

PAK'S U-TURN

As predicted by its own people, Pakistan reversed its decision to boycott T-20 World Cup Match with India. It has become Pakistan cricket board's habit to create drama around the Cricket. India is very clear in its approach. Since we have bad relations with Pakistan due to the latter's support to terrorism and a policy of not playing any bilateral sports with our western neighbor for the same reason, Pakistan has no right to do tit for tat, for it sounds illogical and lacks basis. Besides, Pakistan is in no position to deny itself the revenue that comes with playing international cricket and following the schedule of the International Cricket Council (ICC). Additionally, PCB Chairman, who will always be remembered for his childish act of keeping the Asia Cup trophy with him and not handing it over to its claimant India, is known for playing politics with cricket. ICC Chairman Jay Shah deserves praises for resolving this issue without creating a drama.

BANGLADESH GOES TO POLLS

The world, especially India, is following February 12 elections in Bangladesh closely. The country stands at the threshold of a historic dichotomy – either it retains its character of a nations created out of cultural and linguistic unity as against the Muslim nation that it was originally or it loses its ethos to embrace radical Islam as foundations. Going by the popular narrative, it seem Jamaat-e-Islami is poised to win by default. The Jamaat is a radical group which has announced strict rules for women – both Muslims and non-Muslims. In a poor and under developed country ban on women will have a damning effect. The minorities, who are already living in fear and pressure, will be the worst sufferers. As such the daily killings of Hindus are yet to end and seem to be becoming a new normal. Indian government has refrained from acting tough so far.

Congress dilemma: Why Rahul Gandhi must decide the Party's future now

Anil Anand

Two decades in politics is not a small period. Though the learning curve never ceases to exist, the time comes in the life of a political leader to give a real account of himself or herself and accordingly take tough decisions. Such a situation cannot be allowed to linger on forever in view of the dynamically changing political landscape.

Ironically, after two decades of active politics and, in between, an unsuccessful bid for the presidency of India's oldest political party, the Indian National Congress, Mr Rahul Gandhi still finds himself at a crossroads. Which way to go and which road to take — he seems to be stuck in a dilemma.

He has allowed himself to become the de facto chief of the party, and at the same time his close aides take pains to deflect this perception by painstakingly reminding the country that Mr Mallikarjun Kharge is the fully elected president of the party. There is no denying this fact, but ground realities point in a different direction.

Mr Kharge has been Congress president for over three years after defeating Mr Shashi Tharoor, with the full support of Mr Gandhi and his family. Everyone knows that Mr Kharge's candidature was openly backed by Mrs Sonia Gandhi, which set the course for the poll outcome. Ever since, Mr Tharoor, being suspect in the eyes of Gandhi-camp backers, has acquired the status of a rebel, while Mr Gandhi remains the de facto



boss calling the shots.

Whatever Mr Gandhi did during the last three years (Mr Kharge's tenure) naturally has his stamp, and whatever he did not do also bears his stamp. The "not doing" part pertains to indecisiveness - be it taking over the mantle as Congress president, bringing far-reaching organisational changes, or implementing his own words expressed from time to time. He must take equal credit or blame for decisions taken or not taken.

Solo acts without the backing of a solid organisation will not take you very far, Mr Gandhi. Nor will closing your eyes to rejuvenating the Congress.

This prolonged paradox has now begun manifesting dangerously and is desperately awaiting a rescue act. On the contrary, the situation has become more serious, with the positive impact generated by Mr Gandhi's strenuous Bharat Jodo Yatras (BJYs) almost on the verge of evaporation. In the absence of a follow-up plan, and with deeply divided party units from the AICC down to the states and Union Territories failing to effectively take Mr Gandhi's message to the grassroots level, the historic event is slipping into

oblivion.

The BJP's sleeper cells are merily running PCCs in many states and UTs.

If this reflects Mr Gandhi's shortcomings, it is also an abject failure of his support team, who work in close proximity to him, either in sustaining on the ground the aftermath of such gigantic programmes or in tendering impactful advice to him. The oft-repeated complaint in AICC circles, and a question frequently asked in public, is: "Who are Mr Gandhi's advisers?" No one knows the answer.

Yet another common refrain is the inaccessibility of him and his AICC team, particularly the general secretary (organisation), Mr KC Venugopal, to party leaders and the rank and file — let alone the public at large. This is a jarring situation, which none other than Mr Gandhi himself can tackle. He has to set a new model, through personal example, to be followed by others down below. He has a multifaceted personality with a strong knowledge base, but most of the time he misses the point that being a leading political light entails leading from the front through personal example.

His fight for the marginalised sections of society is commendable, and it has been his quest to bring the core support base back to the Congress. A missing balanced approach - caring for all and antagonising none - has led to this quest creating a buzz but not accruing any electoral benefits. This is something Mr Gandhi must sit and mull over.

The political situation in the country is dynamic and changing fast, with serious questions being raised about the thinking, policies, and planning of the Narendra Modi government - more importantly, about its handling of the social fabric of society.

The unfortunate episode involving Swami Avimukteshwarananda ji, Shankaracharya of Jyotish Peeth, at the Prayagraj Magh Mela - where he sat on dharna protesting against alleged insult by the administration, with no word of pacification coming either from Prime Minister Mr Modi or UP Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath - has added new grist to the political whirlwind. This is a serious development which Congress cannot ignore, particularly in the face of the aggressive Hindutva agenda of Mr Modi and the Shankaracharya questioning its veracity.

Unfortunately, the Congress does not seem prepared to act in consonance, or preferably remain a step ahead of the situation, amid these fast-paced developments. In contrast, the BJP and the Modi government's fire-fighting techniques are ever ready, rediscovering ways at a fast pace to repeatedly turn the tables.

The Congress and Mr Gandhi must shun lethargy if he is to remain in the game. There are misdeemeanours of the ruling dispensation, such as the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of the electoral rolls and various other measures that tilt the balance in its favour, thereby preventing a level playing field. Mr Gandhi's

fight on this front is laudable, but nothing will succeed without setting his own house in order. He cannot be seen as fighting as a loner, but as a leader heading a strong pack, which he must develop speedily.

Firstly, he must clear his mind on whether he wishes to perpetuate the current de facto model of Congress leadership, intends to lead from the front, or is prepared to give a chance to someone else. In any situation, decision-making should not become a casualty. It is because of indecisiveness and opaqueness in the AICC's functioning that things have worsened by the day.

Someone might say that even Mr Modi is far removed from the BJP's rank and file, yet his graph has been rising for the past decade. The strong organisational system, backup support, and capacity to take hard decisions make the difference in his case. There is a multi-tier mechanism in the saffron party's organisational setup which keeps both Mr Modi and his party going through all seasons.

An opposition leader like Mr Gandhi, who is continuously under the scanner of his political opponents, cannot afford the luxury of remaining oblivious to emerging situations or the challenges with which his own party has been beset. There is a strong case for transition and generational change, which he ostensibly wishes to pursue. It requires courage, conviction, fortitude, flexibility, and, at the same time, the will to take strong decisions.

WHEN POLITICS DROWNS DEMOCRACY

Kalyani Shankar

Communication between the Modi government and the Opposition has broken down, as evidenced by the turbulent proceedings in Parliament last week. There have been no back-channel negotiations to resolve the paralysis.

The protests intensified on Monday when Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla announced that the Leader of the Opposition, Rahul Gandhi, could not read from a magazine containing an excerpt from a book by retired General Naravane, citing parliamentary rules.

This breakdown in dialogue culminated in the Lok Sabha being adjourned for the day last Wednesday, preventing the Prime Minister from delivering his usual reply to the Motion of Thanks to the President's Address. This was unprecedented in Parliament's history: the Prime Minister was unable to speak in the Lower House on the President's Address, underscoring the seriousness of the disruptions.

Opposition Members of Parliament from both Houses protested, especially in the Lok Sabha. These protests led to repeated adjournments of the Lower House, often just minutes after it reconvened. During the protests, members chanted slogans, entered the Well of the House, and held banners and placards in front of the Speaker. They also staged a demonstration outside Parliament. Prime Minister Narendra Modi was unable to enter the House be-

cause Opposition women MPs had positioned themselves near his seat in the Lok Sabha.

Speaker Om Birla clarified the following day that he had advised the Prime Minister to avoid the House due to concerns about potential disruptions near his seat. He stated: "When the Prime Minister was scheduled to respond to the President's Address, I had received indications that some Congress members might attempt to create a disturbance close to the Prime Minister's chair. Such actions could undermine our democratic traditions. To prevent this, I felt it was necessary to advise the Prime Minister not to attend the House. As the presiding officer, it is my duty to safeguard these traditions."

Women Members of Parliament obstructed the aisle near the Prime Minister's seat just before his arrival, highlighting the active role of Opposition women MPs in the disruptions.

In a related development, Rahul Gandhi commented on a memoir by a retired Army chief that has yet to be released. The memoir, written by General Naravane in March 2023, is slated for publication in December. General Naravane has been widely recognised for his integrity. Overall, Parliament faced significant disruption due to repeated adjournments. This turmoil highlights the challenges of maintaining parliamentary decorum and the importance of respectful debate for effective governance. In earlier years, there were several high-

quality debates.

The following day, the Prime Minister spoke extensively in the Rajya Sabha about his government's achievements and various initiatives it had launched. He addressed India's position in global affairs and its increasing influence on the world stage. The Prime Minister praised his 11 years in office while strongly criticising the Nehru-Gandhi family for their failure to develop the country effectively. The speech resembled an election rally, filled with punchlines.

Members of Parliament often create disturbances to protest and gain media attention. Their actions include rushing to the Well of the House, shouting slogans, holding up signs, and at times even tearing up Bills. This behaviour reflects deep political divisions and a shift towards confrontational politics.

There has been a noticeable increase in time lost to disruptions, as well as in the costs of running Parliament. It costs approximately `2.5 lakh per minute, `1.5 crore per hour, and `9 crore per day of taxpayers' money, highlighting the financial impact of these disruptions on public resources.

According to NDTV, losses continue to mount even when the Houses are adjourned, with expenses including the operational costs of the high-tech Parliament building, staff salaries, and expenditure on security, among others. Disruptions in Parliament not only hinder government accountability

and limit meaningful discussion but also delay the passage of crucial legislation, affecting public welfare and policy implementation. This underscores the urgent need for reform.

Many committees have recommended reforms for Parliament and have emphasised the need for positive change and support for necessary improvements. In a parliamentary democracy, frequent disruptions not only hinder legislative progress but also erode public trust and weaken democratic legitimacy. To address this, electoral reforms are needed to improve the quality of elected representatives. Greater understanding among political parties should also be encouraged, using both formal and informal mechanisms. By increasing public awareness of Parliament's role and how disruptions harm the public interest, these disturbances can be reduced.

Parliamentary standing committees, such as those in the UK and Canada, have successfully mediated conflicts and improved decorum through structured dialogue and conflict resolution. Such examples can inspire support for similar reforms and demonstrate their effectiveness in strengthening parliamentary functioning. These reforms should be implemented sooner rather than later, with political cooperation playing a crucial role in restoring faith and ensuring the smooth functioning of Parliament. Above all, strong political will is required.

The Epstein mirror: How power and money colluded in plain sight

Nilantha Ilangamuwa

It is ugly. It is disgusting. No one knows whether he died by suicide or by some other, more carefully arranged ending, designed to bury what he knew and whom it protected. But this is what the hypocritical West looks like when the curtain slips. You praise a person as long as you do not know what sits inside him; you despise him the moment the rot begins to breathe in public. Jeffrey Epstein tells a complete story of what America and the West have become, not because he was exceptional, but because he was ordinary in the ways that matter most. From Chomsky to Bill Gates, Elon Musk to Trump, from New York boardrooms to Westminster salons, and the long, awkward associations with figures such as Peter Mandelson, the same putrid pattern repeats. This is not about monsters hiding in basements. This is about appetite, denial, and the theatre of respectability.

Last week, as millions of pages from the so-called Epstein files began circulating again, another artefact surfaced alongside them: the last known interview Epstein ever gave, recorded with Steve Bannon. It is not a confes-

sion. It is not remorseful. It is something far colder. A man speaking as if the trial were civilisation itself, not him.

He speaks of finance as something closer to mysticism than economics. Leaders, he suggests, do not understand the systems they claim to govern. "You weigh and measure every day," Bannon tells him. "You weigh and measure people. You weigh and measure leaders. You weigh and measure economies." Epstein replies, calmly, "I don't even know what it means to be measured." Not as evasion, but as assertion. Measurement, in his account, is approximation, an abuse of language, a crude imposition on reality. Precision itself becomes a fiction.

He repeatedly returns to this refusal. Asked when human life begins, he says the question itself is malformed. "You're asking me to measure something again." Pressed further, he retreats into paradox, invoking Zeno, quantum behaviour, and the impossibility of exactitude. Hair, skull, height, decimals. The question dissolves into semantics. Nothing lands. Nothing sticks.

This is the rhythm of the interview.

Whenever responsibility approaches, the language lifts off the ground.

Epstein frames history as a long record of misunderstanding. Newton, he says, could describe motion but not explain it. Quantum physics only widened the mystery. "We just cannot explain," he repeats. Electrons are not things but clouds. Solids are not solid. At small scales, reality collapses into probabilities. From this, he draws a broader claim: that science, mathematics, and formal systems are the wrong tools for understanding life. "No really new ideas have come out," he says of modern institutions, because they are trapped using the wrong instruments.

He applies this logic everywhere. Markets are not calculable; they are felt. Traders succeed through intuition, not models. Mathematics follows action, never the reverse. Measurement arrives after the fact, to justify what instinct already decided. Crises are not moral failures; they are structural inevitabilities. Collapse is not crime. It is mechanics.

Rockefeller and JP Morgan appear in his telling as honest predators, men who never pretended capitalism was humane. Modern leaders, by contrast,

are described as symbolic figures, trapped inside systems they cannot read, repeating language about growth and stability while liquidity moves independently of them. Whether this is true is almost irrelevant. What matters is that Epstein speaks as if proximity to power grants ontological superiority. Understanding, in his world, is not earned; it is inherited through access.

The files released alongside this interview make the same argument without words. Names recur. Flights recur. Dinners recur. Foundations recur. What disappears is responsibility. Everything is coincidence. Everyone was only passing through. The documents do not need to prove every allegation to expose the structure. Power does not operate through direct orders. It circulates. It accumulates. It protects itself through diffusion.

When Bannon asks whether institutions should take money from someone like him, Epstein does not deny the question's legitimacy. He re-frames it. He speaks of polio vaccines in Pakistan and India. He asks whether mothers would refuse money if told it came from the devil himself. "I don't care, I want the money for my

children," he imagines them saying. Utility overrides origin. Outcome erases source. Pressed further, Bannon asks the question directly: is your money dirty money? Epstein answers simply: no. He earned it — advising terrible people, perhaps, but earning it nonetheless. Ethics, he suggests, are always complicated. This is not a defence. It is a declaration of how the world works.

At one point, Bannon asks whether Epstein thinks he is the devil. Epstein does not laugh. He deflects. The devil, he says, scares him. Satan, he notes, was brilliant, an archangel who rebelled because he could not be number one. The comparison lingers without resolution. The interview ends shortly after. No absolution. No reckoning.

What emerges from this last interview is not a man in denial, but a man entirely comfortable with abstraction. Shame is translated into systems. Harm dissolves into theory. Victims never appear as subjects, only as variables implied offstage. Consciousness, intuition, the soul all enter the conversation only to establish that nothing essential can be pinned down.

The files show how well this posture

was accommodated. Universities accepted money while insisting they were neutral. Politicians appeared alongside him while assuring themselves they were merely polite. Media figures attended dinners while calling it observation. Everyone performed a role and trusted that performance itself was protection.

The West likes to describe itself as transparent, but it survives through selective blindness. Confession is demanded from the weak. Silence is granted to the useful. When scandals erupt, they are framed as deviations rather than products. Epstein's story is intolerable precisely because it refuses that comfort. He does not apologise for understanding the rules as they are practised rather than preached.

There is an instinct to personalise the horror, to catalogue names and savour disgrace. That instinct misses the deeper point. Epstein's circle was not united by ideology or loyalty, but by convenience. People who would never share a moral code shared aircraft. People who condemned exploitation in public tolerated it in private. This is not casual hypocrisy. It is structural compartmentalisation.