

If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail
Abraham Maslow

China's frivolous objection

India has established a direct freight corridor with Afghanistan, bypassing Pakistan. Neither Pakistan nor any other country can object to it. But China has. The Chinese Communist Party's mouthpiece, 'The Global Times', has dubbed it as a manifestation of India's 'stubborn geopolitical thinking' because, the newspaper says, it is an attempt on India's part to 'counterbalance' China's economic corridor with Pakistan. This is ridiculous and is another instance of China's hostile attitude to India. If China can create new connectivity with other countries through projects like CPEC or Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) so can other countries, including India. There is nothing in it to take exception to.

The reasons of China's recalcitrance may be deeper. It cannot be a mere coincidence that China's objection to India-Afghanistan freight corridor and its provoking clashes with the Indian Army and personnel in Sikkim have come at a time when Prime Minister Narendra Modi is holding talks with President Donald Trump on mutual cooperation in a wide variety of fields including defence. Beijing knows India has started taking countervailing measures to protect its geostrategic interests vis-à-vis China. To neutralize China's geostrategic advantage over India by taking control of the Gwadar port, India has entered into an agreement with Iran to develop the strategically located Chabahar port. To countervail China's rapidly rising naval power India has taken up an ambitious project to increase the Indian navy's fleet strength from the present 137 ships to 200 ships by 2027. That apart, India is setting up its first overseas naval base in the Assumption island of Seychelles. It will be one of the major staging posts for a large maritime security network that India is setting up. India's growing strength in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is something which China cannot stomach. Hence its angry response to the India-Afghanistan freight corridor. As things stand, there may be more needling by China in India's north-eastern border, complimented by frequent border violations and terrorist attacks by Pakistan in India's north-west. They will be part of a common strategy to harass India.

In the developing situation India will have to use all its diplomatic skill to safeguard its interests with the help of friendly countries, while increasing its defence capability to meet any exigency that may arise. A strong India will be a factor in stabilizing the situation and go a long way to give a sense of security to her smaller neighbours who now feel threatened by China. Building a regional security architecture may be a good idea to counter Chinese expansionism.

Winning a round, losing the match

REFLEX ACTION

Arun Srivastava

Dalit vs Dalit. The battle line has finally been drawn. While the Opposition's pick Meira Kumar will challenge the NDA nominee Ram Nath Kovind with the motto to strengthen and uphold secular values, on his part Kovind will facilitate Sangh to reinvent itself and usher the country into a new polity with a distinct Hindutva super-structure.

A nasty controversy has erupted on the issue of Nitish Kumar breaking away from the Opposition rank and going all out to ensure the victory of Kovind. While his elder brother and senior partner of the grand alliance, Lalu Yadav called Nitish's decision to support Kovind and not the combined Opposition candidate Meira Kumar, "Beti of Bihar" a "historic blunder" and wondered how he could claim to be working for a "Sangh-mukt" (RSS-free) country by backing an "RSS man", Nitish strongly hit back, "I have committed any blunder let it be". This statement from Nitish has really shocked observers. At the same time, it speaks of his desperation and frustration. Lalu was not much off the mark in describing his decision as a historic blunder as Nitish in the capacity of senior Opposition leader had suggested making the country 'Sangh-mukt'. Leaders of the RJD and Congress, even the JD(U) confess: "Lalu has never made such a strong public statement on Nitish ever since the alliance was formed". Nitish's exploit has not come as a surprise. Ever since the exercise for selecting the presidential candidate started, it was clear that, notwithstanding his rhetoric to support and strengthen the Opposition unity, Nitish will throw his weight behind the NDA candidate. His decision does not owe to any political crisis or compulsion instead it was his conscious choice.

Nitish supporting Kovind is an expression of revenge. The political development that had started taking a new turn just ahead of the Uttar Pradesh assembly elections made it abundantly clear that the Opposition was reluctant to accept Nitish as its leader and also prime ministerial candidate. The Opposition leaders nursed the feeling that he was soft towards

Modi for obvious reasons. In the eyes of Nitish, the main villain was Lalu. He had created a scenario in which the Opposition turned its back on Nitish. While Nitish was discussing the concept of Opposition unity with other leaders, Lalu was projecting himself as the key figure of Opposition unity. In fact what went against Nitish and created suspicion in the Opposition camp was his support to Modi's various programmes and policies, especially demonetization. He was the only Opposition leader who openly supported Modi.

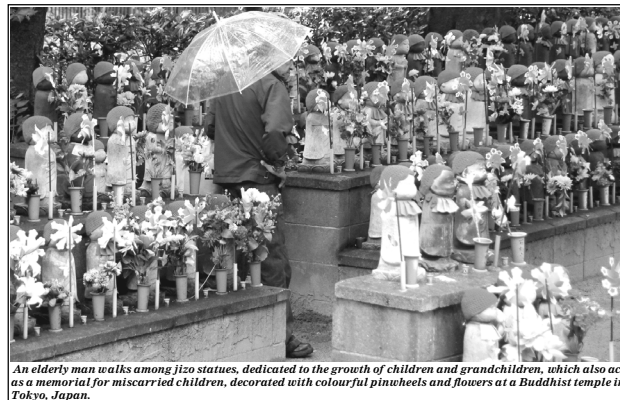
A closer look at the political trajectory of last six months would reveal that Nitish had launched a systematic campaign against Lalu, though in the public he tried to maintain the façade of camaraderie. Both the leaders are waiting for the right opportunity to hit back. Of course, Nitish has already launched the exercise in right earnest. A couple of months ago, Nitish had met Sonia Gandhi to discuss the Opposition prime ministerial candidate. But she did not reveal her cards. For Nitish it was a personal humiliation. This is yet another major reason for Nitish to support Kovind, a move to make the Opposition leaders realize his importance.

Little doubt, with Opposition fielding Meira Kumar, Nitish has lost the initial gain. The Opposition met might have been an irrelevant exercise in the eyes of Nitish and his aides, but one thing is certain and there is no more ambiguity that this year's presidential election would be fought on a high ideological pedestal, which is expected to eventually redefine the future dalit politics in India. Nitish splitting the dalit community and creating a new class of mahadalit has also come under criticism.

Some dalit leaders and intellectuals argue: "It is a known fact that dalits are the cursed and exploited class. Now by splitting dalits, Nitish has created a new class of mahadalits implying that it is worse than the rest of the dalits. It obviously implied that at some level Nitish envisages that the condition of the dalits by and large has been better. Had it not been so, there was no need for splitting the dalits into two ranks."

The Opposition decision is certainly a bigger challenge to Nitish Kumar than supporting Kovind. Nitish has the reputation of being a shrewd politician, but this time he has really been forced into a tight situation. His personal and secular credentials are under public scanner. However, it is a fact that at no stage in his life secularism has been a major ideological or political issue for him. He was always guided by his personal interest. Interestingly, the choice of Meira hailing from Nitish's state with unblemished public career and professional accomplishments has complicated the situation for the JD(U) supremo. His own JD(U) is split on this issue as most of the dalit and harijan leaders are very close to Meira. She was picked over the former Union home minister primarily because the Opposition leaders wanted to give JD(U) leader Nitish Kumar a fitting reply for jumping the ship, and dealing a blow to their efforts to forge a united front. Amidst criticism, on Friday, Kumar not only reiterated his support to Kovind, but surprised the Opposition fraternity by saying: "I have a lot of respect for Meira Kumar, but 'Bihar ki beti' has been nominated only to lose". Nitish also made it clear he will not back down from his support for Kovind as the next President despite a second appeal by RJD chief Lalu Yadav. Nitish shot down Lalu's plea.

One thing is certain that the recent developments do not augur well for the grand alliance. The relation between Lalu and Nitish has deteriorated beyond redemption. The usual warmth between the two was not visible on Friday evening at the iftar party hosted by Lalu. They were sitting side by side but refrained from exchanging pleasantries. (IPA)



An elderly man walks among jizo statues, dedicated to the growth of children and grandchildren, which also act as a memorial for miscarried children, decorated with colourful pinwheels and flowers at a Buddhist temple in Tokyo, Japan.

Scope for enhanced India-Russia economic ties

FOCUS

Nantoo Banerjee

Union Finance and Defence Minister Arun Jaitley's open invitation to Russian firms, last week, to set up joint ventures with Indian companies to manufacture advanced military platforms through technology transfers couldn't have at a more appropriate time as India gears up to overhaul its decades-old slow-moving defence production programme. India is the world's largest defence and security gear importer. The gross annual armament and parts import bill, covering all the three services, paramilitary forces and other connected agencies, is close to US\$10 billion. The BJP-led government's path-breaking initiatives in defence production in India have been received enthusiastically by the country's leading private industrial groups such as the Tatas, Reliance, Mahindra & Mahindra and Larsen & Toubro. Defence manufacturers from both sides of the North Atlantic has made positive responses to the government's 'make in India' initiative.

Russia has been India's oldest and most reliable defence, space research and nuclear cooperation partner. However, it had fallen behind in trade and investment in the face of more aggressive competition from countries like China, the US, France, Germany, the UK, Canada, Israel, Italy and Spain, especially since it started the economic reform programme

in 1991. Russia has been one of India's key major suppliers of arms and ammunition. However, India's armed forces had a long-standing complaint that supply of critical spares and equipment from Russia often took too long to keep military systems using Russian hardware in top condition.

Last week, it was interesting to note that Jaitley, whose visit to Russia came within days of the summit meeting there between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Vladimir Putin, made a fervent appeal to Russian defence majors at the plenary session of 'Technoprom 2017' to take advantage of India's policy changes towards defence production. A strong Indo-Russian joint initiative in hi-tech defence production will benefit both the countries. During Prime Minister Modi's visit of Russia, earlier this month, the two countries signed a historic Rs.50,000-crore nuclear power generation deal under a Russian debt-equity participation programme at Kundamkulam. The Russian government will lend India US\$4.2 billion to help cover the construction. The project will take seven years to start generating electricity. The first unit will be commissioned in 96 months and the second one six months thereafter. Atomstroy export, a unit of Russian state nuclear corporation Rosatom, will build the reactors. If Rosatom can take such a

smart decision to participate in equity with Nuclear Power Corporation of India to produce atomic power, there is no reason to believe why some of Russia's top defence manufacturers not collaborate with Indian companies in building advanced military platforms. Jaitley invited Russian companies "to come forward with proposals for technology transfer to Indian companies and facilitate manufacturing of more advanced components/parts and sub-systems. This can start with platforms of Russian origin where the requirement is in large numbers and is recurring in nature." He said Russian companies can be "natural partners" of the Indian companies as most of India's defence equipments and inventory are of Russian origin. A more predictive and smart Indo-Russian defence manufacturing will help both the countries play an active role in the global armament supply chain.

While a substantially active defence and nuclear cooperation will benefit both India and Russia in terms of economic growth and employment, the two countries must also actively collaborate

in pushing up production of consumer goods and services. Unfortunately, Indo-Russian trade and commerce have dipped substantially since their heydays in the 1970s and 1980s under a bilateral Rupee-Rouble exchange programme. Until 1990-91, India and the Soviet Union — enjoyed robust trade ties. The USSR was India's top goods exports destination with shipments to the tune of \$2.9 billion in 1990. On the other hand, the Soviet Union figured as India's seventh largest sources of imports in value terms at US\$992 million.

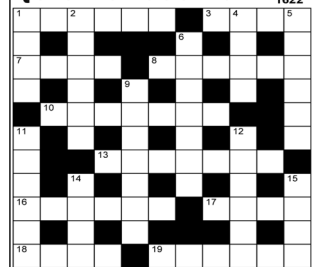
Unfortunately, Russia now no longer features anywhere near the list of India's top 20 global trade partners. For example, in 2015, India exported goods worth \$1.6 billion to Russia, but had shipped more to 37 other countries. That year, India's goods export to the US alone was \$40.3 billion — the country's single largest export destination. At the same time, India's imports from Russia were valued at only \$4.5 billion as against \$61.6 billion from China — the country's largest source of imports. Now, India had imported more goods from 23 other nations than it did from Russia in 2015. Today, Russia comprises just around

one per cent of India's total trade and India accounts for a minuscule 1.2 per cent of Russia's overall trade. Experts say that there exists a tremendous opportunity for both the sides to improve trade and investment for mutual benefit.

They say that the opportunities exist for the Indo-Russian bilateral trade to touch a \$30-billion mark by 2025 and the bilateral investment can easily go up to \$15 billion. Lately, India made substantial investment in Russia, including in equity, especially in the petroleum sector. The country is eagerly waiting for an opportunity for the direct gas line project to link Russia with India. Jaitley's bid to induce Russian defence manufacturers to collaborate with Indian entrepreneurs can soon take the bi-lateral economic and strategic cooperation arrangement between the two countries to the next level. The ball is principally in Moscow's court. After the latest Modi-Putin dialogue and Jaitley's repeated parleys with Russia as India's finance and defence minister during this year, it is expected that both the countries will take the opportunity to push fresh joint economic collaboration programmes with focus on playing a more active role in the global trade.

The most important part of this latest wholesome economic dialogue is that the two countries have been trusted friends for years. (IPA)

QUICK CROSSWORD 1622



- Across**
1. Turn (6)
3. Superstar (4)
5. Certainty (4)
8. Funniness (6)
10. Portable rocket launcher (7)
13. Horse leg part (7)
16. Let rip (anag) (6)
17. Soft cheese (4)
18. Otherwise (4)
19. Reign (6)
- Down**
1. Hasten (4)
2. Menace (6)
4. Let fall (4)
5. Voice box (6)
6. Adulterer's husband (7)
9. German white wine (7)
11. Chemist's grinder (6)
12. Increase by addition (6)
14. Partially (4)
15. Inert gas (4)

Previous solution
Across: 1. Collision, 5. Moist, 7. Cedar, 9. Same, 10. Claret, 12. Appeal, 14. Wren, 17. Guava, 18. Bugle, 19. Alltime.
Down: 2. Opium, 3. Late, 4. Sickle, 5. Order, 6. Mustang, 8. Reliance, 11. Salami, 13. Peeri, 15. Rogue, 16. Able.

SUDOKU: 1903

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	7							

Yesterday's Solution 1902

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6	1	2	7	4	5	9	8	3
9	6	8	4	2	1	7	3	5
2	5	4	6	7	3	1	9	8
3	7	1	5	9	8	6	2	4
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