



Talking amid conflict

China and the U.S. must engage each other without expecting quick results on all issues

Relations between the world's two biggest powers, the U.S. and China, have been in free fall over the past five years amid the trade war launched by the Trump administration. Ties have remained strained despite the change in administration in Washington, with meetings between top officials, in Alaska and then in Tianjin, marked by their rancour. It is this perilous state of ties that likely prompted U.S. President Joe Biden to call his counterpart Xi Jinping on Friday, the first time they spoke since a conversation in February not long after Mr. Biden's inauguration. While Mr. Biden wanted "to ensure competition does not veer into conflict", Mr. Xi agreed both sides needed to "get the relationship right", but underlined the repeated Chinese view that the troubles were "due to the U.S. policy on China". Part of the Biden administration's stated broader approach of competing with China where required but cooperating where possible, the U.S. has sought Chinese cooperation in Afghanistan after its disastrous exit, which has been celebrated by the state media in China, and also on climate change, which is a priority for this administration. At the same time, both sides have clashed on issues including human rights in Xinjiang, Hong Kong, Taiwan, South China Sea actions, and the contentious inquiry into the origins of COVID-19.

The Chinese side, for its part, has made clear it seeks concessions on some of the thorny issues before it will agree to discuss working together on others. In the July talks in Tianjin, Chinese officials presented two "lists" of demands to the U.S., including unconditionally revoking visa restrictions on Communist Party members and withdrawing an extradition request for Meng Wanzhou, the chief financial officer of tech firm Huawei who is on trial in Canada. The Chinese side has also demanded the U.S. change its stance on the COVID-19 inquiry, where Washington has led calls for a more transparent investigation. The Chinese Foreign Minister likened U.S. calls for cooperation on climate change as seeking "an oasis" surrounded by desert. The "oasis", he argued, would "sooner or later be desertified". With the U.S. unlikely to agree to China's preconditions, the state of relations is likely to endure. If the Chinese argument that it is unrealistic to insulate points of discord from a broader relationship is not entirely unreasonable, it is notable that Beijing's officials have rejected that precise argument with regard to the strained relations with India, which has said cooperation on trade and other fronts cannot continue while the LAC remains in crisis. On the contrary, Beijing has hit out at New Delhi for "wavering and backpedalling" in its China policy, demanding that it keep the border "in an appropriate position". If cooperating while in conflict appears an unreasonable proposition for China when it comes to ties with the U.S., it is unfathomable how it expects India to take a very different stand on bilateral relations.

The first time

The US Open saw new champions as Djokovic failed to keep his date with history

Daniil Medvedev's stunning straight-sets victory over World No.1 Novak Djokovic brought the curtains down on one of the most eventful editions of the US Open in recent memory. In the lead-up, the script was laid out perfectly – of Djokovic trying to become the first man since Rod Laver in 1969 to win all four Majors of the year and securing a record 21st Grand Slam title to take him past Roger Federer and Rafael Nadal in the all-time tally. But Medvedev flipped that narrative with an astonishing display of power and creativity to secure his maiden Major trophy in his third final. The 25-year-old appeared the better player coming into the match. But to beat someone so skilled at turning pursuits of history and record-breaking feats into prime driving forces should count among the greatest of achievements. Medvedev is an unconventional counter-puncher, in that he has a blistering serve. On Sunday, the Russian ensured that one of the greatest returners of the modern era could not lay as much as a racquet on many serves, and remarkably, left the master of lateral baseline movement doubting his own patented game. The physical and emotional toll of the past fortnight was evident in the way Djokovic wept towards the end, with the only solace to be had from the notoriously fickle New York crowd finally warming up to him.

Things might have seemed straightforward for Djokovic. Nadal and Federer were absent and he had beaten a rising star for each of his last three Majors, including Medvedev in a lopsided contest in Australia. But to overcome three of them in succession – here Matteo Berrettini, the Wimbledon finalist, Alexander Zverev, who beat Djokovic en route to the Tokyo Olympics gold, and Medvedev – proved beyond him. This is the kind of challenge that also awaits Federer and Nadal – more advanced in their careers than Djokovic – as they plot their return amidst growing evidence that the next generation is ready to contend. The women's game, more amiable to the young and the fledgling, still managed to surprise as 18-year-old British qualifier Emma Raducanu triumphed over an equally unheralded Canadian teenager, Leylah Fernandez. For Raducanu, whose only previous appearance at a Slam was at Wimbledon 2021 where she capitalised on a wild card and reached the fourth round, to go three full weeks without losing a set was astounding. Fernandez should hold her head high too, for she beat two former champions in Naomi Osaka and Angelique Kerber, and two top-five players in Elin Svitolina and Aryna Sabalenka, all in three-sets. Raducanu's technically solid game and Fernandez's lefty flair can only be worthy additions to the fascinating mix of playing styles that adorns women's tennis.

Returning to school 17 months later

The post-COVID-19 situation is complex and the 'where we left it' approach will not do for any stage of school education



KRISHNA KUMAR

As children return to the classroom after an unprecedentedly long gap, many among their teachers realise that teaching will be tougher. And there are others who assume that it will be business as usual. In fact, they have already started teaching from the point 'where we left it', meaning where they were in their online classes. Teachers who stick to the syllabus no matter what happens in the outside world, like to identify themselves as teachers of this or that subject. They see their role purely in terms of the knowledge they enable children to acquire. They view the purpose of education in terms of success in examinations and, consequently, in life. With a sense of purpose so firmly held in their minds, such teachers stay clear of the personal life of children, especially its emotional aspect. We can understand how such teachers define learning – in terms of the prescribed syllabus as articulated in the textbook. There is no harm in acknowledging that teachers of this sort form the majority in the profession.

Though in a minority, there are other teachers who realise that education is more than about completing the syllabus to prepare children to face examinations. These teachers know that their success as teachers depends on how they relate to children, no matter what subject they teach. For this reason, they worry about their children's emotional well-being. When a child is not feeling well, such teachers ask what is

wrong. They recognise individual differences and engage with children as persons with specific habits of mind and behaviour. For such teachers, the world outside the school matters because it makes an impact on children, their spirit and enthusiasm for what they are being taught in the classroom. For teachers of this kind, the long gap caused by the novel coronavirus pandemic in their daily routine interaction with children has made it problematic to resume teaching. They know that 17 months without teaching in a physical classroom has made a strange impact on themselves as well as on the children they teach.

Gap impact

Several obvious reasons can be cited. One that has been widely discussed comes under a poorly conceptualised title: 'learning loss'. If small children cannot read at the level they had attained before the pandemic struck, this can hardly be described as a loss. The terminology of loss and gain seems natural in our times, but it is unsuitable for discussing children and their development at school. When they are small, children do not easily retain for long what they had picked up unless it is put to daily use. This is just as true of the facility in reading as in intellectual capacities to comprehend, analyse and judge. However, the facility once acquired returns when its need is created again – under circumstances that are not threatening. And that is where our systemic conditions pose a problem.

These conditions encourage teachers to be impatient and short-tempered. It is not easy for people who have never worked in a school in our country to grasp the nature of the stress teachers chronically face and absorb. It is so general that it cannot be attri-



buted to any one source, such as a principal or parents. The pressure to perform is a factor of the ethos and the ethos does not distinguish between smaller and older children. From the day a child enters school, he or she comes under this pressure. A minority of teachers realise that it is unsuitable for growth in the primary years, but these teachers have little influence on others. The wider social culture and government norms relentlessly push the child from the first month at school towards higher levels of performance.

One suspects that this pressure will shape the classrooms most children return to after the COVID-19 gap. Many among them will find it difficult to join in at a higher level of efficiency in solving problems in math or language than they can feel comfortable with. This will be seen as a sign of weakness and the usual remedies will be applied to suppress such signs. The remedies endemic to our system are increased drill, coached collective answer-parroting and harder preparation for tests. Each one of these remedies will be counter-productive for the child's development when classes resume and regain the dreaded full steam.

Among teachers I have placed in the second category above, i.e., those who try to relate to children individually and not just teach

them, there will be some who can reasonably guess the kind of psychological problems children might be facing as a result of the long COVID-19 closure of schools. The total withdrawal of a space so intimately linked to childhood must necessarily have been hard to endure for a lot of children. These would include children who might not have greatly enjoyed their daily chores at school and the curriculum, as well as many children who might have taken online in their stride, despite the relentless stress it brought them.

Impact of the online mode

Digital learning is known to bring with it certain additive behaviours that may persist at school and take new and disturbing mutations. When children return to school, they may well feel off-balance, experiencing the uncanny sense of deprivation that hits the mind after an ordeal is over. For teachers to assume that such children will simply carry on with the remaining syllabus will be quite wrong, although this will not become obvious till later.

Online teaching had extremely limited reach in most regions, and even more limited value for its receivers. The idea that teaching simply switched to online mode was little more than a myth. That there was nothing else that could have been done was another myth. Why schools were the absolute last priority for reopening, lower than shopping malls, says something about the importance attached to education. In several other countries, every attempt was made to help schools function, after periodic closure. Nor were primary teachers in other countries given other duties, at airports and vaccination centres. Why mid-day meals were stopped along with teaching is hard to ex-

plain. Nor is it possible to calculate the loss incurred by hunger. No estimate has yet been made of the number of children who have left school altogether.

Now that schools have at last reopened, the educationally better off States, for example, in the South, need to recognise two new priorities. Both concern aspects of children's psychological comfort generally ignored in our system. If given some attention, it will enhance both children's and teachers' readjustment after the long gap they have endured without each others' company.

Space for these priorities

The first of these two priorities is a space for the arts: music, painting, theatre and dance. Aesthetic experience has great healing powers, especially when it is not too focused on performance or ceremonial purpose. If State governments and private schools can devote resources and time to this otherwise marginalised area, they will make the resumption of routine life at school more nourishing. The other priority for school resumption is the reorganisation of this year's curriculum. The 'where we left it' approach will not do for any stage of school education. A linear syllabus coverage approach does not serve children well even in normal times. The post-COVID-19 situation is far too complex to respond to the wooden pedagogy stuck to the chapters of the prescribed textbook. A team of subject-specialists and teachers must sit together to look at the syllabus designed for every grade level and deliberate on ways to reorganise it for this unusual academic session.

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COVID-19, kidney injury and need for a vaccine shot

A Mayo Clinic study into the body's immune response to the virus supports the need for widespread vaccination



MARIAM PRIYA ALEXANDER & TIMUCIN TANER

As of early September 2021, the COVID-19 pandemic caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus has affected over 200 million people and led to 4.4 million deaths worldwide. In India alone, 3,30,00,000 COVID-19 cases and 4,42,000 COVID-19 related deaths have been reported to date. While most infections are mild with respiratory symptoms, a severe form of the disease is seen in older adults and people with chronic heart, kidney and lung diseases, diabetes or other conditions that render the immune system weak. COVID-19 damages many organs including the lungs, heart and kidneys.

Commonly seen complication Kidney injury as a complication of COVID-19 is more commonly seen in hospitalised patients. While the reported prevalence of kidney injury was 7% in a study of 2,650 patients admitted to a large hospital in southern India, a recent large study in the United States reported kidney injury in as many as 46% of 3,993 hospitalised patients, of whom 19% required dialysis. Patients with COVID-19 kidney injury also have increased duration of

hospitalisation, with increased health-care costs. Unfortunately, there are many more deaths in those who have acute kidney injury.

Understanding the microscopic changes in kidneys after infection with the SARS-CoV-2 virus is important and has been the focus of extensive research. Researchers, especially pathologists, across the globe have been unified in their observations of COVID-19 kidney injury – i.e., acute tubular injury (injury of the transporting channels in the kidney) is the hallmark of kidney pathology. Thrombi or blood clots, as seen in the lungs and heart, may also be seen in the kidney. Inflammation (influx of white blood cells) in the kidney has also been described by researchers. The kidney injury is more commonly seen in kidneys that already have chronic injury, such as that seen in diabetes or severe blood vessel diseases.

The exact process in which the SARS-CoV-2 virus brings on the kidney injury has been studied to varying detail by different centres. The first question asked is: does the virus directly damage the kidney? Many centres across the globe have used a very special microscope called the electron microscope to look for evidence of virus in the kidney. The initial studies that emerged from China and the United States seemed to identify structures within kidney cells that looked like viral particles. This seemed to be logical, given that the kidney has a high con-



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centration of ACE2, which is the key protein structure on a cell that the SARS-CoV-2 virus attaches to. This step is critical for the virus to enter the cell. However, as more research was done, it became clear that what was once thought to be viral particles in cells were, in fact, increased numbers of vesicles (structures in the cell that are used in sending important signals) and were mere viral mimics. Even these specific staining techniques to detect very small amounts of viral proteins failed to show virus in the kidneys. All of this suggested that direct viral injury was not the main method of kidney injury. If not, then how was the SARS-CoV-2 virus injuring the kidney?

Changes after infection

The main focus of our own research was to understand how SARS-CoV-2 causes kidney injury and how the proteins and genes change in kidneys after COVID-19 infection. This study from Mayo Clinic, recently published in *The Mayo Clinic Proceedings* (<https://mayoclinic.org/3C52bsy>), points to a strong immune response (immune

response is the way the body fights against substances it sees as foreign or harmful) in the kidneys. The immune response was seen in all parts of the kidney tissue, including the small blood vessels and in the glomerulus (filtering unit of the kidney). This was mostly seen in those with severe cases of COVID-19. We were able to show two pathways of immune response to the kidneys; Innate immunity, which is the non-specific response you are born with, to fight harmful organisms. In COVID-19 kidneys, we found a rich infiltrate of white blood cells (called macrophages) in the kidneys. Adaptive immune response, which is the body's acquired immune response to the SARS-CoV-2 virus, was evident by an increase in specific type of immune (T cells) in the kidney tissue. This was shown using state-of-the-art techniques, including transcriptomic, proteomics and mass-cytometry.

Like sepsis-associated injury

Several experts in the field had been suggesting that the kidney injury in severe COVID-19 behaves similar to kidney injury from sepsis, which is the body's extreme response to an infection. In our study, we were able to compare the findings in COVID-19 kidney injury with kidneys from individuals with known sepsis, and indeed, found that the immune response in the two were very similar. This finding perhaps emphasises the need to manage COVID-19 patients in the same way as patients with sepsis.

The observations from our tissue proteins analysis and ultrastructural analysis points also to mitochondria, (which is the powerhouse of the cell) bearing the final insult of the SARS-CoV-2. While this finding is unique to COVID-19 kidney injury, it lends important insight into potential treatment strategies that could be used in managing COVID-19.

Key takeaways

In conclusion, this Mayo Clinic study is important in that it emphasises a few important facts. First, there is a great need for researchers to capitalise on the patient specimens collected during the pandemic and gather and store data for current and future use. Data archived for future studies will potentially provide valuable information in the event of another pandemic. Second, it will allow the study of COVID-19 associated tissue injury in different populations. Third, by using state-of-the-art technology tools, we were able to analyse the body's immune response to the virus, and how this response might be injuring kidneys. Taken together, the severe kidney injury seen in COVID-19 further supports the need for widespread vaccination to protect everyone from this viral infection.

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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.

Change in Gujarat

The selection of first-time MLA Bhupendra Patel as the next Chief Minister of Gujarat causes little surprise to a discerning political observer (Page 1, September 13). Given his political clout with the BJP high command and the support from the dominant Patidar community, his elevation has become a *fait accompli*. However, it is unfortunate that the caste syndrome still prevails despite vociferous claims by the political class to create a casteless and an egalitarian society. Will he prove to be a game-changer in 2022?
P.K. VARADARAJAN,
Chennai

Farewell write-up

The column, "From the Readers' Editor - Not

dropping the vase" (OpEd page, September 13), was a finely crafted farewell message from Mr. A.S. Panneerselvan. He has been a visible yet nuanced link between readers and the editorial team, bringing in all the clarity of how a news desk functions in the daily. I have always looked forward to his column every Monday. Mr. Panneerselvan has not dropped the vase. He has preserved it.

NIRMALA NARAYANAN,
Bengaluru

As a corrective force, the RE held the flag high, and at the same time took pains to set right the genuine misgivings of many a learned reader. To go through his weekly columns was an edifying experience. To use

the analogy of the vase, I would say that he held the vase with grace and ease.

AYYASSERI RAVEENDRANATH,
Aranmula, Kerala

Mr. Panneerselvan's swan song has all the right tunes. While articulating measured satisfaction about a job well done, he has left the final judgment about his performance to the readers. It is unrealistic to expect an internal ombudsman to have an arm's-length relationship with the newspaper in letter and spirit. What matters is the perception that the RE is responsive to readers' queries, feedback and complaints. I am sure he might have received a fair share of uncharitable and *ad hominem* remarks from disgruntled readers. He responded to criticism that

was communicated in a civil language by identifiable readers. He cited my complaint about *The Hindu's* coverage of the pandemic's second wave verbatim, even if it was couched in a harsh and highly emotional tone. My verdict is Mr. Panneerselvan did not drop the vase while sidestepping pitfalls inherent in his job.
V.N. MUKUNDARAJAN,
Thiruvananthapuram

Raducanu's win

What an impressive victory for 18-year-old Emma Raducanu in the U.S. Open women's title. She rocked the court making the match of a teenager versus another teenager very interesting. Both players were full of energy and enthusiasm and had a powerful spirit. Age is clearly no barrier in success

("Sport" page, September 13).
KIRTI WADHWAN,
Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh

Delay in CAPF letter

The Union Public Service Commission (UPSC) selects candidates every year for the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) Assistant Commandant (Group A) – this is for the Border Security Force (BSF), Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), Indo Tibetan Border Police (ITBP), Central Industrial Security Force (CISF) and Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB) – on the basis of a written exam, physical efficiency test, medical standard test and interview. In 2019, the UPSC had notified the CAPF Asst. Commandant recruitment on April 24, 2019 to fill up 330 vacancies in all the CAPFs. The break-up was 108

seats in the CRPF, 100 in the BSF, 66 in the SSB, 28 in the ITBP, and 28 in the CISF. The final result was announced by the UPSC on February 5 this year, but the selected candidates of the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPF) 2019 examination have yet to receive their joining letters. The authorities concerned have not communicated to the candidates the reasons for such an inordinate delay. Over two years later, the UPSC CAPF 2019 process awaits its logical conclusion, resulting in despair and confusion for many young minds who are enthusiastic about serving the country through the CAPFs.
R. RAVI,
New Delhi