We have the privilege tonight to welcome the High Commissioner of India, H. E. Mr. Tanmaya Lal and Mrs. Sumita Lal. Excellency, welcome to Mauritius and thank you for spending this evening with us. Your presence among us is proof of the good relationship we have with your mission since years, a relationship which has a history, a present and a future.

When talking of the land of the great grandfathers of 70% of the Mauritian population, one is baffled with ideas that one does not know where to start. Let us just say that India, home to 1.3 billion people, or 17% of humanity, destined to be the world’s most populous nation by 2040, is the home to the world's largest democracy, a land of all possibilities, a land of economic dynamism, a land of cultural vibrancy and a land of social mobility.

The social ascendency is palpable on the trip from the airport of Bombay to downtown………… the number of high rises and the cleanliness of the city. The cultural activity is best explained by the film industry that produces the largest number of films in the world and keeps millions glued to the entertainment of Bollywood. Some productions also make their way to the prestigious la Croisette, not next door, but in Cannes.

India is also home to some famous families who have formed some of the largest multinationals ……… the Tatas, the Ambanis, the Premjis, who are creating jobs in Europe and of course Mittal, the world number one manufacturer of Steel.

Mauritius must feel lucky to have a friend like India. We are a country without much natural resources and we have survived and progressed thanks to the support of India and of European countries, some of whom had colonized us and since a few years, by the generosity of China whose Ambassador has joined us to welcome you.

England and France have been some of our all-weather allies. Though being net sugar exporters, they have bought our sugar at guaranteed prices; they admitted our textile products on preferential tariffs to help us compete with the Asian low salary countries. The European support helped us leave our projected status of an overcrowded barracoon and join the club of NICs. Our next goal is to join the superior economy club.

The ties between our two countries are so multiple, deep and enduring that frankly they require no elaboration or rehearsal this evening. Sceptics sometimes suggest that democracy is impossible to create or to maintain in a country of the size of India because democracy is an inclusive system that promotes pluralism, secularism and respect for all citizens of a country. We had been receiving conflicting reports that there was an effort by anti-democratic forces to highjack the last election to deface India which prompted [71](https://countercurrents.org/2019/04/24/71-bollywood-actors-writers-appeal-to-the-nation-to-vote-to-defend-the-very-idea-of-india/) Bollywood actors and writers to appeal to Indians to vote for India. PM Modi got the message and he sent the right signal: he was talking about Sab ka saath, sab ka Vikas and now has added sab ka Vishwa’s in his slogan– that is the trust. And India has proved them wrong again and won the election. It looks like official speeches in India will now start with Namaste, Jai Bhim, Salaam, Satsri Akal, Jai Jinendra, Buddha Namo, AlahAbho and Shalom. That is how you start to sab ka saath, the saath of 1.25 billion Indians in one single sentence.

May we look forward to the contribution of India in our next drive. Here, we have in mind of Mauritius being made regional offices of the Indian multi-nationals and their investments and to establish ties between our nascent industries with that of your giants. And since we are on the subject of bilateral cooperation, I would like to add one personal note, which I think should be permissible between friends. India could have followed the European example and allowed us to enjoy the advantages of the DDAA as it was and assured the vibrancy of our financial services.

We would like to wish you a happy and fruitful stay among us. With your rich track record as a seasoned Diplomat, we are sure that our relationship will only grow stronger. Whether it rains or shines, let us live our passion and commitment for an ever-friendly relationship. Long live India-Mauritius friendship.

# Rethink India’s Belt and Road options

India’s absence from the recently concluded second summit meeting of the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing on April 25-27 was more a topic of animated discussion in our country — that we “rejected” the Chinese invite, decided to “boycott” the event and administered a “snub” to China and so on. This was due to our media and think tankers’ tunnel vision.

On its part, China seems to have shrugged it off as if nothing else was expected — as of now, at least. From the Chinese indifference, it can be surmised that Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale who visited Beijing just before the event in Beijing would have given some reasonable explanation to the Chinese side why India was unable to participate in the summit.

However, the larger question remains — India’s stance on the BRI as such. Evidently, there are some signs of a mellowing of the Indian stance. India has given up the pretensions that it would have a connectivity paradigm of its own to rival China’s. India’s reservation has increasingly narrowed down to a single point — namely, that the BRI projects are being implemented illegally in parts of Pakistan, which we consider as really belonging to India, and that it becomes violation of the country’s sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Beijing doesn’t feel flustered. The ball is now entirely in the Indian court to decide whether or when to participate in China’s BRI. It is a happy situation insofar as our sovereign prerogative to decide on our foreign policy is intact here, as compared to the US’ bullying to make the Modi bend on the Iran oil sanctions issue recently. In fact, Wang was willing to address our angst over the BRI recently.

To quote him, “One of our differences is on how to look at the BRI. The Indian side has their concerns. We understand that and that is why we have stated clearly on many occasions that the BRI, including the CPEC, is only an economic initiative and it does not target any third country and has nothing to do with the sovereign and territorial disputes between any two countries. India has its basic position on these disputes. Our cooperation… will not undermine India’s basic position on sovereignty and territorial integrity and at the same time it will provide more opportunities of development and help India in its modernisation endeavour. I believe this is a good option and choice for India.”

Indeed, Wang is right in saying so. Countries with territorial disputes find ways to cooperate without compromising on their respective stances on the disputes. What Russia and Japan are doing despite the intractable Kuril Islands dispute is a case in point.

At any rate, India’s “boycott” didn’t cast a shadow on the BRF summit, which turned out to be a successful event widely noted as a major development on the global stage. One concrete [outcome of the summit](https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d414d32457a4d34457a6333566d54/index.html) impacting Indian interests is that China, together with 33 representatives from government transportation and customs departments, key port enterprises, port authorities and terminal operators from 13 countries – Egypt, Sri Lanka, UAE, Latvia, Slovenia, Belgium, Spain, Fiji, Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark, Romania and Singapore –jointly set up the Maritime Silk Road Port Cooperation Mechanism and released the Ningbo Initiative on the Maritime Silk Road Port Cooperation. Financial institutions also signed on to support projects.

Again, major financial institutions of China, the UK, France, Singapore, Pakistan, the UAE, China’s Hong Kong and other countries and regions signed up to the Green Investment Principles for Belt and Road Development. Also, China’s Ministry of Finance in collaboration with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Asian Development Bank, the Corporación Andina de Fomento, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the European Investment Bank, the Inter-American Development Bank, the International Fund for Agricultural Development and the World Bank Group established the Multilateral Cooperation Center for Development Finance.

Most important, the keynote [speech](https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d674e32636a4d34457a6333566d54/index.html) by President Xi Jinping at the summit on April 25 seemed to respond to international criticism of BRI’s lack of transparency, its inattention to corruption, its preferential treatment of Chinese entities, and its reputation as a “debt trap” for developing countries — concerns which Delhi too voiced in the past.

Clearly, a [policy refresh on the implementation](http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1147663.shtml) of the BRI is on cards, alongside an “internationalisation” of the BRI itself. This is all but inevitable, given the BRI’s growing traction in Europe, and by no means is to be construed as a recalibration for retreat. This shift also has a bigger backdrop where India would have profound interests — namely, China’s all-out effort to win the commanding heights of next generation technologies (fifth generation telecommunications and connectivity, artificial intelligence and quantum computing.)

In sum, the most important message from the BRF summit is, as a report of the American think tank Centre for Strategic and International Studies’ Global Infrastructure Task Force puts it, China has made itself through the BRI “the most significant and ambitious strategic initiative of the twenty-first century so far.” It adds, “Over the next 15 years, more hard infrastructure is projected to be built around the world than currently exists. Make no mistake. The United States is way behind the power curve.”

This latter point is very relevant if India is under any illusion that the US’ opposition to BRI will last till eternity. And, when — not if — the US slouches toward the BRI (which can be overnight), India should not find itself stranded as a lone supplicant. We must anticipate developments instead of being taken by surprise. The point is, Washington faces isolation as more and more western capitals start collaborating with the BRI projects.

The fact of the matter is that 22 European countries have inked BRI cooperation documents with China. Italy became the first country from the G7 to sign BRI cooperation documents. Ignoring the US criticism, Italian PM Giuseppe Conte attended last week’s summit in Beijing. The British finance minister Philip Hammond [said](https://uk.reuters.com/article/us-china-silkroad-britain/britain-calls-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-a-vision-idUKKCN1S20NZ) in Beijing that Britain is committed to help realize the potential of China’s BRI, which he described as a “vision” that holds “tremendous potential to spread prosperity and sustainable development, touching as it does, potentially 70 percent of the world’s population, a project of truly epic ambition.”

The trends visible at the BRF forum summit are too powerful and potentially beneficial for India, and too consequential to ignore. The text of the joint communique of the Leaders’ Roundtable of the 2nd BRF summit titled [Belt and Road Cooperation: Shaping a Brighter Shared Future is here.](http://english.scio.gov.cn/BRF2019/2019-04/28/content_74730528.htm)

***David Hartsough knows how to get in the way!*** He has used his body to block Navy ships headed for Vietnam and trains loaded with munitions on their way to El Salvador and Nicaragua. He has crossed borders to meet “the enemy” in East Berlin, Castro’s Cuba, and present-day Iran. He has marched with mothers confronting a violent regime in Guatemala and stood with refugees threatened by death squads in the Philippines. Waging Peace is a testament to the difference one person can make. Hartsough’s stories inspire, educate, and encourage readers to find ways to work for a more just and peaceful world. Inspired by the examples of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., Hartsough has spent his life experimenting with the power of active nonviolence. It is the story of one man’s effort to live as though we were all brothers and sisters.

[**71 Bollywood Actors, Writers, appeal to the Nation to vote to defend the very Idea of India!**](https://countercurrents.org/2019/04/24/71-bollywood-actors-writers-appeal-to-the-nation-to-vote-to-defend-the-very-idea-of-india/)

in [India](https://countercurrents.org/category/india/) — by [Press Release](https://countercurrents.org/author/press-release/) — April 24, 2019



Our country is known and admired across the world for its enormous diversity, pluralism and the mutual respect that unites millions of Indians in a multi-cultural ethos. This is the idea of India that our freedom movement held high. That is why the modern values of democracy and separation of religion from politics, for which our country’s freedom-fighters fought hard, form the very foundation of our vast society.

Enshrined in the Constitution of India, these central values have unified us as a people, by protecting our diversity. They are guidelines to prevent prejudice and discrimination. This is what makes India great.

In recent years, when there have been attempts by anti-democratic forces to threaten and weaken these founding principles of the Republic of India that is Bharat, many have risen to protect our core values – including students and youth, dalits and minorities, women, writers, artists and countless citizens in various walks of life. We have also witnessed the struggles of farmers, workers and people from underprivileged sections.

Today, each one of us needs to act – as a proud inheritor of this unique civilization and as a citizen of the world’s largest democracy – to unambiguously declare our allegiance to the core values of fraternity, dignity and compassion. Yes, there are conflicts and disagreements amongst us but they can be resolved if we nurture and live by these values.

We appeal to all the people of India, our dear brothers and sisters, to use your power as citizens and as caring human beings to defend our Constitution, and nurture the very idea of India.

Please, pause and think, before you vote.

Mumbai, 23rd April 2019
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Shabana Azmi (Actor)
Vijay Krishna Acharya (Filmmaker)
Shubha Mudgal (Musician)
Anusha Khan (Filmmaker)
Mahesh Mathai (Filmmaker)
Ayesha Sayani (Filmmaker)
Aneesh Pradhan (Musician)
Anjum Rajabali (Screenwriter)
Saiwyn Quadras (Screenwriter)
Shellee (Poet)
Sanjay Chouhan (Screenwriter)
Akshat Ghildial (Screenwriter)
Reema Katgi (Filmmaker)
Vetrimaaran (Filmmaker)
Shonali Bose (Filmmaker)
Anand Patwardhan (Filmmaker)
Swara Bhaskar (Actor)
Rasika Dugal (Actor)
Mahesh Dattani (Playwright-Filmmaker)
Urmi Juvekar (Screenwriter)
Gazal Dhaliwal (Screenwriter)
Swanand Kirkire (Lyricist-writer-actor)
Nachiket Patwardhan (Filmmaker-architect)
Rajesh Dubey (Screenwriter)
Kausar Munir (Screenwriter-Lyricist)
Bikas Ranjan Mishra (Filmmaker)
Jayoo Patwardhan (Filmmaker)
Abdullah Khan (Novelist-Screenwriter)
Dharmakirti Sumant (Playwright-Screenwriter)
Jyoti Kapoor (Screenwriter)
Ishita Moitra (Screenwriter)
Deepak Venkatesha (Screenwriter)
Manaswini (Playwright-Screenwriter)
Satyam Tripathy (Screenwriter)
Suman Mukhopadhyay (Filmmaker)
Zaman Habib (Screenwriter-Producer)
Vinod Ranganath (Screenwriter)
Shiv Subhramanyam (Actor)
Aparajita Krishna (Filmmaker)
Atika Chohan (Screenwriter)
Vinay Shukla (Filmmaker)
Maithili Rao (Film Critic)
Vinta Nanda (Screenwriter)
Jagriti Thakur (Screenwriter)
Mandira Shukla (Costume Designer)
Hardik Mehta (Filmmaker)
Sanyuktha Chawla Shaikh (Screenwriter)
Gautam Kishanchandani (Casting Director)
Samar Shaikh (Filmmaker)
Sudip Sharma (Screenwriter)
Dhananjay Kumar (Journalist-Screenwriter)
Imteyaz Hussein (Playwright-Screenwriter)
Ravinder Randhawa (Screenwriter)
Ranjit Kapoor (Playwright-Director)
Ranjan Ghosh (Filmmaker)
Pooja Varma (Screenwriter)
Abhijit Mazumdar (Filmmaker)
Dinkar Sharma (Screenwriter)
Avinash Arun (Filmmaker)
Himanshu Sharma (Screenwriter)
Manisha Korde (Screenwriter)
Maheep Dhillon (Producer)
Mazahirr Rahim (Filmmaker)
Salim Arif (Playwright-Director)
Bhavani Iyer (Screenwriter)
Anushree Shukla (Screenwriter)
Debashish Irengbam (Screenwriter-Novelist)
Atul Dubey (Filmmaker)
Suhana Bhatia (Screenwriter)
Tushar Paranjpe (Playwright-Screenwriter)
Petrina D’Rozario-Shetty (Producer)

Dr. Pradnya Daya Pawar,
Anand Wingkar
Urmila Pawar
Sudam Rathod
Avinash Gaikwad
Mangesh Bansod
Subhash Thorat
Chaya Koregaokar
Shafat Khan
Jayant Pawar
Veera Sathidar
Arvind Survade
Pratibha Ahire
Suresh Raghav
Rajanand Suradkar
Maya Pandit
Shyamal Garud
Usha Ambhore
Aashalata Kamble
Mahebub Sayyad
Satyapalsingh Rajput
Veera Rathod
Aadinath Ingole
Dr. Shridhar Pawar
Satish Kalsekar
Vandana Sonalkar
Mangesh Kale
Prakash Ghodke
Anjali Kulkarni,
Dipak Borhade
Santosh Padmakar
Ganesh Vispute
Pravin Bandekar
Prof. Kunda Pramila
Subodh More
Rajiv Deshpande
Uday Narkar

Over 10 countries, including Russia, Thailand, Vietnam and India, will send nearly 20 vessels to join a naval parade commemorating the 70th anniversary of the founding of the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Navy, senior navy officer Qiu Yanpeng told a press conference Saturday.

**Europe may hold new promise for BRI**



By [Swaran Singh](https://www.asiatimes.com/author/swaran-singh/)Dr Swaran Singh is professor of diplomacy and disarmament at the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi; adjunct senior fellow at The Charhar Institute, Beijing; senior fellow, Institute for National Security Studies Sri Lanka, Colombo; and visiting professor, Research Institute for Indian Ocean Economies,

On eve of its second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (BRF), to be held in Beijing on April 25, China this Tuesday held its annual summit with the European Union. It is to be followed by its [adjunct annual summit](https://www.asiatimes.com/2019/04/article/eu-and-china-sign-a-mandate-of-trade-heaven/) with 16 nations of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) this Thursday and Friday. These two summits have at least temporarily deflected global attention away from China’s unending trade war with Washington.

Indeed, in the face of India earlier this week declining China’s invitation to participate in the BRF and the Donald Trump administration’s continuing vacillation on negotiating a trade deal with Beijing as also about its own participation in the BRF, Premier Li Keqiang’s week-long parleys with EU and CEE leaders are likely to embolden China to put up a brave front against the increasing number of countries questioning the BRI’s contours and credentials. More specifically, these will boost the Chinese diplomatic drive that has continued countering the ever-growing reportage about China creating “debt traps” for recipient countries.

This is where China’s front-loading of developed European nations becomes a potent tactic for the BRI, which was originally conceived for developing and least developed countries. It is also important to underline that it is not the US but the EU that remains China’s largest trading partner, with their two-way trade last year reaching US$650 billion – an impressive $1.8 billion a day. This figure can also be seen as being larger than China’s bilateral trade with both the United States and India combined.

The Brexit episode has also lately enhanced fissures within the EU, which has often failed to speak with one voice, something that has also given certain advantages to Beijing.

It is against this backdrop that this China-EU Summit has ended with what some European leaders are calling a breakthrough trade agreement that promises their greater integration into the BRI. These claims become especially important given that only last month the European Commission was branding China as its “systemic rival” politically and as an “economic competitor” promoting unfair trade practices. Media commentaries were also agog reporting how the Trump administration had been pressuring EU leaders to ban Chinese high-tech giant Huawei for its alleged links with China’s Ministry of Public Security.

There were even reports that in the run-up to this 21st China-EU Summit in Brussels, European interlocutors had raised serious concerns and threatened not to sign the final communiqué. But most of these objections seem to have disappeared in face of the lure of China’s commercial deals

There were even reports that in the run-up to this 21st China-EU Summit in Brussels, European interlocutors had raised serious concerns and threatened not to sign the final communiqué. But most of these objections seem to have disappeared in face of the lure of China’s commercial deals. These incentives have now been camouflaged in the name of further fine-tuning China’s reforms and opening up to facilitate foreign investments while also addressing European concerns about China poaching foreign investors’ intellectual property.

So, to propitiate detractors, the China-EU joint statement on Tuesday evening underlined their commitment that (a) “there should not be a forced transfer of technology,” (b) market access should be made “broader” and “non-discriminatory,” and (c) the strengthening of rules against state subsidies for industries.

Premier Li underlined how EU companies, including those 100% foreign owned, would enjoy “equal treatment” with local state-owned Chinese companies. This clearly has set the tone for his next China-CE summit in Croatia, which involves nations that have been closely connected to the BRI.

Given the size of their economies, the engagement of CEE nations with the BRI has not been widely publicized. Instead of European beneficiaries of the BRI, media focus has remained on China’s mega infrastructure projects across South and Southeast Asia and in African countries. In terms of their politics as well, having fiercely fought and ousted former communist regimes in some of these CEE nations, their post-communist leaders are not usually seen as natural partners of Beijing. But again, the BRI’s commercial lure has been fairly effective among these growth-seeking but infrastructure-starved newly liberalized countries.

Indeed, this region was amply represented in China’s inaugural BRF in May 2017. This included four heads of state/government (from the Czech Republic, Poland, Hungary and Serbia) and a Romanian delegation led by the deputy prime minister. What makes this week’s China-CEE Summit promising is that 11 of these 16 CEE nations are members of the EU, and their deliberations in Brussels on Tuesday had already finalized several draft BRI deals that will be announced on Friday evening.

In fact, last month had already underlined this mood swing in Europe when Italy became first of the Group of Seven industrialized economies to join China’s BRI. Italy is now projected to become China’s gateway to the CEE.

But all this has not put an end to contrarian voices that find China lacking in delivering on its promises, especially in terms of market reciprocity. There have been concerns about the detention of foreigners and internment campus in its Muslim-majority Xinjiang region.

French President Emmanuel Macron last month asserted how “China plays on our divisions” and urged that the “period of European naïveté is over,” yet sometimes such assertions are seen only as call for better commercial deals. President Xi Jinping’s visit to France last month that resulted in the two sides signing 15 agreements involving $45 billion worth of Chinese investments – including the purchase of 300 Airbus planes – made Macron’s assertions appear like a last-ditch effort before falling in line.

One could even say that this week’s 21st China-EU and ninth China-CEE summits have not only provided a positive spin to the upcoming BRF but even reinforced the political position of Premier Li. While attempts will continue to propitiate the Trump administration, whose reluctance, if not negation, to engage the BRI will have a direct bearing on US friends and allies – and how their media cover this jamboree – China’s BRI has clearly entered its next phase of shifting engagement to relatively advanced European countries.

This is part of China spreading its BRI far and wide with expanding engagements with European, Arab and African states while streamlining its existing partners in its immediate periphery. And, in spite of muting criticisms ranging from human rights to intellectual property, the truth is that as China shifts focus to European nations, more than a dozen of them have already signed up for partnerships with the BRI, which is likely to become the focus during the second BRF in Beijing.

The need for constitutional courage: on Ayodhya dispute

[**Apoorvanand**](https://www.thehindu.com/profile/author/Apoorvanand-6519/)

**The Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute is a title dispute, not a religious one**

The [**Supreme Court’s decision to appoint a panel of mediators**](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/constitution-bench-sends-ayodhya-dispute-for-mediation/article26465192.ece) to resolve the long-standing Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid (Ayodhya) dispute is deeply problematic. By taking this route, the court has given the impression that the dispute is best solved outside the legal domain. In a very short span of time, the court has moved from its position of treating this as a title dispute to a matter involving religious sentiments. It has not explained what led it to change its stance, especially since mediations that have taken place in the past have failed.

**Ambiguity in the court**

The idea of mediation was mooted in 2017 by a Bench headed by the then Chief Justice of India, J.S. Khehar. The Bench had suggested that the issue was much larger than ownership of land, and that mediation might help in “healing relations”. After Justice Khehar, Chief Justice Dipak Misra insisted on treating it as a land dispute only. Now, the court has again brought back sentiments into the legal discourse. This wavering and ambiguity in the court has accompanied the case all along.

Sentiment is a problematic word, especially when there are two political sentiments competing with each other. This is not a question of the majority community feeling deprived of a temple at the birth place of Lord Ram. On the other hand, it is a majoritarian political ploy masquerading as religious sentiment. This is a ploy to subjugate the minority Muslim community further, by playing a symbolic game. In this game, the numbers are stacked against Muslims. Lazy common sense holds that the minority must understand the ‘historical injustice’ done to Hindus by their ancestors and atone for it by leaving the site for them.

Moreover, even if we accept the notion of contending sensitivities, one must not ignore the sentiments of those Hindus who do not consider this issue as one that defines their identity. There are also many Hindus who would not like a temple to come up in Ayodhya by displacing a mosque. How will these myriad views be represented in the mediation process, [**which began on March 13 in Faizabad**](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/ayodhya-mediation-process-begins-in-faizabad/article26520188.ece)? By creating two neat sides, the court has validated the claim of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh and its political arm, the Bharatiya Janata Party, and weakened the position of the Hindus who contest this division.

The Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid issue was never religious. The BJP has always included the promise of constructing a Ram temple in its election manifestos over the years. L.K. Advani’s 1990 rath yatra not only led to the eventual demolition of the Babri Masjid, but expanded the national footprint of the BJP. The campaign was aimed at denigrating Muslims and entrenching their ‘foreignness’ in the minds of Hindus by using the figure of Babar.

Since the court has itself digressed from the brief before it, one can ask why it did not think it necessary to first address the criminality of an act in 1949, when the idol of Lord Ram was placed in the Babri mosque on the night of December 22, which happened much before the demolition of the mosque itself. Also, the bloodletting accompanying the demolition of the mosque cannot be dissociated from the act. Why is it that the issue of sentiments is given primacy and not the criminality of the act, when the court is equipped to address the latter? Why is the court wading into the mediation route yet again after so many years of hearing, and when the time is right for taking on majoritarian audacity?

**Selection of mediators**

Further, the eight-week time limit for the mediators coincides with the election campaign period and ends just before voting ends. It is not difficult to see which party will use this in its favour. If the mediation committee fails to come to a consensus, this could be used to fuel anger in **[Ayodhya](https://www.thehindu.com/tag/221-217-81/ayodhya/?utm=bodytag" \t "_blank)**once again, against both Muslims as well as the court.

It is not just the idea of mediation but the [**selection of mediators**](https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/ayodhya-title-dispute-who-are-the-mediators-appointed-by-the-supreme-court/article26469362.ece) that casts a doubt on the process. While Justice F.M.I. Kalifullais a retired Supreme Court judge and senior advocate Sriram Panchu has been instrumental in making mediation a part of India’s legal system, what are Sri Sri Ravi Shankar’s qualifications? He has not only flouted laws himself but has espoused the cause of a temple at the disputed site on multiple occasions. He is the one who said we will have a “Syria in India” if the Ram Mandir issue is not resolved soon. By no standard does Mr. Ravi Shankar qualify to be a mediator. A mediator is expected to be open-minded and fair, and if we go by his controversial statements, it looks doubtful whether he’ll be independent.

At times like this, we expect the apex court to uphold constitutional morality. It does not help in a political dispute to replace the constitutional route with a “humanitarian” one. The sentiment of the court to “heal relationships” is laudable. But it is only constitutional courage that can steer us through these troubled times.

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*Ad on Hindu-Muslim unity gets far right in a twist*



**By**[**CHANDNI DOULATRAMANI**](https://www.asiatimes.com/author/chandni-doulatramani/)**, INDIA**

A[television commercial](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zq7mN8oi8ds) in India for detergent brand Surf Excel, a Hindustan Unilever product, has garnered [gather, collect, accumulate, amass, assemble, store, lay up, lay] outrage from several right-wing supporters.

The advertisement shows a little Hindu girl encouraging other kids in the neighborhood to throw balloons filled with colored water at her during the [Holi](https://www.holifestival.org/) festival. She happily takes the hit in order to protect her Muslim friend so that he can go the mosque to offer *namaz* with clean clothes. While dropping him off at the mosque, she playfully tells him to be prepared for the Holi celebration later.

The advertisement, to say the least, is endearing and heart-warming, but right-wing fanatics and trolls have found a reason to be offended, as #BoycottSurfExcel trended on Twitter.

Actress Payal Rohatgi tweeted asking Muslims to stay at home and read *namaz* on Holi day. “No need to step out,” she wrote, adding, “Lets see their tolerance when a burqa clad girl is playing Holi.”

[View image on Twitter](https://twitter.com/Payal_Rohatgi/status/1104428268441104384/photo/1)





**[PAYAL ROHATGI & Team](https://twitter.com/Payal_Rohatgi)**

[✔@Payal\_Rohatgi](https://twitter.com/Payal_Rohatgi)

To [@HUL\_News](https://twitter.com/HUL_News), [#Masjid](https://twitter.com/hashtag/Masjid?src=hash) is not required to offer Namaz as per Quran so this Holi read Namaz at home. No need to step out. Regarding [#lovejihad](https://twitter.com/hashtag/lovejihad?src=hash) propoganda start making reverse advertisement now. Lets see their tolerance when a burqa clad girl is playing holi [#BoycottSurfExcel](https://twitter.com/hashtag/BoycottSurfExcel?src=hash)

[3,774](https://twitter.com/intent/like?tweet_id=1104428268441104384" \o "Like)

[9:06 PM - Mar 9, 2019](https://twitter.com/Payal_Rohatgi/status/1104428268441104384)

[2,442 people are talking about this](https://twitter.com/Payal_Rohatgi/status/1104428268441104384%22%20%5Co%20%22View%20the%20conversation%20on%20Twitter)

[Twitter Ads info and privacy](https://support.twitter.com/articles/20175256)

Right-wing trolls on Twitter are labelling this as an attempt to promote “love jihad” and calling the ad “anti-Hindu.” Many are objecting to the depiction of a Hindu girl and Muslim boy and asking, “Why not a Muslim girl and Hindu boy instead?”

“Love jihad” is a conspiracy theory that alleges that Muslim men target Hindu girls to marry so they can convert them to Islam by faking love.

Many have boycotted the product and are asking others to do the same. Trolls have radicalized the advertisement depicting harmony and have attempted to color it with communal hate.

A contrast is not, however, a contradiction. We welcome you today, not principally to commemorate the past, but rather to herald the present, and to gaze to the future. Prime Minister, thank you for coming. It is my pleasure to invite you to speak to us.

We have the privilege tonight to welcome the High Commissioner of India, Mr. and Mrs. When talking of the land of the great grandfathers of 70% of the Mauritian population, one is baffled with ideas that one does not know where to start. Let us just say that India, home to 1.3 billion people, or 17% of humanity, destined to be the world’s most populous nation by 2040, is the home to the world's largest democracy, a land of all possibilities, a land of economic dynamism, a land of cultural vibrancy and a land of social mobility. Sceptics sometimes suggest that democracy is impossible to create or to maintain in a country of the size of India because of its diversity or level of economic development. India has proved them wrong over and over again and of course this past May.

The ties between our two countries are so multiple, deep and enduring that frankly they require no elaboration or rehearsal this afternoon. Sceptics sometimes suggest that democracy is all but impossible to create or to maintain in countries of a certain size, degree of diversity or level of economic development. Over the past 68 years, India has proved to be a standing rebuke to such sceptics.

The social ascendency is palpable on the trip from the airport of Bombay to downtown………… the number of high rises and the cleanliness of the city. The cultural activity is best explained by the film industry that produces the largest number of films in the world and keeps millions glued to the entertainment of Bollywood. Some productions also participate in the prestigious Cannes Film festival.

India is also home to same famous families who have formed some of the largest multinationals ……… the Tatas, the Ambanis who are creating jobs in Europe and of course Mittal, the world number one manufacturer of Steel.

Mauritius must feel lucky to have a friend like India. We are a country without much natural resources and we have survived and progressed thanks to the support of European countries, some of whom had colonized us.

England and France have been our all-weather allies. Though being net sugar exporters, they have bought our sugar at guaranteed prices; they admitted our textile products on preferential tariffs to help us compete with the Eastern low salary countries. The European support helped us leave our projected status of an overcrowded barracoon and join the club of NICs. Our next goal is to join the superior economy club.

May we look forward to the contribution of India in our next drive. Here, we have in mind of Mauritius being made regional offices of the Indian multi-nationals and their investments. And since we are on the subject of bilateral cooperation, I would like to add one personal note, which I think should be permissible between friends. India could have followed the European example and allowed us to enjoy the advantages of the DDAA as it was and assured the vibrancy of our financial services.

Excellency, the ties between our two countries are so multiple, deep and enduring that frankly they require no emphasis this evening. And we are sure that with your presence here, our ties will only be reinforced.

We would like to wish you a happy and fruitful stay among us. Whether it rains or shines, let us live our passion and commitment for an ever-friendly relationship. Long live India-Mauritius friendship.

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## [**Poor man’s Dilip Kumar**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1485045/poor-mans-dilip-kumar)

[Jawed Naqvi](https://www.dawn.com/authors/280/jawed-naqvi)May 28, 2019

[Facebook Count](https://www.facebook.com/sharer/sharer.php?u=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.dawn.com%2Fnews%2F1485045&display=popup&ref=plugin)

[Twitter Share](https://twitter.com/share?text=Poor%20man%E2%80%99s%20Dilip%20Kumar%0A&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.dawn.com%2Fnews%2F1485045&counturl=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.dawn.com%2Fnews%2F1485045)

[23](https://www.dawn.com/news/1485045/poor-mans-dilip-kumar#comments)

THE late movie actor Rajendra Kumar was sometimes described as the poor man’s Dilip Kumar. Rajendra, like other would-be Dilips, found popularity as a star but was a mediocre actor. The comparison came to mind when a Delhi University professor suggested the other day that Narendra Modi was very likely envious of Jawaharlal Nehru and saw himself in the lofty image of India’s first prime minister.

In a Freudian sense such a thing is possible, of course, even if we have to exclude Nehru’s peerless erudition, sense of history, scientific temper and a passionately secular worldview from the equation.

Nehru spoke clearly and simply, and was loved for that. Modi is probably more passionately idolised by his followers as a gripping speaker and possibly as a beacon of hope to them. He too has cultivated several foreign friends who he calls by their first name and who are always ready to partake of his bear hugs. The world of psychology, literature and cinema is replete with examples of characters that secretly loved those they hated.

I have been thinking for some time, and more so since Modi’s spectacular victory last week, that he could be leading an Iran-like awakening of the underdog, the politically suppressed hoi polloi who were shunned as cultural misfits in the imperious world of the Shah of Iran. Khomeini challenged the Shah’s Westernised cultural plank with an uprising that took Iran and the CIA by surprise.

Article continues after ad

The masses seemed to be securely with Modi, as they were with Nehru, and to an extent with Indira Gandhi.

While Modi may resemble this aspect of Khomeini (if there ever could be a pro-American Khomeini), he fails to live up to the Spartan life that the Ayatollah and in significant ways Mahatma Gandhi promoted. At the very outset, the Indian prime minister’s name woven in gold threads on a brand new Nehru jacket he wore to greet Barack Obama got etched in public memory — and it was at odds with his description of himself as a man of poor origins. The conflict, however, became his métier.

Modi’s alleged love with the Nehru image — though he never tires of berating him day in and day out — would not be the first by a leader from the Hindutva flock fawned over India’s charismatic first prime minister. Atal Behari Vajpayee had tears and awe in his eyes, according to reporters, who saw him taking the chair that Nehru had occupied as foreign minister. Nehru was his own foreign minister and usually worked from that office. Vajpayee never failed to mention how Nehru had sent him to the UN to represent India at a very young age.

Listening to Modi’s welcome address to his winning MPs on Saturday, one could glean a marked moderation in the tone and also a different purpose from the one we were used to over the last five years. The problem, as I should argue with my professor friend, was that the moderation, the wooing of Muslims with calls for communal unity, appeared to have been nudged by the bad press the prime minister had received from foreign shores during the long and bitter campaign. People of the Hindutva flock don’t always question their description as fascists, but to be called ‘divider in chief’ may have miffed the prime minister.

Nehru seldom, if ever, had to struggle for good press, largely because he was a good communicator but also because he had little or nothing to hide. Even with the China debacle he was seen as a tragic hero, not the villain of the piece the Hindu right makes him out to be.

Some of my liberal friends got upset when I quoted Modi’s speech the other day. They were certain he was faking it. Who would believe a scary right-winger when he urges a charged-up new flock of his coalition MPs not to bear any grudge against those who didn’t vote for them? He said India should work in the spirit of 1857 when Hindus and Muslims had united in a militant upsurge to overthrow British rule. That was the way to get India its truer democracy, Modi said. I was only quoting him as someone responds to a strange spectacle with what journalists call straight reporting.

Let’s go along with my friends’ view that Modi was faking this idea about communal harmony. He had spoken of sabka saath, sabka vikaas earlier. Now he had added vishwas, they reminded me incredulously. Their reference was to the 2014 promise of progress for everyone, to which Modi had added winning everyone’s trust as the new element.

So see this discussion with the tested idea that fascism does move the masses along albeit with a false consciousness, targeting a false enemy. But the masses seemed to be securely with Modi, as they were with Nehru, and to an extent with Indira Gandhi.

As luck would have it, the only time I interviewed Dr Manmohan Singh was when he was finance minister. I asked him why he was not quitting over the Harshad Mehta affair, the securities scam in which foreign and domestic banks were complicit in siphoning public money. He kept mum, his default posture in a crisis not very different from his mentor Narasimha Rao. (Remember Rao slept through the day when Babri Masjid was razed.) Manmohan Singh has a more agreeable demeanour than most Indian politicians. But his economic reforms were nothing but handing over public assets to private buccaneers.

The phenomenon has seen tycoons and fly-by-night operators salting public money in foreign banks. Singh was a Nehruvian South-South cooperation champion whose economic talent was harnessed by then prime minister Rao to launch India’s neo-liberal adventure whose byproduct Narendra Modi was destined to be. Just in case Modi does have a secret aspiration to be Nehru, Singh too never fails to see himself as an heir of Pandit Nehru. Imagine a contest between a fascist Nehru and a neo-liberal Nehru?

unless Modi demonstrates an ability to rise above himself and beyond the Hindutva vision of the RSS.

Accordingly, one is tempted to say the RSS has won but India has lost.