



THE EDITORIAL PAGE

WORDLY WISE
CAPITAL IS DEAD LABOUR, WHICH, VAMPIRE-LIKE,
LIVES ONLY BY SUCKING LIVING LABOUR.

— KARL MARX

The Indian EXPRESS

FOUNDED BY
RAMNATH GOENKA

BECAUSE THE TRUTH INVOLVES US ALL

Arms and the Nation



PRATAP BHANU MEHTA

To understand failed states, don't get development consultants. Get people who follow the guns

A LINE TO KABUL

UNSC resolution, India's first engagement with Taliban, speak of new realities in Afghanistan — and the navigation challenges

THE UNITED NATIONS Security Council resolution on Afghanistan, adopted on the last day of India's month-long presidency, has shown up the big power rift in the new geopolitics of Asia since the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan. Russia and China abstained and the US, France, UK and 10 non-permanent members voted for the resolution. The reason for the divide is not far to see. In the virtual surrender of the US to the Taliban, Russia senses an opportunity to get into the driver's seat in Asia. Over the last decade or so, Russia opened channels of communication with the Taliban, and shelved its Afghan war humiliation to repair relations with Pakistan. In the run-up to the 2020 Doha Agreement between the Trump Administration and the Taliban, and since, Moscow has made the case for a larger role for the radical Islamist group in post-US Afghanistan. Beijing, through its proximity to both Russia and Pakistan, hopes to fill the vacuum left behind by the US. Both countries want to keep all options open with the Taliban, not draw red lines around themselves with a resolution which, while all but recognising the new rulers of Afghanistan, demands that Afghan territory not be used by terrorists for attacks against other countries. The Russia-China-Pakistan cooperation on Afghanistan could become more apparent in the coming days, specifically at the mid-September SCO summit in Dushanbe.

India has made its first big readjustment to the emerging reality with a publicly acknowledged engagement with a Taliban representative on the same day as the UNSC resolution was adopted, the last US soldier left Afghanistan and the Taliban declared victory. While a Ministry of External Affairs statement said the meeting, held in Doha, focussed on safety, security and early return of Indian nationals stranded in Afghanistan, and the travel of Afghan nationals, "especially minorities", to India, the Taliban have chosen to remain silent. But an indication of the mood in Kabul came with the outreach to Delhi last week, calling for continuation of Afghanistan's friendly ties with India, and stressing their economic, historic, and cultural linkages. The MEA's pointed mention that the meeting was held at the request of the Taliban showed the preoccupation in Delhi with the optics and possible domestic fallout of engaging with a group it has viewed as a proxy of Pakistan and as an associate of terrorist groups that target India. Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla held up a mention in the UNSC resolution adopted on August 30 of Resolution 1267 (under which Lashkar-e-Toiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed are designated as terrorist organisations) as evidence of inclusion of India's concerns. The irony is that the Taliban has been designated under 1267 since 1999, and so have some of its top members. As chair of the Taliban Sanctions Committee this year, India could even find itself presiding over the folding up of this committee.

The reality is that the world is preparing to do business with the Taliban. No window dressing can obfuscate this and none is required. What Delhi makes of the opening provided by its first hesitant public engagement with the Taliban is more important.

MAHA SPLIT

Congress-AIUDF alliance in Assam had potential to shift political ground, but neither party had stamina or conviction

THE CONGRESS FORMALLY ended ties with the AIUDF on Monday, marking the unravelling of the Mahajot, a multi-party alliance formed in January with an eye on the Assam assembly elections. Arithmetic had suggested that a Congress-AIUDF alliance could lead to a consolidation of the 34 per cent Muslim vote in the state and help it take on the BJP, which was seeking reelection to office. The Mahajot gave a close fight to the NDA in terms of vote-share — 43.68 to 44.51 per cent — but it could not translate this into seats. The Congress seems to have concluded that the alliance cost the party Hindu votes, especially in the Upper Assam constituencies where it lost heavily to the BJP.

The Congress-AIUDF alliance was a turning point not merely because of its electoral implications but also because it ended the relegation of the latter, seen to be the voice of Bengali-speaking Muslims, in mainstream politics in the state. But if arithmetic was a factor that led to the formation of the alliance, very little chemistry was visible on the ground during the election. The Congress, wary of the BJP campaign that painted the AIUDF as a party of "outsiders" and hence inimical to Assamese interests, underplayed the alliance and the two parties even fought each other in a few seats. The antipathy of parties that grew out of the anti CAA-NRC agitation, like Akhil Gogoi's Rajgor Dal, also influenced the Congress against a fuller embrace of the AIUDF. In the Barak Valley, the alliance became a major source of discomfort for the Congress, which leaders like Sushmita Dev expressed during seat-sharing talks in March — Dev, who was president of the All India Mahila Congress, has since joined the TMC. Clearly, the voices within the Congress that had held the alliance would cost the party support among non-Muslim Assamese voters, have prevailed over the backers of the Mahajot, though the official reason for the break-up is that an AIUDF MLA praised the BJP.

The Mahajot could not sidestep the linguistic, religious and ethnic fault lines that the BJP skillfully exploited to mobilise voters. The Congress and AIUDF lacked the conviction and political nous to present their alliance as a break from the politics of polarisation towards an inclusive governance framework that respected Assam's demographic diversity. The BJP had laid out a communal argument against the Congress-AIUDF Alliance during the election. The Congress failed to counter it then. And now, even though indirectly, it may be laying the ground for its revival.

THE GOOD CONSUMER

A booking app started by women hotel workers in Spain hopes she will pressure owners to treat them with dignity

JEFF BEZOS — RICHEST man in the world, bane of the brick-and-mortar store, space joy-rider — summed up perfectly the advantages of the "platform" economy: "We are consumer obsessed." What is true of retail goods is perhaps more so for travel and tourism. Apps and websites allow consumers to browse for the best hotels, with deals that offer them the cheapest prices. The casualty of this convenience, though, have been the workers who actually make hotels run — and their financial and social precarity has only been enhanced by the pandemic. Now, at last, a labour union formed by chambermaids in Spain is trying to use technology to even the playing field.

Las Kellys began as a WhatsApp group in 2014 in Barcelona, started by mostly women workers frustrated at the inability of traditional unions to represent their interests. In the hospitality industry — as in transport and retail — hotels, particularly the big chains, have increasingly begun to outsource the employment of staff, particularly cleaning crews, to avoid paying the state-mandated minimum wage and benefits, including maternity leave. Las Kellys has raised funds to start its own booking app. Now, in addition to a room with a view and pool-side cocktails, patrons can judge hotels by how they treat their staff and whether, while being "consumer obsessed", they are also decent to their workers.

The Spanish experiment, if successful, could form a meaningful way in which to use technology and the internet to bargain for the basic rights of the most marginalised workers. The major hiccup, though, is that the model relies on people being more conscientious. Will enough consumers, as they swipe through the endless array of options at their disposal, pay a little bit extra to reward establishments that treat their staff with dignity? Hopefully, the average traveller has a little more concern for the well-being of working women than the average owner.

THERE IS AN old adage that if you want to understand state building or state breakdown, follow the guns. In conflict zones like Afghanistan, it is all too easy to take recourse to debates over development and culture, while ignoring the dynamics of armed conflict, and the presence of weaponry that militarises society and embeds violence. Even a casual perusal of databases at Small Arms Survey, Geneva, that tracks violent conflict and the proliferation of arms, brings home some basic facts about state building and violence.

In their last year of comparative data base 2018, Afghanistan has a rate of 59.8 violent deaths per 1,00,000, below other conflict zones like Syria (187.9), and El Salvador (87). But this data base is also a reminder of two other large trends. First, violence tends to be sticky. Once embedded, it is hard to dislodge. South Africa has a rate of 40.6; Brazil 36.3. Most countries with relatively lower rates are in Asia, or are European social democracies. In Asia, India has a violent death rate of 3.9 per 1,00,000; Pakistan is at 5.9 while big countries like Indonesia, China and Japan are lower than 1. This contrast between Asia and the Americas on this aspect of state building and prevalence of violent death is striking, and rarely made as central to the development literature as poverty.

Violence has complicated causes; even settled societies can have violent political convulsions. There are also forms of violence other than violent death. The relationship between the presence of firearms and violence is also complicated. But again what is striking is the lower prevalence of civilian firearms in Asia. This data base is for both registered and unregistered arms. India has 5.30 per hundred persons, China 3.2, Indonesia less than one. The US, not surprisingly, has 120 per 100; while Brazil and South Africa are closer to 10. Of course, the raw numbers don't tell much by themselves, but as a first cut they are revealing.

As Priya Satia argued in her brilliant book, *The Empire of Guns, The Violent Making of the Industrial Revolution*, the prevalence of guns has a social and political history. Colonial practices embedded guns in some societies and not in others. In the Americas, gun ownership

was almost obligatory for whites, as part of a racial strategy of supremacy and dispossession of natives and oppression of slaves. In Asia, by contrast, colonial empires, for their own self-protection, pacified and built state and society by disarming citizens. As Satia shows, the British empire in India not just dispossessed Indians of weapons, it also disarmed them of burgeoning indigenous knowledge in weapon-making that had begun to emerge in the 17th century, including innovative forms of metallurgy. The Arms Act of 1878, which tightly controlled arms ownership in India, was an exercise in colonial and racial subordination, such that even Gandhi wanted it overturned later. But it is worth wondering about the counterfactual. Given India's social fault lines, if India had been awash with guns, what kind of order might have been possible? It is not an accident that the Indian state in 1959 continued restrictive gun laws. Ironically, fearing lower class rebellion, Britain enacted restrictive gun laws in the 1920s as well.

Violence has complicated causes; even settled societies can have violent political convulsions. There are also forms of violence other than violent death. The relationship between the presence of firearms and violence is also complicated. But again what is striking is the lower prevalence of civilian firearms in Asia. The data base at the Small Arms Survey, Geneva, is for both registered and unregistered arms. India has 5.30 per hundred persons, China 3.2, Indonesia less than one. The US, not surprisingly, has 120 per 100; while Brazil and South Africa are closer to 10. Of course, the raw numbers don't tell much by themselves, but as a first cut they are revealing.

Some armed groups are genuine forces for liberation. But as scholars like Nicholas Marsh and Paul Staniland have argued, the structure of how arms are procured and the social embeddedness of who procures them matters. You can have an instance where a coherent force like a Communist Party or a Maoist movement uses arms to establish hegemony and join the state, as in Nepal. The Taliban's success in being a unifying force is prima facie more surprising, because development analysts keep telling us that Afghanistan is too decentralised and fractious for a single group to be dominant. But there are other instances where the proliferation of arms simply leads to fragmentation, warlordism or continual insurgency. One thing, however, is clear: The supply of weapons matters, and unless controlled, acquires an autonomous dynamic.

Here the US has been the opposite of the British in India; it has ensured that places it intervenes in are awash in weapons. Just to randomly pick items, it was reported in 2016 in a Pentagon audit that more than 1.5 million firearms supplied to Afghan and Iraqi forces had gone missing. Many of the arms provided to the Mujahideen ended up with successor

groups; in Yemen US-supplied arms were being transferred by Gulf states to arms militias. All of this is in addition to the support Pakistan would have provided to so many groups. Saturation of a place with arms is, with rare exceptions, going to backfire. Militias are also hard to decommission, unless they win decisive victories to become the state. In short, you cannot saturate places with weapons and expect development.

In this context, it might be worth looking at the debate over the Small Arms Treaty adopted by the UN General Assembly in 2013. The Treaty aimed to establish the highest possible common standards for regulating conventional arms, and prevent their diversion and illicit trade. The US has withdrawn from the Treaty because of an ideological commitment to exporting weapons. On India's view, the Treaty protects arms exporters more than importers. But more to the point, the Treaty is not strong enough on arms transfers to non-state actors, which is where a significant part of the problem lies. China has embraced the Treaty in a way guaranteed to make India and the US recoil. Whatever India's motives, its central concern is not philosophically off the mark. If we are worried about the fear of violent death in armed conflict and the disruptions caused by state breakdown, then there is a case for very stringent regulation of arms transfers and diversion.

The US has a historical tradition of gun ownership to assert racial privilege; and a history of an armed militia winning a war of independence and becoming a modern state. Perhaps that legacy, and the political economy of the military industrial complex, makes the proliferation of weapons its default option in dealing with conflict. Even Asian states are not immune to this temptation. But there is still truth to the old wisdom, the pacification of violence cannot take place with the indiscriminate spread of weapons. If you want to understand failed states, don't get development consultants. Get people who follow the guns and political elites who are at least willing to control them.

The writer is contributing editor, The Indian Express

CLIMATE SOLUTIONS

Israel's expertise in climate innovation can help India strike right balance



RONY YEDIDIA CLEIN AND LIOR ASSAF

EVEN THOSE OF us not particularly aware of the climate crisis cannot help but be alarmed by what has been happening around us lately. While massive floods in Germany and Western Europe claimed the lives of hundreds, entire villages in India were washed away by monsoon rains. Giant hailstones rained down on Italy in the middle of summer, and Britain and Switzerland were surprised by sudden wild and rainy weather. Sardinia, Greece, Turkey, Australia, US and Siberia were hit by widespread fires. In California and Canada, temperatures reached unthinkable records of above 50 degrees Celsius. The average global temperature rise in 2021 is projected to be about 1.2 degrees Celsius above that of the pre-industrial period. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change 2021 analysis shows that the window of opportunity to limit temperature rise to 1.5 degrees Celsius to avoid the worst impacts of climate change is closing.

The report released by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change is a warning for us. We must transition to a lifestyle and economy that supports — not disrupts — the planet's climate, nature and environment.

Change, however, is difficult, and we need success stories, peer learning, and technologies that will help us move to a zero-emissions economy by 2050 and halve humanity's greenhouse gas emissions by 2030.

In India, the Himalayan glaciers, the source of major rivers and aquifers supplying water to hundreds of millions of Indians, are disappearing at an alarming rate. Climate change will increase the risks in low-lying coastal zones due to cyclones and coastal and inland flooding, storm surges and sea-level rise, threatening communities along the Indian coastline.

The increased frequency of extreme events such as floods and droughts will have a severe impact on India's agriculture and water resources, food security and the prosperity of rural communities. Economic development has been a policy priority for India in the last decades — as it lifts millions of people out of poverty while creating larger demands for goods and services, and increasing the demand for energy across all sectors. India has made enormous investments in renewable energy sources, to increase the use of solar, wind, biomass, waste, and hydropower energies. But there are still enormous challenges in meeting Indian demands for energy, food, and water in a sustainable way.

Israel has lessons to share. Over decades, Israel has learned to establish agriculture in the desert and arid areas, to recycle 90 per cent of its wastewater, and to desalinate drinking water. It has developed solutions for energy storage, energy efficiency, and renewable energy; it has cultivated a groundbreaking industry of animal protein substitutes.

and knows how to preserve forests in conditions of drought and aridity. Israel is a laboratory for the development of practical solutions to the climate crisis.

Take, for example, the developments in research institutes and the private sector in Israel in the field of animal protein substitutes. Products such as poultry, milk, eggs and more are being produced in laboratories using methods that emit almost no greenhouse gases, and which allow huge swaths of agricultural land currently being used for livestock purposes to be freed up for ecological restoration and reforestation.

Israel's climate innovation also provides solutions in the fields of compressed-air energy storage, energy generation from sea waves, the use of advanced computing tools for energy management, and more.

It is clear to everyone today that there is not one single country, strong and developed as it may be, that can cope with this unprecedented crisis alone. We need to harness all of humanity's abilities in order to steer the planet towards a safe shore. The only way to do this is by working together, sharing information and experience, and providing mutual support. Israel and India can lead the way to establish state-of-the-art solutions for the developing world in order to mitigate the impacts of climate change.

Clein is charge d'affaires and Assaf is water attache at the Embassy of Israel

SEPTEMBER 2, 1981, FORTY YEARS AGO

UPROAR CONTINUES

CORRUPTION CHARGES AGAINST A R Antulay, Chief Minister of Maharashtra, rocked both Houses of Parliament for the second day in succession and shot out the entire Question Hour in the Rajya Sabha on Tuesday. There will be fuller discussions on Wednesday when two Call Attention motions are taken up, but the Opposition fought for 100 minutes in the Rajya Sabha and won its point — that the discussion should begin on Tuesday itself as agreed to on Monday. In the Lok Sabha, an unsuccessful bid was made to get an adjournment motion admitted. Even then, a quarter of question time

was blocked. Congress (I) members added fuel to the fire by making charges against Atal Bihari Vajpayee, Charan Singh and George Fernandes. Opposition speakers took serious objection to the distribution of some papers among Congress (I) members by the Minister of State for Parliamentary Affairs Sitaram Kesri.

IRAN LEADERSHIP

MOVING FAST TO fill a power vacuum after the fire-bomb assassination of the president and prime minister of Iran, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's regime named the Interior Minister on Tuesday as Iran's interim

prime minister, the official Pars news agency reported. It said Speaker Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani announced the designation of Interior Minister Ayatollah Mohammad Reza Mahdavi Kani as provisional premier at the end of an open session of the Majlis.

ANTULAY IN DELHI

MAHARASHTRA CHIEF MINISTER A R Antulay made an airdash to Delhi following summons from the party high command. It is understood that the party leadership has sought a detailed account of the chief minister's fund collection as it will have to face the opposition onslaught in Parliament.



