

A nation is a society united by delusions about its ancestry and by common hatred of its neighbors
William Ralph Inge

Harassment of diplomats

The current India-Pakistan cold war has now degenerated into harassment of each other's diplomats. Both New Delhi and Islamabad complain that their diplomats have been harassed by different State agencies. Diplomats are supposed to enjoy diplomatic immunity and are allowed free movement in each other's country according to the Code of Conduct of 1992. It is a normal diplomatic practice all over the world that when a person enjoying diplomatic immunity is found to be engaged in spying (in diplomatic parlance engaged in "activities not consistent with his status") he is expelled, without in any way harming him physically. But India and Pakistan complain that their diplomats are being tailed and subjected to unnecessary harassments.

Former Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee once said that one cannot choose one's neighbours. India and Pakistan are and will continue to be neighbours howsoever bitter their mutual relations may be. They cannot wish away each other. Common sense tells us that in the circumstances the diplomats of the two countries should be allowed to discharge their normal duties. Harassing them will serve no purpose except to further strain of mutual relations. A war between two nuclear-power countries is out of the question. What is possible and is happening is the constant pin-pricks that Pakistan is giving India in Jammu and Kashmir, killing our security personnel and civilians. Meetings between the DGMOs are held regularly to reduce tension and stop border skirmishes but soon both countries are back to square one. India has accepted this as the new normal and limits its actions to occasional 'surgical operations' and nothing more.

But harassment of diplomats is a new phenomenon. Both countries should realize that harassing diplomats serves no purpose except to more bitterness. India-Pakistan relations have never been normal and neighbourly since Independence and are not likely to be normal in the foreseeable future. In the circumstances, the least that the two countries can do is to let their diplomats function smoothly, without let or hindrance. India-Pakistan official talks have remained suspended since 2015. The tension has now started having its impact also on the SAARC. India is trying to corner Pakistan in the SAARC while Pakistan is trying to hold SAARC meeting in a country of its own choice. Be that as it may, targeting diplomats and straining diplomatic relations serves no purpose. Diplomacy is always quiet. Let it remain quiet and let the diplomats do their job quietly.

Two killer words: Lynching and assassination

REFLEX ACTION

Aditya Aamir

Lynching is mob action. A 'group of people' lynch. So the term 'mob lynching' is an oxymoron. Lynching is mostly out in the open. In town and village square. In the Wild West of America it was strung from the nearest tree. A couple or more people cook up a lie over a rumour spread like wildfire. And the falsely accused is killed by the group without trial. The choice of weapons is left to the moron: Sycife, machete, club and spear. The long rope!

A lynching can also be bloodless. Priyanka Chopra mouthing 'Hindu terror' in the Romeo episode of Quantico riled 'nationalists' enough to lynch her in Social Media. But the lynching of a businessman and a musician in Assam's Karbi Anglong the other night was physical, bloody, and mindless. The two were lynched for being suspected child-lifers. The same accusation/rumour worked for the lynch mob that killed several people in Jharkhand last year. Then, too, fake news of child-lifter gangs ran the gamut. This time (in Assam) the cue came from Social Media. The pleas of the businessman and musician that they were 'Assamese' was not heard in the din of the lynching. Priyanka's apology on Sunday was lame-duck. Perfunctory Desultory. Cursory. Sabbatical. Moreover, the herd of right-leaning social media warriors were a spent force by midnight Saturday. That being said there's a herd of a difference between herd mentality and mob mentality. Both lead to lynching, but of different sorts. If one is bloodless, the other is bloodcurdling. For example, Congress leader Anand Sharma provoked herd mentality against 82-year-old Pranab Mukherjee by tweeting his anger against the former President's presence at the RSS event. Congressmen erupted with memes and gifs. If there was no wholesale herd lynching it was because Pranab could not be cornered in a Congress alley. The ex-President steered clear of Congress street and did not name it once in his discourse, opting instead to narrate a history of India in largely non-Congress terms - in colour Indigo not saffron! The Congress sheep were not allowed the luxury of getting clothed in dyed

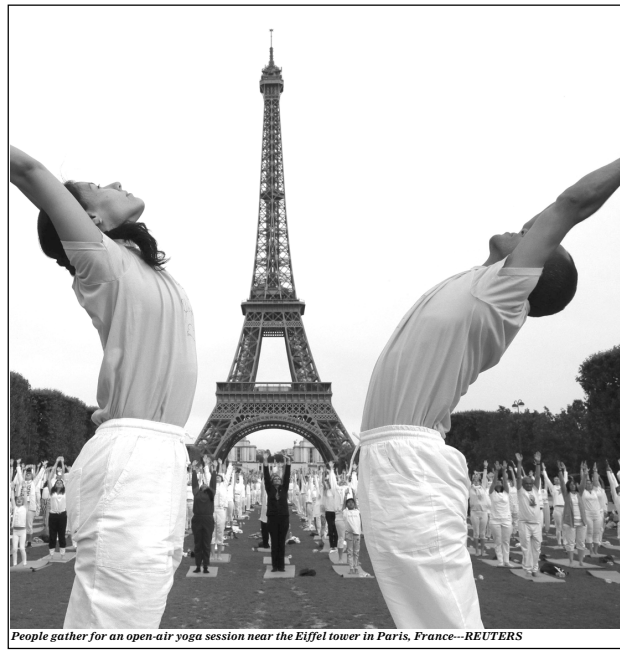
wool. The hardy veteran Congressman with many a bout under his belt walked away with the laurels. Later, when Pranab tweeted that dialogue between different strands of thought was what bound cultures together, Anand Sharma claimed pubescent victory and lauded Pranab for lynching the RSS in the RSS den.

The 'after the effect' realization that Pranab was no less a Congressman than Anand Sharma cheered the Congress herd which, like all herds, wouldn't go into different alleys! Mob and herd mentality are basically examples of intolerance. The difference being that while the mob aims for elimination, the herd looks for culmination. Closure. The mob is made up of roughnecks. The herd is made up of incurious rubbernecks. The herd follows. The mob stations itself at the vanguard. The herd is bunched sheep. The mob is a wolf-pack. A lynching leaves everything to chance. An assassination leaves nothing to chance. The open window 40-storeys high. The high-powered rifle on the tripod. A direct line of sight to the leader in the open Cadillac. The assassin controls his breathing. His finger on the trigger takes the pressure, ever so slowly. The bullet flies. A neat little hole. Dead of centre. The trickle of blood marks the kill. Abraham Lincoln and John F Kennedy were assassinated. So was Robert Kennedy. His assassination anniversary fell last week and Americans remembered him fondly. Mahatma Gandhi was assassinated and his 'Hey Ram' still reverberates. Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi were also assassinated. Now, there are reports that a group of people - styled as 'Urban Naxals' - were planning a

'Rajiv Gandhi-type' assassination of Prime Minister Narendra Modi! A 'Rajiv Gandhi-type' assassination involves some basics: Large crowd. An assassin who is a human bomb. She gets through tight security. Gets close to the target. And fifteen-style blows up everyone in her vicinity, including the main target, to bits and pieces. Collateral damage. Charred bones. Guttured flesh. Mission accomplished!

The gang reportedly planning the 'Modi assassination' was looking to procure high-powered rifles to spray deadly fire on a Modi roadshow. Jack Kennedy was assassinated while on the road and the attempt to assassinate President Ronald Reagan was also made in a somewhat similar milieu. It goes without saying that reports of PM Modi being a target of assassins will be taken with a pinch of salt. That sort of martyrdom is generally believed to be the lot of left-leaning righteous statesmen. Compared with a good heart and wings of Gabriel Angels together to stomp-mad Donald Trump and Narendra Modi. The 'right leader' will more likely die in bed. A victim of Alzheimer or Parkinson's, his bigly and his homophobia intact. In the United States, he will get his library but his statue will be toppled. Lincoln's an exception. His iconic statue, one of the few icons of human rule that survived the eponymous Planet of the Apes, which human endeavour found on its return from space.

In the current 'terrifying' atmosphere of 'mob lynching' the Dalit and the Maoist are on the same side. The assassins are supposed to be those with pyjama strings tied to the RSS. So, it's quite okay for JNU scholar Sheila Rashid - the com-mie girl next door of indeterminate age - to suggest that Nitin Gadkari, powered by the RSS, was planning assassination. Yes, Sheila Rashid was there - right there in the room with alleged Maoist Rona Jacob Wilson - when Nitin Gadkari was, according to Sheila Rashid, planning the assassination of PM Modi. A Roads minister and a Roadshow! That's one for the expressway. No need to stretch the hand for the saltshaker! (IPA)



People gather for an open-air yoga session near the Eiffel tower in Paris, France—REUTERS

Violent attacks on development projects

FOCUS

Nantoo Banerjee

Not many people in Bengal may have ever heard the name of a militant outfit called CPI-ML Red Star, not until it attacked a Power Grid Corporation's (PGCIL) sub-station project, being built in co-operation with the West Bengal government, at fast developing Rajarhat in Kolkata's outskirts. The central transmission utility had sought cooperation from all stakeholders for completion of the Rs. 800-crore Rajarhat sub-station project.

"Considering advantages of the Rajarhat 400/220kV sub-station project, Power Grid Corp solicits cooperation from all stakeholders," PGCIL had said in a statement while maintaining that land for the project was acquired at "market rates to adequately compensate locals". It had also said that "GIS technology is safe, reliable and requires less maintenance..."

CPI-ML Red Star collected a few thousand people from nearby villages to attack the project, earlier this year. The police tried to control the stone pelting and handmade bomb throwing mob with usual lathicharge and teargas shells, in which several people, including policemen, were injured and one died later in the hospital. The protesters don't want the transmission project. They want their land back. Thanks to a strong position taken by the overwhelmingly Trinamool-led West Bengal government in support of the project, the work on the sub-

station is on. A key leader of the violent agitation, was arrested recently from an Odisha hide-out. Hopefully, the project will soon be completed.

However, other states seem to be less lucky to deal with similar agitations by militant groups and NGOs against development programmes, including infrastructure, industrial and core sector projects, which the country needs desperately to stabilise and grow its economy. In fact, richer states such as BJP-ruled Maharashtra and Gujarat and AIADMK-led Tamil Nadu are faced with more violent demonstrations from militant groups and locals as the government prepares to strengthen and expand the country's industry and infrastructure systems. Deadly disputes are brewing in several other parts of the country over land and environment as the world's second most populous country gears up for the next level of development.

Since last month, India's largest copper smelter, operated by Vedanta Resources, at Tamil Nadu's port city of Thoothukudi, remained shutdown after the Tamil Nadu police fired a large number of violent agitators, killing 13 people and injuring at least 50. Activists have been agitating against the unit saying emissions from the plant were polluting the air, water and soil, affecting people's health and livelihoods.

Vedanta denied the allegations. The company said in a statement that it had complied with "all the necessary regulations". The state didn't support Vedanta management in the face of public ire. Finally, it was shut down by a court order. In Gujarat, farmers have taken to the streets to protest against land acquisitions for a US\$ 17-billion bullet train project under Japanese collaboration. Farmers, who stand to lose 850 hectares of land, have not given their consent for land acquisition.

In Maharashtra, the fate of the proposed \$44-billion refinery and petrochemical complex, the largest in India, hangs in the balance following agitations by the locals and environmentalists. Thousands of farmers are refusing to surrender the coastal area land for the project that is to be implemented by a consortium of three Indian public sector oil companies - IOC, BPCL and HPCL - and global oil giant Saudi Aramco. The project will require some 15,000 acres of land. The region is famous for its juicy Alphonso mangoes and lush cashew plantations.

All the 10 village panchayats in the vicinity have reportedly passed resolutions opposing the

land acquisition process. The local people fear that the project will not only displace them, but also kill the mango and cashew cultivation apart from causing irreparable damage to palm trees and marine life. Shiv Sena and MNS have thrown their weight behind the protesters. Such conflicts are increasing across the country. A large number of new projects, including roads, airports and seaports, rail transit systems, telecommunications, petroleum refining and pipeline transportation, coal and mining, electricity generation and transmission, among others, may be delayed and some even abandoned if those violent agitators have their way.

However, this is not to suggest that those affected by development projects should not protest against actions that threaten their life and livelihood and damage environment. The constitution protects their right to life and land. Behind much of the current so-called anti-development agitation is the lackadaisical attitude on the part of the authorities to the established laws to protect the rights of citizens. The land acquisition law of 2013 is meant to

protect the rights of farmers, but calls for consensus over land acquisitions, rehabilitation of those displaced and adequate compensation. It also requires environment and social impact assessments.

Unfortunately, both the central and state governments have been diluting the provisions that will speed up acquisitions for developments. Their actions are more political than societal. Their stated objectives ignore immediate local concerns. In practice, they seem to go by investors' choice and focus on quick clearance. Ideally, the government or the political leadership should take the local people into confidence before starting any critical project that would lead to displacement of denizens and impact their livelihood and environment. More recently at the doorstep of the national capital, a standoff between residents and the Noida administration over a waste-to-energy plant in Sector 123 turned violent when protesters threw stones at policemen and the cops responded with lathicharge and water cannons.

The protesters say the Noida waste plant will put over five lakh lives at risk. According to unofficial reports, Gujarat and Maharashtra alone account for over a tenth of the country's 800 on-going land disputes involving the government, industry and local land losers. (IPA)

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| 14 Belonging to us | 7 Precious metal |
| 15 Meal course | 10 Colour |
| 19 Spanish monetary unit | 13 Tannin term |
| 21 Corn spike | 14 Musical dramas |
| 22 Waggers | 16 Seize suddenly |
| 24 Swift | 17 Part of the eye |
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