



The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY

RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

A SHARPER EDGE

Minister Jaishankar's strong words on uniting against terror point to growing challenge vis-a-vis Pakistan, and in region

THE TALIBAN TAKEOVER of Afghanistan has added several layers of difficulties to the fraught India-Pakistan relationship. The relationship of the Pakistan Army and ISI with the Taliban, especially the Haqqani network, is an open secret. Their influence over the processes that took the Taliban speedily to Kabul when American forces began withdrawing from the country was also apparent. For at least three years, if not more, security officials in the now deposed government of the Republic of Afghanistan and Indian intelligence reports have pointed to Punjabi fighters supporting the Taliban's military push. By all accounts, cadres of anti-India groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed made common cause with the Taliban and fought American soldiers and Afghan security forces alongside them. The connections between Islamic State of Khorasan Province (ISKP), the Afghanistan chapter of ISIL, with LeT came to the fore when after the arrest of its top leader in Afghanistan last year following the horrific attack on a Kabul gurdwara, it was revealed that he was a former Lashkar commander. The National Directorate of Security, the Afghan intelligence agency in the erstwhile government, other ISKP cadres with connections to the ISI, had been among those arrested for the attack. The links between these groups and their connections to the deep state in Pakistan were always a concern, but the military conquest of Afghanistan by a fundamentalist group and the emboldening effect it is bound to have on outfits such as LeT and Jaish, among many others, has increased that concern manifold.

This was the context in which External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar flagged the threat posed by terrorism at a United Nations Security Council meeting earlier this week. The minister singled out the Haqqani network, which is allied to the Taliban and is known to have the unstinted backing of the ISI, and the LeT, Jaish and ISKP for special mention. His strong words for a united stand against terrorism contained veiled references against both Pakistan and China — the latter has blocked the designation of Pakistan-based terrorist groups in the past. It is significant that at the meeting, the third special event organised by India during its month-long presidency of the UNSC, China joined other countries, including the US and UK, in making the demand for holding the Taliban to its commitment that it will not allow Afghanistan to be used by terror groups.

As Pakistan is in the driving seat of developments in Afghanistan, and has effectively achieved what it has long wanted — Taliban rulers in Kabul — it too should be prepared for greater scrutiny of its actions. Minister Jaishankar has set in motion a narrative that is likely to dominate domestic debates on Pakistan. In the current situation, the possibility of normalisation of ties with Pakistan, which had come to the forefront with the revival of the ceasefire on the LoC, has receded once again. The benefits of the ceasefire are not small, but it would be difficult to sustain this fragile truce without a wider bilateral engagement.

A WELCOME REPRIEVE

Gujarat HC poses a question mark on constitutionality of not just Gujarat's 'love jihad' law but also legislation in other states

THE GUJARAT HIGH Court decision staying some provisions of the state's anti-conversion law, including the one that deems all interfaith marriages as those solemnised for carrying out forceful religious conversion, is extremely welcome. While the decision by Chief Justice of the High Court Vikram Nath and Justice Biren Vaishnav is only an interim order, even as the larger legal challenge of the Gujarat Freedom of Religion (Amendment) Act, 2021 is still pending, the ruling sends out a larger message. It poses a question mark on the constitutionality of not just the Gujarat law but also similar legislation in other states, be it Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, or Himachal Pradesh.

The stated aim of recent anti-conversion laws brought in by BJP-ruled states is to prohibit unlawful religious conversions. But in doing so, the law's vague and excessively broad provisions give powers to the state to hold a police inquiry to probe the motives behind a woman's change of religion for marriage and to potentially annul such a marriage. The law also allows the "aggrieved person, his parents, brother, sister, or any other person related by blood, marriage or adoption" to lodge an FIR on an allegedly unlawful conversion, essentially legitimising mob interference in an individual's private life. By shifting the burden of proof on the individual accused of forcibly converting another person, in effect, the law weaponises communal prejudice and paranoia and throws the power of the state behind it. Even as these laws are under challenge before several high courts, they have become a template for harassment of citizens. The interim ruling comes, therefore, as much-needed relief.

The Gujarat HC intervention recognises the unacceptability of law's intrusion into an individual's private life even when the state may have a legitimate interest in containing unlawful, forcible conversions. It draws a line and says that the state cannot enter the doors of a marriage where there is no evidence of it being forced or involving violence. However, even with the progressive intervention of the judiciary, decisions are often excruciatingly slow to percolate to the ground. Take the case of the police across the country continuing to file cases under Section 66A of the Information Technology Act despite the apex court striking it down in 2015. Laws that grant the state police powers to regulate freedoms must be rolled back. The Gujarat HC's reading of the law will hopefully have a bearing on other courts where similar laws have been challenged.

LIKE DRONACHARYA

Coach Nambiar brought home the difference a coach could make to an athlete's career

OM NAMBIAR, THE Dronacharya award-winning coach who died on Thursday, was arguably the first celebrity coach in the country. Not only because his most famous student was PT Usha, one of the few genuinely world-class athletes the country has produced, but also because he introduced modern methods and drilled in the importance of quality coaching. He brought home the difference a coach could make to an athlete's career at a time when coaching in the country was amateurish, when retired athletes just filled in the role informally.

To Usha, Nambiar was a father figure. In several interviews, she reflected that she wouldn't have become half the athlete she was if not for Nambiar's guidance and perseverance. From spotting her during a district athletics meeting to grooming her for the Olympics, and overseeing her transition to a bold and confident athlete, Nambiar played an influential role in the making of Usha. He was a teacher and also her nutritionist, dietician, recovery expert, psychiatrist, and confidant, who was by her side in triumph and tragedy. He was the support system that helped Usha recover from the near-miss in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics and fuelled her push for gold medals in the Asian Games two years later. Two others who bagged laurels in the Seoul Games — Shiny Wilson and Vandana Rao — were his students too.

Later, when Usha herself became a coach, she brought into play what she had learnt from Nambiar. Her style was deeply personal, perhaps to a fault. Just as it was detrimental to her career — she stayed with Nambiar when she could have sought the services of a foreign coach — it was not beneficial for some of her wards that they stayed too long with her. Nambiar, too, reportedly disliked Usha availing the tutelage of other coaches. But that should not tarnish his legacy. Maybe Usha could have been better. But Nambiar will be revered and remembered for the athlete she has been.



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

AMERICAN EMPIRE HAS been stuck in a place where, to use Polybius's words, "it can neither endure its condition, nor the means to overcome it." In the context of Afghanistan, learned strategic thinkers and broadsheets of imperial privilege like *The New York Times*, will fulminate over roads not taken. But this exercise, as valuable as it might be, misses the wood for the trees. These questions re-enact the presumption of imperial omniscience, innocence and power. In Phil Klay's masterpiece, *Missionaries*, Lisette, a journalist who has spent time in Afghanistan, asks the question: "Any wars right now we are not losing?" She promptly thinks the answer is Colombia. But this answer turns on how one defines "not losing". The exorbitant privilege of empire is you even get to define what counts as loss and shrug off its costs.

There is a long litany of losses. The wars in Iraq, Libya, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Somalia, Lebanon; the coups from Iran to Chile; the creation of secret instruments of violence in assorted places from Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Laos, Honduras, El Salvador; sanctuary to autocracies and exporters of violent fundamentalism from Saudi Arabia to Pakistan, each of whom have subverted the US's own aims. Ask the question: "Did intervention leave a place in a better condition or achieve an objective with least violence possible?" The answer often turns out to be "no". The tens of thousands of civilian casualties testify to that.

Often progress was set back. The Middle East had many functioning states, pockets of urbane modernity, till the geopolitics set the stage for worse forms of fundamentalist reaction. The exact shape of the Taliban, ISIS, al Qaeda is no more over-determined by the interventions of great powers, than it is by some more primordial essence of a culture. But it is impossible to deny that they are products of modern imperial politics: Its unsettling of local societies, its encouragement to violence, its support of fundamentalism, its breaking up of state structures.

At the heart of empire is the debasement of moral identity. Empire has seven deadly sins. The first is corruption. Internally, empire always empowers corrupt practices, the legions of lobbyists, arms dealers, hucksters,

Modality of US withdrawal from Afghanistan will give fillip to fundamentalism's deepest impulses

There are no easy solutions in Afghanistan. The corruptions of empire made withdrawal long overdue. But the tragedy of the American withdrawal is that even in trying to extricate itself, America ended up enacting the sins of empire, not overcoming them. The withdrawal from Afghanistan is not an end of the corrupt political economy of violence. The great powers will be new proxies who produce the same cycle of violence and civil war. Withdrawal does not signal a commitment to greater multilateralism or the rule of law. Withdrawal will not produce an honest reckoning with the self-deceptions of empire.

who begin to constitute the secret sinews of the state and channel its war booties. Externally, the reliance on mercenaries, the sordid deals with all kinds of unsavoury groups, the casual saturation with arms, the implication in illicit trade, make empire resemble a gangster operation that has blowback on the state it represents. Corruption ensured both that the US Treasury was drained and no state was built in Afghanistan. The second sin is self-deception. From Vietnam to Afghanistan, America knew exactly what is going on. But the stakes in keeping the myth of imperial virtue and imperial power produce self-deceptions of the most extraordinary sort.

The third is a morality that, to use Tagore's phrase, "is split down the middle," committed to the very things it disavows. What does the rule of law mean when empire itself enacts a regular lawlessness? What does a "humanitarian mission" mean, when it licenses an outsourcing of torture or disregard for civilian life? The fourth sin is its continual expansionism. The omniscience of empire is apt to give every local conflict global significance. But it also has the need to remind the world of its resolve to remain preeminent. That needs war. The fifth is hypocrisy. The more power tries to stretch, the more it deploys double standards. Some hypocrisy is inevitable in politics. But it becomes the defining feature through which the world understands imperial power. The sixth is a cult of violence. There is an abiding paradox in US strategy. The creation of stable states and societies requires the pacification of violence. But there is something bizarre about modern imperial counterinsurgency strategies. From Iraq to Afghanistan to western Pakistan to the drug wars, the abiding legacy of this empire is saturation of societies with arms and militias; as if creating armed factions in society and militarising, running it awash with cash, will ever get you a stable state. The seventh sin is racism. Even the most liberal-minded empire will create a hierarchy of those whose lives matter; even in its emancipatory mission it cannot get away from reinforcing claims of superiority that generate resentment.

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Afghanistan. The corruptions of empire made withdrawal long overdue. But the tragedy of the American withdrawal is that even in trying to extricate itself, America ended up enacting the sins of empire, not overcoming them. The withdrawal from Afghanistan is not an end of the corrupt political economy of violence. The great powers will be new proxies who produce the same cycle of violence and civil war. Withdrawal does not signal a commitment to greater multilateralism or the rule of law. Withdrawal will not produce an honest reckoning with the self-deceptions of empire.

Will the Taliban reinvent itself? There is reason to be deeply sceptical that it will. Will it become like a poor Saudi Arabia in the Eighties — a power the West had no problems with, even when it was internally repressive or exporting jihad? Or will anarchy follow? Or will the internal fissures of Afghan society produce a new political dynamic? No one truly knows.

But the modality of US withdrawal excluded the fundamental sin of empire: Its reinforcement of race and hierarchy. The tropes used to justify the mess of this withdrawal all underscore this. It is the Afghan president, their army, that is to blame, as if after 20 years of intervening in a society, the US had no responsibility. Suddenly, the pretext of common humanity, and universal liberation, which was the pretext of empire, turned into the worst kind of cultural essentialism. It is their culture, these medieval tribalists who are incapable of liberty. We veiled the fact that they are entirely the creation of modern war.

And finally, this shocking sense of, "Frankly dear, we could not care a damn," about the Afghans who reposed trust and risked their lives. Fundamentalism has drawn its motivating energy, not from God, but from cultivating grievance against imperial hierarchies. The Taliban's victory is not just a morale booster for fundamentalists everywhere. The US management of the withdrawal will give fillip to fundamentalism's deepest psychological impulses. It is an anarchic world, each for their own.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express



P D T ACHARY

THE CHAIRMAN OF the Rajya Sabha is reportedly contemplating action against MPs who, he thinks, were involved in the fracas in the House. There is speculation in the media about what kind of action will be taken against those MPs. There is also speculation about the formation of a special committee to suggest severe punishment. It appears that the Rajya Sabha secretariat has prepared a report on the incident, which accuses some MPs of assaulting security personnel. The MPs, on the other hand, have alleged that strangers in blue uniform were allowed inside the House who roughed them up.

House rules vest in the chairman all the powers necessary to conduct proceedings smoothly. The rules also provide for the suspension of MPs who "disregard the authority of the Chair or abuse the rules of the Council by persistently and willfully obstructing the business of the House". However, the power to suspend a member is vested in the House, not in the chairman. The chairman names such a member whereupon a motion is moved by the Parliamentary Affairs Minister, or any other minister seeking the suspension of the member. Under the rule, the maximum period of suspension is for the remainder of the session. A suspended member cannot enter the chamber or attend any meetings of the committees. He also cannot give any notice for discussion or submission. By convention, a suspended member loses his right to get

LAWMAKERS & DISORDER

Can the House give MPs more severe punishment than suspension?

replies to his questions. Thus, suspension from the service of the House is regarded as a serious punishment. But, surprisingly, the rules do not spell out the disabilities of a suspended member. These are imposed on them as per conventions or precedent.

Suspension is the only serious punishment provided for in the rules. Rule 256 of the Rajya Sabha's Rules of Procedure specifies the acts of misconduct: Disregarding the authority of the chair, abusing the rules of the council by persistently and willfully obstructing the business thereof. A member can be punished for any of these acts and, usually, the punishment is immediate. Punishing members long after the occurrence of misconduct is very rare. Suspension for the remainder of the session makes sense only when they are suspended immediately after the misconduct has been noticed by the chair. For the acts of misconduct by the MPs outside the House, which constitute a breach of privilege or contempt of the House, usually the privilege committee investigates the matter and recommends the course of action and the House acts on it.

A special committee is appointed usually when the misconduct is so serious that the House may consider expelling the member. Such occasions have been few and far between. The first case of expulsion occurred in 1951 when a special committee was appointed to investigate the conduct of H G Mudgal, an MP who accepted financial ben-

efits from business houses to canvass support for them in the government and Parliament. The committee found him guilty of misconduct, which was derogatory to the dignity of Parliament. He was expelled. Another special committee was appointed in 2005 to inquire into the issue of MPs accepting money for raising questions in Parliament. This followed a sting operation done by a private body of investigative journalists. Ten MPs were expelled in connection with this episode.

So, special ad-hoc committees are appointed only to investigate serious misconduct by MPs outside the House. No special committee is required to go into what happens before the eyes of the presiding officer inside the House. As per the rules of the House, they need to be dealt with then and there.

An interesting question that arises in the Rajya Sabha case is whether the House can give the MPs more severe punishment than suspension. The rules do not recognise any punishment other than suspension for a specific period. Article 20 of the Constitution prohibits a greater penalty than what the law provided at the time of committing the offence. It is a sobering thought that the rules of the House do not empower Parliament to inflict any punishment on its members other than suspension for creating disorder in the House.

The writer is former secretary general, Lok Sabha



AUGUST 21, 1981, FORTY YEARS AGO

POLL REFORMS REJECTED

AFTER A TUMULTUOUS five-hour debate, marked by pandemonium and acrimony, the Lok Sabha on August 20 rejected by a voice vote a motion moved by Madhu Dandavate (Janata) calling for urgent poll reforms to make elections free of shortcomings. While the fate of the motion was more or less a foregone conclusion, the intensity displayed by most of the speakers took everyone by surprise. Towards the end, it assumed shocking dimensions when a Congress (I) member Bhagwan Dev tore up certain photographs of the Garhwal poll tabled by Harkesh Bahadur of the DSF. For 10 minutes, total pan-

demonium prevailed in the House with members from both sides converging on the central table and the photographs strewn on the carpet.

ZAIL SINGH ON ASSAM

HOME MINISTER GIANI Zail Singh assured the Lok Sabha that the government would find a solution to the Assam problem that would be acceptable to all, or at least give minimum satisfaction to the maximum number of people. He said that the talks on the foreign nationals' issue was going on in a cordial manner. He said before taking a final decision on the issue, the government would

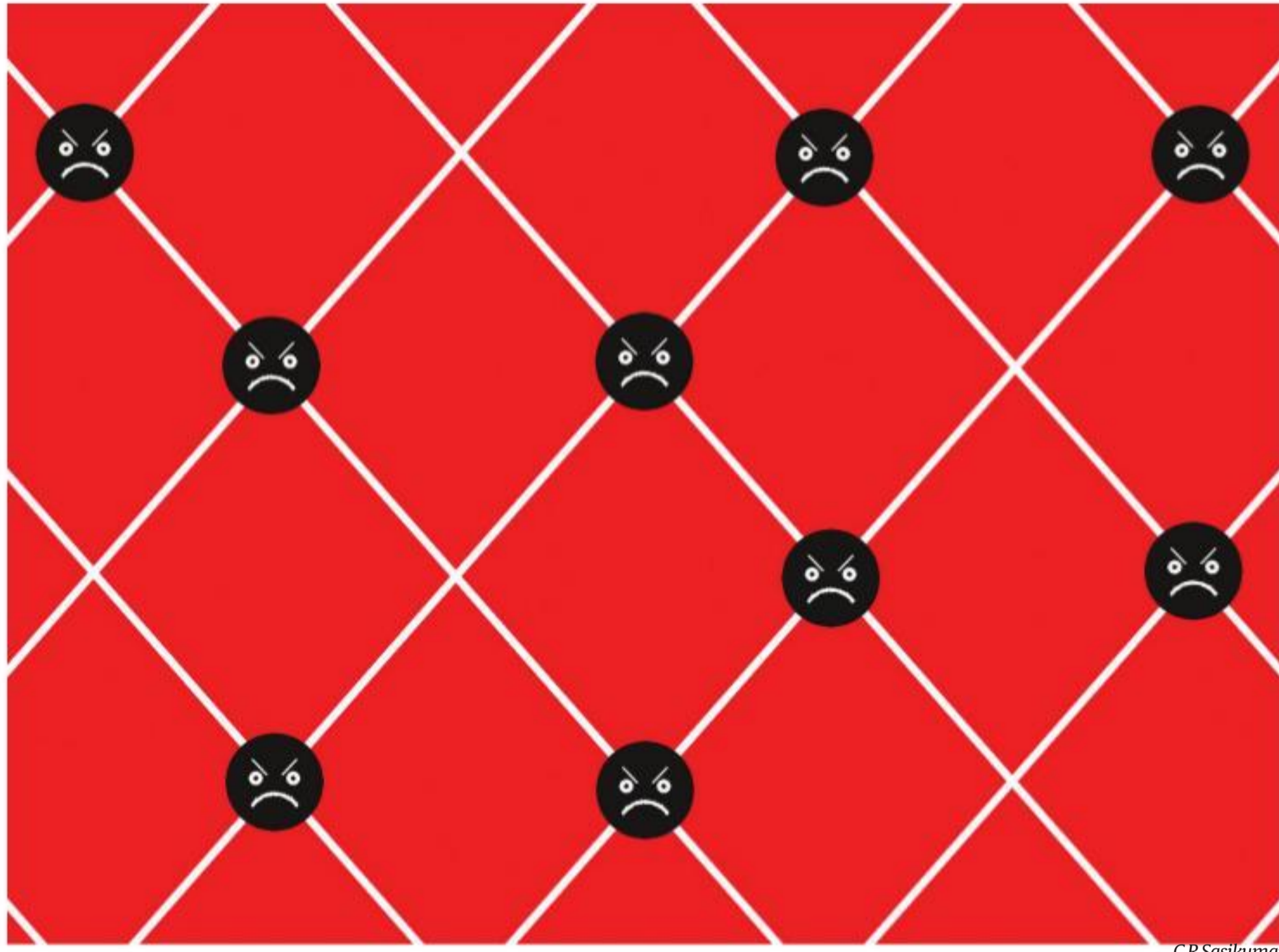
consult the Opposition members.

DU VIOLENCE

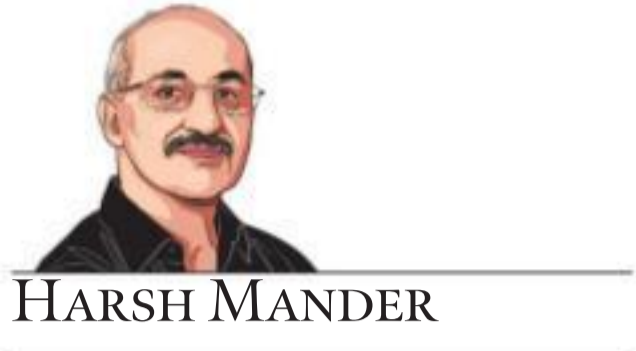
A LARGE NUMBER of students of Sham Lal College and other colleges in Delhi University raided Dayal Singh College, set fire to scooters, motorcycles and bicycles parked in the campus, broke window panes, beat several students and escaped before the police arrived. 50 to 60 students and six teachers were in the college when the raiding party arrived. The raid is suspected to be in retaliation to the beating up of students of the Janata Vidyarthi Morcha students who had visited Dayal Singh College earlier in the day.

Lest we remember only hate

What is important is not just what we remember from the tangled agony of Partition, but what lessons we draw from these memories



CR Sasikumar



HARSH MANDER

ON THE EVE of India's Independence Day, Prime Minister Narendra Modi declared that August 14 would now be observed as the Partition Horrors Remembrance Day. "Partition's pains can never be forgotten", he declared. "Millions of our sisters and brothers were displaced and many lost their lives due to mindless hate and violence."

The overwhelming majority of Indians alive today were born long after India's blood-drenched Partition tore the country. They must indeed remember this history: The agony of a million people losing their lives in Hindu-Muslim riots; of trains in both directions piled with corpses; of 14 million people uprooted in the largest distress displacement in human history, except the trafficking of Africans as slaves to the Americas. But the salient questions are — what they should remember, how they should remember, and what lessons they should draw from this recollection.

I recall speaking in a hall in Ludhiana, Punjab, some years ago about the imperative of fighting religious bigotry and hate. An ageing man, older than me, spoke, his voice quivering. He recalled the slaughter and pillage of Partition, which had snatched from him his family and his home. "When I recount this history to my children, how can you expect me to teach them to love and respect Muslims who destroyed us so mercilessly?"

I replied to him, "I understand your pain. I too belong to a Partition family, and the families of my parents suffered traumas identical to yours. But if you must speak of this to your children, and their children, can you at least tell them the full story? Tell them that Hindus and Sikhs did suffer horrendously at the hand of Muslim mobs in places where they were in a minority. But tell them also that Hindus and Sikhs, where in a majority, unleashed identical horrors upon Muslims. No community kept at bay the frenzy of hate in those horrific months. The hands of every community were equally tainted with the blood of innocents. You lost lives and homes, but tell your children that our Muslim sisters and brothers also lost their lives in equal numbers. Partial remembering can only nurture further hate."

I recalled to him Mahatma Gandhi's epic 40-day fast in Calcutta, just weeks after India won her freedom, trying to restore peace and sanity to a city burning in feverish Hindu-Muslim violence. A Hindu man, torn by grief, went to where Gandhi lay fasting, and shouted, "What you are doing is utterly unjust and heartless. I lost my son — so small — to Muslim mobs. How can I ever forgive them?" Gandhi replied, "I understand your pain. But let me suggest to you a way. Find a little boy — so small. A Muslim boy whose parents were slaughtered by Hindu mobs. Adopt him as your son, raise him in the faith into which he was born; maybe you will then be able to heal, even to forgive."

My parents' village, Kahuta, near Rawalpindi, was among the worst-ravaged by hate violence during Partition. The Sikhs

and Hindus of the village took refuge in a gurdwara with high, fortress-like walls. When Muslim mobs laid siege to the gurdwara, the men in the community decided that all the women and girls would save their 'honour' by throwing themselves into a well. When some women refused, men of their own families sliced them with swords and threw them in. I am grateful that I never heard a word of bigotry against Muslims from my parents. My father often told me that the word Allah appears more than a thousand times in the Sikh Holy Book. Their prayer room carried the name of Allah on its walls, along with a crucifix, Buddha and many Hindu gods and goddesses.

Decades later, when I decided to leave behind my career in the IAS in protest against the Gujarat communal massacre of 2002, to fight for justice and healing with the survivors, many relatives of my extended family were furious, and cancelled me from their lives. One of them said to me loudly during a family wedding, "We are ashamed of you. After all we suffered during Partition, you have crossed to the wrong side". I replied, "After all our families suffered in Partition, who more than us can understand the suffering of victims of the same hate violence? It is, even more, our duty to stand resolutely with them, against the perpetrators of hate. I am on the right side. It is you who are on the wrong side. Don't you see?"

What is important is not just what we remember from the tangled agony of Partition, but what lessons we draw from these memories.

Can we remember who were the most tragic victims of Partition violence? The women who were treated as property, and battlefields to defend or transgress the "honour" of the community. The Dalit Christians

My parents' village, Kahuta, near Rawalpindi, was among the worst-ravaged by hate violence during Partition. The Sikhs and Hindus of the village took refuge in a gurdwara with high, fortress-like walls. When Muslim mobs laid siege to the gurdwara, the men in the community decided that all the women and girls would save their 'honour' by throwing themselves into a well. When some women refused, men of their own families sliced them with swords and threw them in. I am grateful that I never heard a word of bigotry against Muslims from my parents.

left behind in Pakistan, condemned to continue the work of manual scavenging but savaged by blasphemy laws and religious discrimination.

Can we remember the thousands of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims who risked their lives to save their neighbours from the hate violence of people of their own community?

Some of us believe that behind the announcement of the Partition Horrors Remembrance Day are the politics of the ruling establishment. August 14 is celebrated as Independence Day in Pakistan. My social media feed is already choked with messages that blame Gandhi and Nehru for Partition, and maintain that it was Sardar Patel and the RSS that saved India from fragmentation and further dismemberment. The RSS historically played no role in the freedom struggle. Is the announcement of Partition Horrors Day a part of their larger project to rewrite history, with the RSS painted as patriots and the Congress led by Gandhi as traitors? When we remember Partition, we must recall that it was Savarkar of the Hindu Mahasabha who, long before the Muslim League, imagined two separate nations, of Hindus and Muslims. It was the RSS that sought an India of Muslims as second-class citizens. It was the RSS and communal organisations of Muslims that lit and stoked the horrific fires of communal violence.

Yes, Indians must never forget the torment and horrors of Partition. We must remember so that we never allow hate to partition not just our land, but even more fundamentally, our hearts. We must remember always what the politics of religious hate does to a people.

Mander is a human rights and peace worker. His books include Partitions of the Heart: Unmaking the Idea of India

What Sabyasachi owes Sanganer

His collaboration with H&M puts Indian design on the map, but at the cost of struggling craftspeople and hand-made textile producers



JAYA JAITLEY

THE CURRENT SPARKS on social media are not just a frothy tussle between some elite persons, who are considered the protectors of craftspeople, daring to come up against Sabyasachi Mukherjee, one of the most successful names in the fashion business. It is about a genuine and much larger challenge for the world of the handmade. On one side are the values that are important to our cultural heritage, which are about community sharing and retaining pride in our diverse identities and skills. It is about a lifelong *riyaaz* to improve one's skills and designs. Craftspeople can create, innovate and cooperate with modernity very easily. Their immense value is that their workmanship incorporates specific cultural histories and stories special to each place and skill. They are our living treasures, who need support and opportunity and they need to be prioritised so that their existing and precious livelihoods are sustained. On the other side is the new "market monster" which makes it alright to swallow up the old ways for the sake of fame and profit. Jeff Bezos, who has been accused of exploiting his workers, has the gall to thank millions of Amazon customers all across the world for funding his multi-billion dollar dream trip into space for five minutes. It is an unequal battle. The passing acknowledgement by our designer to hybrid craft forms is something similar.

When it was announced that marketing lines had crashed due to the success of H&M's tie-up with Mukherjee for a new line, who would not have rejoiced that Indian designers had conquered the world? We have been proud of the typical Indianness of his designs in the Bengal patina, just as we proudly acknowledge Ritu Kumar's contribution to hand embroidery and hand block prints, when other designers were running the Western way. But on reading Mukherjee's statement about the collaboration, it was the mention of a Sanganer block print being digitised that caught the eye of those who have dedicated their lives to ensure that its neglected and often starving practitioners gain respect, recognition and remuneration.

One wonders if Mukherjee knows what's been going on in the real Sanganer. It is a small edge-of-town kind of colony outside Jaipur, surrounded by garbage and sewage. The block printers there have been struggling to get clean water and to continue staying there instead of being summarily relocated to some unknown and unfamiliar area by the Pollution Control Board. Hand-block printing employs wood carvers and metal block makers, dyers, designers and printers. The charm of hand-block printing is also its "perfection of uneven-

ness". Now, the block printers are simultaneously struggling with heavy competition from skill-less screen printers, who provide fabric quickly and cheaply, in the same way that power looms have overrun handlooms. They faced the challenge of mill prints on huge machines in large factories when colonialists prioritised Lancaster and Manchester and destroyed India's tradition of textile production by hand. Then came digitisation, sounding yet another death knell for India's hand work heritage.

The whole point of the crafts-supporting world, even internationally, is to respect handwork and human endeavour over the machine. This support is not just a hashtag or a hand-on-heart statement. Its purpose is to benefit the makers directly and to respect a distinct heritage that loses sense if hybridisation is considered true design. If fashion designers like Mukherjee used some of their profits to uplift the working environment in Sanganer, it would be a genuine gesture of respect for our craft heritage.

When Mukherjee boasts of "putting Indian design on the map" with his name and his brand, it may be a big win for him and for India, but not for those who are fighting to continue block printing in Sanganer so that people like him can be "inspired" and "create hybrids" from multiple regions including other "ancient world cultures", as he says. Sadly, there is no humility in such statements. It is no longer really Indian nor Sanganer craft if it comes out for H&M's "masses" from a digital version. Yet, he should know that he is a huge "influencer" for all fashion design students in India. He drives the media into a frenzy of adoration. Brides are so desperate for a Sabyasachi *lehnga*, which can cost up to Rs 25 lakh, that one small-time electrical shop owner had to sell some of his property to please his to-be-married daughter. We came across a zardozi shop owner in Delhi who showed us his "original copy" of a Sabyasachi sari that he "kept hidden from imitators", he said.

Since the designer's influence is vast, if he even whispers the word "digitisation" in the context of a precious hand-crafted textile, he could crush the aspirations and livelihoods of all hand-made textile producers and invalidate the work done by those who have struggled to keep crafts and livelihoods alive through a better appreciation of hand skills. Those young people who are turning to support the craft sector now in the name of "organic" or "sustainable" or "slow fashion" will switch paths in a moment if some big fashion name says it's okay. There is also a risk of dumbing down those customers who are slowly learning to care about and recognise the differences between powerloom and handloom and screen and block prints. One cannot proudly claim to "Make in India" by destroying another creative section of India, and benefiting only multinationals and designer brands.

The writer is founder, Dastkari Haat Samiti

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

A QUESTION

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Word police' (IE, August 20). It appears that the decision to ban the use of the colloquial term "gorakh danda" (unethical practice) by the Manohar Lal Khattar government in Haryana was taken to soothe the "hurt sentiments" of Gorakhnath community. But what about the phrase "Aaya Ram-gaya Ram", which originated in Haryana? It is a unique contribution to the lexicon of the Hindi language to describe the phenomenon of defection by leaders from one political party to another. The phrase is a disdainful description of politicians' unethical behaviour. Will the government ban this phrase when approached by the devotees of Lord Ram?

LR Murmu, Delhi

LESS OPAQUE

THIS REFERS TO the editorial, 'Welcome the nine' (IE, August 20). The call for transparency and accountability in the functioning of the Supreme Court collegium isn't intended to dilute the pivotal role played by the judiciary in our state structure. The lack of secrecy in the appointment and transfer of judges would ensure common people are in the loop, making any attempt of assault in the functioning of the judiciary by any other organ of the state a lesser possibility. A fair and independent judiciary is the collective responsibility of every citizen.

Sudip Kumar Dey, Barasat

GENDER STEREOTYPE

THIS REFERS TO the article, 'The future

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In New India, sportspersons have full support from government, PM



ANURAG SINGH THAKUR

THE SIGHT OF our Prime Minister offering churma to Neeraj Chopra, ice cream to P V Sindhu, laughing with Bajrang Punia, telling Ravi Dahiya to laugh more and hearing the experiences of Mirabai Chanu brought a smile to every Indian's face. What was equally encouraging was that he spent time with every athlete who took part in Tokyo Olympics. The next day, he interacted with the Paralympic contingent, discussing their inspiring life journeys.

These gestures indicate a different side to Narendra Modi — a person who is passionate about sports and willing to go the extra mile for India's athletes. Before the Tokyo Games began, PM Modi held an extensive review meeting to take stock of our preparedness.

Those who have seen PM Modi closely can vouch for the passion he has towards supporting a culture of sports and games among the youth. As CM of Gujarat, he began the Khel Mahakumbh initiative, which boosted grassroots level sports participation in a state that is not historically known for sporting excellence. There is also a method in how he has supported sports and sportspersons, which would make me to argue that he is India's first and foremost "Sportsperson's Prime Minister".

A few days ago, a 2013 video went viral. In that video, Modi was addressing a group of college students in Pune, where he lamented that India has a large and talented population as well as a history of sporting excellence, but in Olympics after Olympics, we have struggled to raise our

medal count. He said that there is no reason a nation like ours should remain deprived of Olympic success. But, according to him, the issue was not the players but our inability to create the right supporting atmosphere. The women's and men's hockey teams have gone on record saying that the PM's phone calls after their defeats played a key role in boosting their morale. In 2019, when Neeraj Chopra suffered an injury, PM Modi wished him a speedy recovery, which was widely appreciated.

When it comes to sports, the PM has understood the root of the problem — that sports generate much interest but when it comes to incentives and participation, there is a wide gap. There was both fact and optimism when he remarked after meeting the Olympic winners — "seeing the recent successes in sports, I am confident there will be a shift in parental attitude towards sports." When parents see India's medal count rising, one hopes they will be more open to their children pursuing sports. But, more importantly, when they see all arms of the government, and the corporate sector support our players, they will realise that sports makes for an attractive and honourable career.

Amongst the various ways we can enhance India's sporting success is by looking at encouraging our states towards a "One State, One Sport" outlook: They can prioritise one game or promote a few (while not ignoring others) based on the available talent pool, natural interest, climatic conditions and available infrastructure. This will bring a focussed

approach but also allow for optimum utilisation of existing resources in the state.

Further, we must also get on board corporate India to adopt "One Sport, One Corporate". Across the world, corporates are at the forefront of extending support to budding talent, building leagues, enhancing the fan experience, marketing as well as merchandising to enhance the financial kitty of players. The success of corporates with cricket over the years is a case in point. Additionally, the sponsorship pattern has transitioned from FMCG brands to new FinTech unicorns. This can be a win-win for players, corporates and the game itself.

Another important aspect is to build a grassroots sporting culture. For this, it is imperative to expand the calendar for various games at the local, state and national levels. India needs regional leagues in every sport that will provide an opportunity for young athletes to hone their skills throughout the year at various levels, as well as enhance the sports ecosystem and infrastructure in the country. I also believe our university system can be transformed into an oasis for Olympic excellence.

These measures will fill the gap between interest and participation going forward.

One of the things that has helped Indian sports is the emphasis on quality and global standards. The conventional route was bureaucratic and tiresome; this has changed in the Modi government, where even the PM prefers to receive feedback directly from the players. While meeting the Tokyo 2020 con-

tingent, he asked them to keep sharing their views on ways to strengthen sporting infrastructure. Be it Mirabai or Mary Kom, the PM has personally ensured they got the best treatment for their injuries.

Another issue impacting Indian sports is (ironically) the rise of modern technology. PM Modi has addressed this in his book, *Exam Warriors* and in Pariksha Pe Charcha townhall programmes. He talked about giving as much importance to the playing field as to the play station. Modi has not dismissed the advent of modern technology. He has sought a healthy balance where the human element of sports — teamwork, togetherness — is maintained. Further, the National Education Policy also consists of mechanisms that will make sports education an attractive option. In the years to come, Manipal will get India's first sports university, which will be a boon to athletes and harness the rich sporting legacy in the Northeast.

Tokyo 2020 was an Olympics of many firsts for India. We won our first gold in athletics, the hockey team did wonders and there were successes in other sports such as discus throw, golf, fencing, etc. The Target Olympic Podium Scheme, Khelo India and the Fit India Campaign have laid the foundations for greater success. New India has fire in its belly. Our sportspersons have the full support of the government and the PM in their quest for sporting excellence.

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