to make Madhya Pradesh an *atmanirbhar* state — a state which is anchored in the idea of progress for all.

In fact, we are also the first state in India to ensure prompt action to achieve PM Modi’s vision of Atmanirbhar Bharat. We have outlined our vision under the four pillars of physical infrastructure, governance, health and education, economy and employment. This will help us move from contributing to create an India@75 to ensuring a well-rounded MP@75 in the next ten years, as Madhya Pradesh prepares to celebrate the 75th year of its foundation in 2031.

This epidemic has taught us what could be the lesson of a lifetime — to ensure that even the smallest voice gets heard. Hence our journey from India@75 to MP@75 will be of immeasurable significance and value. It will lay down a path and a resplendent future for generations to follow. It will tell the world that because no one gets left behind, Madhya Pradesh is indeed a *prema aur pragati ka pradesh*.

The writer is the Chief Minister of Madhya Pradesh



AMRITA DUTTA

Cry, beloved democracy

In tradition of Indian patriarchs, leaders use tears to shut down dissent

DEAR LADIES log, we have seen this film before, haven’t we? The men of the house moved to tears in the name of order, discipline and “sacredness”, usually when confronted by difficult daughters or forbidden love or a challenge to authority. Rare is the Indian woman whose desires and decisions — to love, to study, to marry or not — have not been questioned thus: “Do you know how much this will hurt your father/family? Do you know how much we love you?” A venerable Indian tradition in which the powerful do not just stamp out your freedoms, but it breaks their heart if you object to it. And so, in the horrified hush that follows, the house rallies around the patriarch’s feelings, the young woman sacrifices hers — and the rebellion is sidestepped. End of debate.

I was reminded of such expert emotional arm-twisting, as I watched the foiling of debate and deliberation in the Monsoon Session of Parliament, which ended with Rajya Sabha chairman Venkaiah Naidu in tears. The anguish of the veteran BJP leader was at the disruption of the House by Opposition members, who refused to give in to the magnificent mandate of the Modi government, often useful to ram through sweeping changes in laws. This time, the government used it to dodge straight questions on whether it used the Pegasus spyware against Indians, allegations which have moved many other governments to action. The Opposition insisted on answers and made a ruckus. The government did not relent. It flexed

muscles and cried anarchy, and Naidu said he lost a night’s sleep. No, somehow, the tears were not at the prospect of a predatory state snooping and hacking phones; at the citizen being turned into the enemy.

As Hindi cinema’s fathers through the ages have shown us, the tears of those in positions of authority are often effective — in breaking up couples and getting sons to fall in line, in silencing the mutinous and snatching back the currency of victimhood. It happens in Houses of Parliament, as well as our *ghar-parivar* and *gali-mohalla*, where young girls (and boys) are trained to tiptoe around the fragile emotions of loving fathers and husbands, to keep their voices down, bite that cheeky answer back, and not ask inconvenient questions. My mother recalls how, at dusk and with the imminent arrival of their father from work, her boisterous siblings and she would be ordered to turn into silent shadows at home. The girls would pull bangles up their little arms, so that they did not tinkle disobediently.

But bangles will clink — and some girls grow up to be women with difficult questions, at home and in the House. They will not go gently, if they are being forced into marriage or yanked out of college and love; or being told to respect disrespectful and abusive elders. In Indian families, such revolts are met with gaslighting (outright denial of oppression), the tears of those who wield authority over children and women,

and their fury at being challenged.

It’s something we have seen play out often in our public life in the last couple of years. The Modi government has muscled through legislation as varied as the Citizenship Amendment Act, the abrogation of Article 370 and the farm reforms. When vast numbers have taken to the streets to say, “Sorry, we do not agree. Your laws will harm our lives and identities”, it has responded with injured pride and pique, vilification and sedition cases.

Paternalism sustains homes and domestic hierarchies. In schools and colleges, it trains us in deference, not doubt. Increasingly, it also bleeds into our political and social life, as worship of authority and the authoritarian turns into a cult. The state bloats a little more every day on a diet of our freedoms. It has drawn Lakshman rekhas around who we can marry, what faith we can follow, and what films we can watch. It even wants the power to cancel old films cleared by the CBFC, just in case.

The monsoon session of Parliament saw a prolonged stalemate, but also extraordinary instances of protesting Opposition members being edited out of the Lok Sabha TV telecast. The government believes that the grave questions thrown up by the Pegasus scandal or the year-long farm protests or its mismanagement of the pandemic can be muted by invocations of national or parliamentary honour. It believes, like good Indian parents, that since it

knows best, it is beyond reproach. Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla has rued the “poor productivity” of the House, another minister has likened Opposition’s unruly behaviour in the House to vandalism. Naidu has denounced the Opposition’s protests as “sacrilege” in a “temple of democracy”.

All of this points to an idea of parliamentary democracy in which the *sarkar* is the headmaster, and the others misguided children who must keep their fingers on their lips. Or, at best, a clearing house for bills, bound to meet KRAs of productivity. But the Parliament of a large democracy must be held to higher standards — it must engage with things that adults deal with, such as dissent and disagreement. It is more — a staging ground of politics, noise and protest. It is not a temple, where accountability must bow to reverence, or where notions of purity are wielded to exclude large sections.

The refusal to talk to the Opposition as equals, the need to use ideas of honour and propriety as a smokescreen for a ruthless exercise of power is a dissolution of democracy. It is a game still played in Indian families, but daily challenged as well by the anger and aspiration of young men and women. But if Parliament is turned, without a fuss or a furor, into such a pygmy patriarchal set-up, tears must be shed for such a travesty.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A SYMBOL

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Sabrina’s no’ (IE, August 17). Jessica Lal, the model, was shot dead in 1999 on a whim by a man who could not fathom his desires being denied. But all nine accused were acquitted in 2006 for lack of evidence. Sabrina Lal was left fighting for justice for what should have been an open-and-shut case. After all, Jessica was murdered in a bar, and there were multiple eyewitnesses. Sabrina on Sunday at the age of only 53 but she became a symbol of the fight against the rich and privileged, for whom the normal rules don’t apply.
 SS Paul, Nadia

REFORM POLICE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, ‘Lame Excuse’ (IE, August 17). The chilling statistics from UP police’s Operation Langda highlight the need to implement police reforms with alacrity. The Ribiero Committee, Padmanabiah Committee and others have made useful recommendations in this regard. State governments must start implementing them if public confidence in the police is to be restored.
 Hemant Contractor, Pune

GREAT WIN

THIS REFERS TO the report, ‘India’s last-hour win Lord’s: Best 1-Day gift’ (August 17). History repeats itself with India’s triumph over England at Lord’s. The victory came about because of Mohammad Shami’s impressive and incredible fifty-not-out and Siraj’s eight

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wickets in both innings.
 Md Yousuf Kamal, Muzaffarpur

OPPORTUNISM

THIS REFERS TO the article, ‘It’s Congress that needs repair’ (IE, August 17). Both this article and the one it responds to (by Sonia Gandhi) smack of a “heads I win tails you lose” attitude. It is true that the Congress was against the NDA’s triple ta-laq bill. But why is the BJP not showing the same urgency in passing the long-pending Women’s Reservation Bill? Further the Congress is now opposing the UAPA law which it enacted when it was in power at the Centre. Such instances only show the partisanship and opportunism of our parties.
 Tarsem Singh, Mahilpur