



## A Patel at the helm

The BJP is once again willing to accommodate dominant caste groups

Effecting the fourth change of guard in a State this year, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) replaced Vijay Rupani with Bhupendra Patel as Chief Minister in Gujarat on Sunday. Though the decision came out of the blue, intrigues that led to it had been gaining momentum for a while. To keep it all under the wraps, the government in Gujarat went so far as arresting and sending to jail a journalist under sedition charges for reporting that a change of guard was on the cards. Patels or Patidars have been the backbone of the BJP in Gujarat, but the elevation of Narendra Modi as Chief Minister in 2001 unsettled the cozy relations between the community and the party. Anandiben Patel succeeded Mr. Modi after he became Prime Minister, but she did not last in office for long. A partial ejection of Patels to accommodate a wider range of caste groups in its tent was the BJP approach under Mr. Modi and Amit Shah, and their national strategy mirrored this Gujarat experiment. The Patels in turn rebelled against the Modi-Shah axis several times in the last two decades. Mr. Rupani was less than impressive in administrative tasks or management of the social coalition. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed his failures starkly. With the Assembly elections looming, the Patels getting more restive, and the Aam Aadmi Party trying to emerge as a more viable opposition than the rulerless Congress, the BJP had to act. The Chief Minister-designate is a first-time MLA who was elected from the constituency vacated by Ms. Patel. The change also underscores the high command culture that is now entrenched in the BJP.

The return of a Patel at the helm indicates a reversal of the BJP strategy of building coalitions of diverse caste groups under a leader from a marginal caste. Mr. Modi projected himself as a backward class leader in 2014, and subsequent choices in leadership at various levels largely followed this trend. There have been exceptions, such as Yogi Adityanath, a Rajput, who was elected Chief Minister in Uttar Pradesh. Within the party and outside of it, dominant castes have been resenting this and the BJP has now begun to feel the pressure. When it had to replace veteran warhorse B.S. Yediyurappa, a member of the dominant Lingayat community as Chief Minister in Karnataka, the BJP ensured that his successor was from the same community. The ongoing stand-off between the party and the Jat farmers in U.P. and Haryana is also indicative of the tension between the BJP and a dominant social group. The party's Chief Minister in Haryana, Manohar Lal Khattar, is facing the heat. These communities are bargaining for a bigger share of power in the BJP's Hindutva tent. The BJP is partially acting under pressure, but it may also be feeling more confident of the support of the marginal communities and poorer sections to accommodate its traditional supporters.

## Foreclosure

BCCI and some senior players seem to prioritise the lucrative IPL over Test cricket

Indian cricket's English summer that commenced with a touch-down at London's Heathrow on June 3, dished out riveting fare before being hastily concluded in a pandemic-induced cloud of doubts and controversy. During the beginning of this long tour, India lost the World Test Championship final to New Zealand at Southampton but subsequently made amends against England. Virat Kohli's men were leading 2-1 after four Tests with Manchester's Old Trafford all set to host the climactic fifth Test from September 10 before COVID-19's long shadow precipitated a no-show. It all started with Indian coach Ravi Shastri, referred to as patient zero in the emerging cluster, testing positive during the fourth Test at the Oval in London. Later, bowling coach Bharat Arun and fielding coach R. Sridhar tested positive and while the trio was quarantined, the rest of the squad travelled to Manchester when second physio Yogesh Parmar also tested positive. A team that has been on the road for three months had enough and senior players, especially with their families around, were apprehensive. The danger that an infection would be a threat to their participation in the lucrative IPL must also have weighed on their minds. The match got cancelled and questions arose about how the bio-bubble got breached. Shastri's book launch before the Oval Test, in which health protocols were not adhered to, was seen as a tipping point and drew scrutiny.

In an era leaning towards digital events, Shastri should have bided his time. If the Indian coach is part of the coronavirus matrix, other factors played a role too as England had opened up from July 19. Having temporarily lost its talismanic all-rounder Ben Stokes to mental fatigue, the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB) preferred a bubble with relative freedom. The persistent forays of Jarvo, a fan, into the playing arena during the previous Tests, were an avoidable breach. A series that could have wound down at its own pace, is now searching for closure. India leads 2-1 but the series verdict is in limbo. The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) has offered to later schedule a lone Test while the ECB has written to the International Cricket Council (ICC) to adjudicate on the fate of the cancelled game. The players have leapt into another bubble in the United Arab Emirates ahead of the IPL from September 19. Lost in this fog of no-play and frantic travel, is the remarkable performance that Kohli's men offered through the series despite a loss at Leeds. Five decades ago, India registered its maiden Test series triumph in the Old Blighty. Cut to the present, India is trying to figure out whether it is merely leading an unfinished series or has won it or drawn it.

# A global war on terror with no tangible results

If anything, the U.S.-led war has made the world less safe with the scourge of transnational terrorism spreading deeper



BRAHMA CHELLANEY

On the day the United States marked two decades since the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the Taliban triumphantly hoisted their flag over the Afghan presidential palace to start off their new regime. The unprecedented 9/11 attacks prompted the U.S. not only to invade landlocked, strategically located Afghanistan but also to launch a global war on terror. Yet, the U.S.-led war on terror has yielded no tangible results.

### A President's 'blunder'

If anything, it has made the world less safe. The scourge of transnational terrorism has only spread deeper and wider in the world. In fact, the U.S. President Joe Biden's blunder in facilitating the terrorist takeover of Afghanistan raises the nagging question whether the seeds of another 9/11 have been sown.

Mr. Biden will be remembered in history for making the world's deadliest terrorists – the Pakistan-reared Taliban – great again. Historians will be baffled that the U.S. expended considerable blood and treasure in a protracted war to ultimately help its enemy ride triumphantly back to power. The war killed 2,448 American soldiers, 1,144 allied troops, more than 66,000 Afghan security personnel, and countless numbers of

civilians.

The Taliban's defeat of the world's most powerful military represents the greatest victory of violent Islamists in the modern history of jihadism, with the Taliban calling it "the most joyful day of our existence". The triumph over the "Great Satan" is certain to inspire other Islamist and terrorist groups across the world.

### It is worrying allies

America's close partner, India, with its location right next to the Afghanistan-Pakistan belt, is likely to be one big loser from Mr. Biden's Afghan debacle. The rejuvenated epicentre for terrorism next door could leave India less space to counter an expansionist China at a time when Indian and Chinese forces remain locked in multiple border standoffs since last year.

Despite the Afghan fiasco, Mr. Biden plans to withdraw from Iraq this year, in keeping with what he declared in his August 31 address to the nation: "This decision about Afghanistan is not just about Afghanistan. It's about ending an era of major military operations to remake other countries. (https://bit.ly/2Vvzfzfu)" This realignment of strategic objectives is rattling allies – from Taiwan to Ukraine – who fear being abandoned the way the U.S. threw the Afghan government under the bus.

Afghanistan may not be the last blunder of the Biden presidency. Robert Gates, who served as Secretary of Defense under U.S. Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama, wrote in a 2014 memoir that Mr. Biden "has been wrong on nearly every major foreign policy



and national security issue over the past four decades". Mr. Gates has proved right.

In fact, al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden, in a May 2010 letter found in his Pakistan compound after he was killed by U.S. forces, advised al Qaeda not to target then-Vice President Biden, hoping he would one day become President. "Biden is totally unprepared for that post, which will lead the U.S. into a crisis," bin Laden wrote. He too has proved correct, to the delight of all jihadists.

### Misleading distinctions

Mr. Biden, like his predecessors since 2001, has disregarded the lessons of 9/11. This is apparent from Mr. Biden's attempts to paint the Taliban as "good" terrorists and ISIS-K (Islamic State Khorasan), al Qaeda and the Haqqani Network as "bad" terrorists. He even claimed that "ISIS-K terrorists" are "sworn enemies of the Taliban", ignoring the Pentagon's acknowledgment that one of the Taliban's first actions after conquest was to free thousands of ISIS-K prisoners from Afghan jails. The misleading distinctions Mr.

Biden has sought to draw between interlinked terrorist groups are part of his administration's public relations campaign to downplay the implications of the Taliban conquest. Indeed, extending its good-terrorists-versus-bad-terrorists thesis, Team Biden has sought to court the Taliban as America's new partner to help contain the "bad" guys, with United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken saying publicly that the U.S. is ready to work on "counter-terrorism" with the Taliban.

This flies in the face of a key 9/11 lesson – that the viper reared against one state is a viper against others. Drawing distinctions between those who threaten U.S. security and those who threaten others is a sure recipe for failure, as terrorist cells and networks must be targeted wherever they exist on a sustained basis in order to achieve enduring results against the forces of global jihad.

### Terror interconnections

In reality, the Taliban are closely entwined with other terror groups. As a United Nations Security Council report has said, "the Taliban and al-Qaida remain closely aligned" and cooperate through the Haqqani Network. Since their victory, the Taliban have not only refused to utter a critical word about al Qaeda but also have claimed there is "no proof" that bin Laden was responsible for 9/11.

The Taliban and Haqqani Network are not "two separate entities," as the State Department has claimed, but closely integrated, as the line-up of the new Cabinet ministers shows. And, although Mr.

Biden sought to insulate the Taliban from the Kabul Airport bombing (August 26) by quickly pinning the blame on ISIS-K, the fact is that ISIS-K has little relationship with the Taliban. Rather, as part of Pakistani intelligence's deception operations to build plausible deniability in terror attacks, ISIS-K draws its cadres largely from the Haqqani Network.

Afghanistan is set to again become a haven for transnational terrorists under an all-male regime dominated by former Guantanamo inmates and U.N.-listed or U.S.-designated terrorists, including the interim Prime Minister who was instrumental in the 2001 destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas. The world is reaping the bitter fruits of a geopolitics-driven war on terror.

### On the anniversary

The 20th anniversary of 9/11 should have been an occasion to reflect on the forgotten lessons of those attacks, including the importance of not coddling terrorism-supporting regimes. With the global war on terror having gone off the rails, the anniversary was also a reminder of the imperative to build a new international consensus to help drain the terrorism-breeding swamps. It is not too late for western powers to absorb the lessons from national policies that gave rise to Frankenstein's monsters.

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## September 11 — a brief personal reflection

The moral status of one's criticism of those in power is not independent of one's geographical and ideological location



AKEEL BILGRAMI

February 14, 1989 and September 11, 2001 have stood like bookends in my occasional writing on contemporary politics as it relates to Muslims. A rite of passage, a personal education. But the personal here reflects something wider in American, more generally western, public life.

### Critical undertakings

When the *fatwa* against Salman Rushdie was pronounced on the first of those dates, I had written critically of the absolutist stances taken by some Muslims in the aftermath of the publication of *The Satanic Verses* and in support of the commitments to free expression that I had been accustomed to in all the societies (India, England, America) I had inhabited. The long aftermath of the atrocities on September 11 found me withdrawing from these critical undertakings – not out of any funk but, curiously, out of a sense that it was the only

self-respecting thing to do. My reason was just this: one does not make criticisms on demand. And there was an expectation, occasionally even explicitly voiced to me, that a Muslim living in a society that had been subjected to such an atrocity, should be declaring his anti-jihadi credentials. It soon became clear, in fact, that criticism of extremist Islamist politics had become a sort of career-path for Muslims in this part of the world and it was not a path I was willing to tread, even though a certain recognisably zealous type – some among my friends – thought my reaction to be too rarified in its scruple.

### Speaking truth

This raises a wide range of issues about truth, speech and location.

The cliché "Speak Truth to Power" contains an indirection. It would be a pointless instruction if it was intended to convey what it directly seems to say since, as Chomsky has pointed out, those in power already know the truth and often withhold it or deny it so that others more distant from power – but on whom power depends in a democracy – do not get to know it. Still, as an instruction, it is worth retaining, I think, because it really



seems to be saying something more indirect: 'Speak the truth, which is critical of those in power.' It is regarding this instruction that the question of location arises.

What scope should we give it? Should one, giving it very wide scope, just speak the truth that is critical of anyone who is in power anywhere and abuses it? Or should one speak it to and of the power in one's own location, the power that one is living under? Such a restriction has sometimes been proposed in the spirit of another instructional cliché, 'Choose your Battles'. The point here is about the consequences of speaking the truth. Since our breath is finite, we should focus our airing of critical truths to those in power in one's own political vicinity because that is what is likely to have some good consequences. Speaking truth that

critically addresses remote occupants of power is not likely to have much effect.

### The wrongs

This is true enough, but in the long aftermath of September 11 – during which American power invaded and indiscriminately bombed towns in Afghanistan and Iraq, imposed and renewed murderous embargoes, caused an interminable cycle of violence of sectarian strife in the entire Middle East, and generated and fanned a phobia of Islam in its own people (while, as a power, it lay in bed with the most repulsive Islamist regime in history) – proposed the restriction to myself on grounds that were not really consequentialist in this sense. Perhaps the way to put it, if there are really such things as moral sentiments, is that the restriction, for me, owed to something more sentimental. To put it at its simplest, I felt the restriction is called for because it comes at greater risk to oneself. I find it not necessarily more sound but far more honourable that someone domiciled in America should be critical of the wrongs of the United States government rather than about the wrongs done by Muslim terrorists said to be supported by

those in power in distant lands, whether in Iran or Pakistan or Afghanistan or Saudi Arabia.... Of course, were they to be invited to speak in Tehran or Peshawar or Kabul or Riyadh, the honour lies in the reverse.

Many had accused Sartre of hypocrisy for not being critical of the Soviet Union, while repeatedly chastising European imperialism with great eloquence. But why should he, sitting in Paris (not Moscow) during the long Cold War, do anything different? What honour does it reflect to join – as was demanded of him – the constant chorus of anti-communism all around him? It is said that the Soviet government would reprimand Sakharov for his nagging criticism of their tyrannies, without saying a word about the deep racism in the American South. I would hope that all of us, living and writing and speaking here in the United States, can show the seemingly perverse and rarified form of courage shown by these locational asymmetries in Sartre and Sakharov.

*Akeel Bilgrami is Sidney Morgenbesser Professor of Philosophy and Professor, Committee on Global Thought, Columbia University, New York*

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

### Commemorating 9/11

The wound the world suffered 20 years ago is still festering (Page 1, "Unity the central lesson from 9/11 attacks, says U.S. President", September 12). The images of the billowing smoke, dust and fumes from one of the targets, the Twin Towers, are a stark reminder that terrorism has many dimensions and the terrorists can be unimaginably lethal with their ingenuity. The immediate response of America in occupying Afghanistan, which continued for two decades and has claimed the lives of thousands – soldiers and civilians – has been rendered otiose when one considers the speed and ease with which the Taliban and other terror groups have reoccupied Afghanistan once the American troops were withdrawn.

It is nothing short of foolhardiness to conclude that there will be no repeat of heightened terrorist activities. That all countries, without exception, should be all the more vigilant against terrorism is the undeclared message. The words of

consolation to the families who lost their dear ones are just superficial and routine.  
V. LAKSHMANAN,  
Tirupur, Tamil Nadu

America has solemnly marked the 20th anniversary of 9/11, but it is pertinent to ask and know whether the U.S. and the world will ever spare a humble thought for the tens of thousands of innocent people maimed and killed in Iraq during the U.S.-led invasion with the avowed intention of destroying "Weapons of Mass Destruction" stored over there – as alleged and propagated by the U.S. and its allies. Will those who were instrumental in savagely attacking and literally destroying Iraq for blatantly false and wrong reasons ever be held accountable for their unpardonable crimes? If not, will they ever tender a public apology?  
C.G. KURIAROSE,  
Kothamangalam, Kerala

It was on September 11, 2001 that the entire world had watched in disbelief the symbols of American capitalism and its military prowess crumbling as a result of an unprecedented

act of terrorism. Twenty years have elapsed since terrorism took a heavy toll, but the threat of terrorism to international peace and stability has not yet waned. The response of America to the 9/11 terror strike, which manifested itself in two wars, one against Taliban in Afghanistan and the other against Iraq in search of non-existent weapons of mass destruction, has actually done incalculable damage to its geopolitical credibility and authority.  
M. JEYARAM,  
Sholavandan, Tamil Nadu

The 9/11 attacks perhaps provided the world an opportunity to thwart terrorist activities. However, the U.S. is back to square one with the Taliban surmounting Afghanistan. One can come to terms with the ignominious exit of the U.S., but, it could have taken its wherewithal, i.e., weapons along with it rather than ensuring the Taliban has been given more teeth. It might be a day of solidarity for the people of the U.S., but Afghanistan has become a powder keg on account of the U.S.'s misadventure.  
AANYA SINGHAL,  
Noida, Uttar Pradesh

### Enough is enough

Crime and atrocities against women in India and even in our so-called safe cities and towns never seem to be ending. The horrific assault and murder in Mumbai of a 32-year-old mother (Page 1, September 12) is yet another example. These are cases that are reported. How many go unreported is anyone's guess. The exemplary punishment awarded in the Nirbhaya case, does not seem to be having a deterrent effect. We talk about women's empowerment but falter when it comes to ensuring their safety. The judiciary and the police need to work in tandem and fast to ensure that there is quick justice.  
BALASUBRAMANIAM PAVANI,  
Secunderabad

### Computer pattas

I am writing this letter to highlight the hardships being faced by the people in Chennai to get computer pattas (Chennai, "Digitised land records being checked for errors", August 15). In connection with this issue, I have been pursuing the matter for the last five years with the District Collector, Chennai and others, but

without any tangible outcome. I have made out a lengthy representation addressed to all higher revenue authorities, and to the District Collector, Chennai, to highlight all the discrepancies that have crept into the computer system and even suggested remedial measures. It is baffling why the department concerned is opaque in its dealings. The public should be able to upload the manual patta with identity proof of such pattadhars to ensure that the error rectification is across the system.  
S. DHARMARAJAN,  
Chennai

### The Fifth Test

It is unfortunate that Test cricket has had to fall in what would otherwise have been a hundering of a final at

Manchester. The insatiable quest for money by the cricket boards is to blame. The IPL is the villain of the piece. The gentleman's game of cricket has been sacrificed at the altar of the IPL ("Sport" page, September 12).

BELLUR S. DATTATRI,  
Bengaluru

The developments are a blow to Test cricket, which is already on oxygen. There is the perception that it is nothing but the IPL jackpot which has prompted our players to forgo the Test series. The BCCI has proven once again that it is not the game of cricket, but only the money that matters. God save Test matches.  
N. MAHADEVAN,  
Chennai

**CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:**  
In the story headlined "IIT-M tops in ranking for third year in a row" (Sept. 10, 2021), the reference to IIT-Kozhikode – under the rankings for management institutions – should be corrected to say IIM-Kozhikode.

In the story titled "Scindia sets target of 50 more UDAN routes" (Sept. 10, 2021), the picture caption erroneously referred to the Civil Aviation Minister as Jyotiraditya Sinha. It should have been Jyotiraditya Scindia as given in the text of the story.

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor's office can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552963; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturba Buildings, 859 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com