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Is China sending a signal in replacing Qin Gang?

The change in the foreign ministry could be Xi Jinping's way of acknowledging that he chose the wrong person for a very sensitive job.



Gunjan Singh, JUL 27 2023, 10:32 IST | UPDATED: JUL 27 2023, 10:32 IST



Ex-China Foreign Minister Qin Gang. Credit: Reuters File Photo

After a long month of speculation, the post of Chinese Foreign Minister has been [again handed over to Wang Yi](#). The National People's Congress (NPC) announced the official removal of Qin Gang after [he was missing for the last month](#) being last sighted at an event on June 25.

Qin had served as the ambassador to the United States in 2021 at a time when bilateral ties faced the most challenges. He was considered close to China's President Xi Jinping, and was known for his aggressive foreign policy approach and the 'wolf-warrior diplomacy'. Fifty-seven-year-old Qin was one of the youngest leaders to be appointed China's Foreign Minister.

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... [Lina Hsu also vanished for a few weeks in 2021.](#) Book shop owners from Hong Kong have vanished and resurfaced after a few months. In most of these cases, apart from Xi, those who resurface after 'disappearing' would have gained some insights into their behaviour and how they need to modify it to align with that of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).

Such actions have been undertaken by the CCP consistently to bring major critics of its policies and authority in line. Qin's case, yet again, underscores the opaqueness of the Chinese political system. It highlights that even high-ranking officials are not spared. The rumours of Qin's bad health as well as extramarital affairs have not been proved. It also establishes the fact that even the top leadership of the party and government are on a tight leash with little room for wavering from the party line, or if they are seen as causing harm to Xi's image.

The decision to appoint Wang seems too rushed, and an indication that the position is being handed over to a more experienced hand. Qin's appointment had come as a surprise to several people and mistakes by him would reflect poorly on Xi's choices. This also raises questions about Xi's choice of people for the top posts, many of whom lack experience or are incapable.

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This change in the foreign ministry comes at a time when Sino-US ties are facing a major challenge. China is opening to the world after lifting its zero COVID-19 policy and its economy is yet to get back on track especially now that the US has imposed new sanctions. These have affected Beijing's global posturing and Xi's positioning both globally and within China. The change in China's foreign ministry could be Beijing's effort to rehaul its foreign policy outlook and image. With the US consistent in its statements on Taiwan and India-US ties on the upswing, China could do with such a change. Adding to Beijing's woes is the negative image China has generated with its support to Russia in the latter's war against Ukraine.

The change could be Xi's way of acknowledging that he chose the wrong person for a very sensitive job and the reappointment of Wang an indication of course correction; that he is looking at experience over aggressiveness. Is this a sign that Xi's China might be abandoning its aggressive foreign policy, and a hint at China's long term global agenda?

(Gunjan Singh is Assistant Professor, OP Jindal Global University)

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'Oppenheimer' has reopened debate in the US. In Japan, it's more complex

What can we learn from a country's choice of when -- or whether -- to screen World War II drama Oppenheimer?



Bloomberg Opinion, JUL 27 2023, 10:41 IST | UPDATED: JUL 27 2023, 11:30 IST



By Gearoid Reidy

What can we learn from a country’s choice of when -- or whether -- to screen World War II drama *Oppenheimer*?

Christopher Nolan’s blockbuster biopic was released in the US just after the anniversary of the Trinity test, the culmination of the Manhattan Project on July 16, 1945, that paved the way for the postwar Pax Americana. In South Korea, it will hit screens on National Liberation Day, which marks Tokyo’s August 15 surrender in World War II — something the bomb is credited with. And in Japan itself, which next month will see 78 years since Little Boy and Fat Man were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, respectively, the movie isn’t scheduled for release at all yet.

That might reflect the country’s complicated views on the war. In the US, the movie has reopened the debate on the bomb and whether it was a war crime. These revisionist discussions, which are based on what we know now, aren’t especially helpful. Contrary to some reports, *Oppenheimer* has absolutely not been banned in Japan — unlike some of its Asian neighbors, the country rarely takes such steps, even for politically insensitive content. But the movie’s distributor has yet to schedule a release date; assuming one comes at all, it will be some time after the Aug. 6 and 9 memorials.

Also read | [Nolan's 'Oppenheimer' sparks controversy after sex scene features Bhagavad Gita](#)

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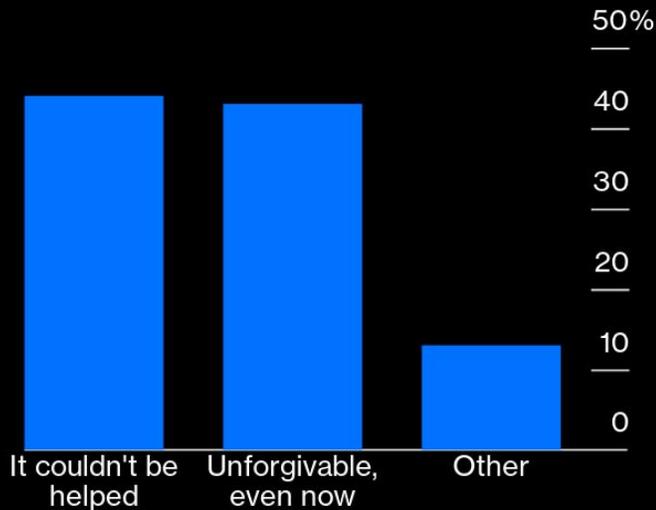
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Even on those anniversaries, Japan tends to avoid discussion of the rights and wrongs. That’s not to say its citizens have a uniform position — far from it. A 2015 poll by public broadcaster NHK found that 40 per cent of the population agreed with the proposition that the US had no choice but to use the bomb. Interestingly, in Hiroshima, that number was 44 per cent — higher than the country at large — and topped those who called it “unforgivable.”

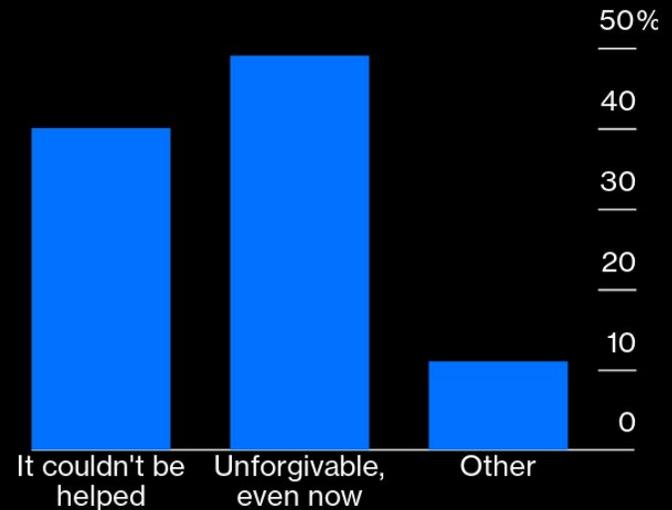
Japan's Mixed Feelings

Residents were asked what they thought of the US decision to drop atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki

Hiroshima city



Japan



Source: NHK, 2015

Bloomberg Opinion

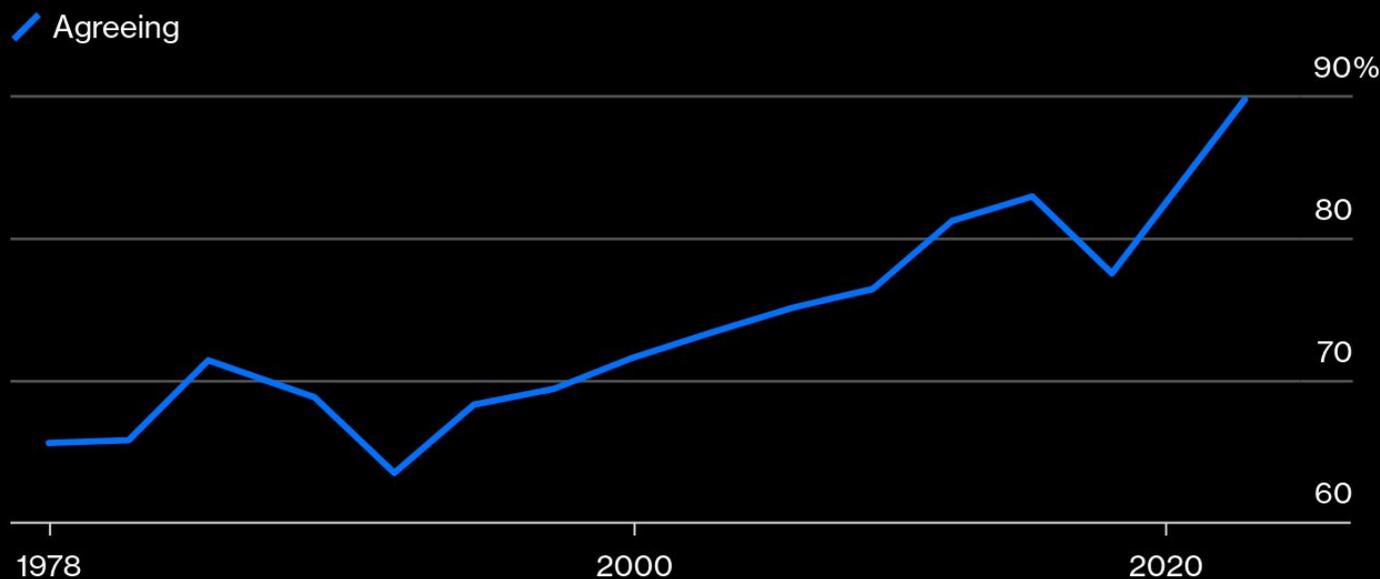
But if and when local audiences can have their say on the movie, perhaps it may trigger a discussion instead on Japan's ambiguous, if not contradictory, stance toward nuclear weapons — a technology it publicly opposes, but simultaneously depends on for its survival in an increasingly hostile neighborhood. As the country prepares for a historic shift in defense spending, the time for that debate is now.

One rather typical headline from Kyodo News on *Oppenheimer's* US premiere reads, "Biography of the 'Father of the Atomic Bomb' Released; Doesn't Depict the Devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki." It's a common sentiment on both sides of the Pacific, but Japan's own depictions also often lack such historical context, tending instead toward sentimental looks at the rank-and-file caught up in events. The horrors both visited on the country and those Japan committed elsewhere are treated more akin to a natural disaster.

Not retreading old arguments might be wiser, of course. While the US is still chewing over decision to use the bomb back then, Japan has largely accepted the postwar reality. In a recent survey, a record 90 per cent praised the US-Japan alliance for helping preserve the country's peace and safety, a figure that has steadily climbed over the past 40 years.

Japanese Public Approves of the US Alliance

Respondents were asked if they think the Japan-US Security Treaty contributes to the peace and security of Japan



Source: Japan Cabinet Office

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Last year, Tokyo came close to starting a serious debate on the appropriateness of its three non-nuclear principles, under which the government is committed to not possessing, producing or permitting atomic weapons to be brought into the country. Early in 2022, Shinzo Abe suggested that it was time to discuss hosting US nukes. At the time, Abe was a senior voice in the ruling Liberal Democratic Party, one who many then thought could have had a third spin as prime minister.

“We should not regard a discussion on how the world’s security is maintained as taboo,” Abe said at the time, referencing a commotion caused in 2006 when then-LDP policy chief Shoichi Nakagawa suggested discussing the building of atomic weapons in response to North Korea’s first nuclear test. Bemusing as it may seem now, concerns ran high at the time over Japanese remilitarisation rather than the rapidly strengthening China, and the comments caused international alarm. A few years earlier, a deputy vice-minister of defense was forced to resign after making similar remarks.

Many divisions in Japan have moved on since, but this debate isn’t one of them. The idea of weapon sharing was flatly rejected by Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, whose family hails from Hiroshima and is a lifelong denuclearisation advocate. Abe was assassinated before he could capitalize on Kishida’s relatively weak public support. Lacking a significant voice, the discussion has never really launched.

In May, the prime minister took the Group of Seven leaders to view the bomb’s aftermath in Hiroshima, with the premiers pledging to work toward “an ultimate goal of a world without nuclear weapons with undiminished security for all.” Contrast that with the alarmism of former US Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, who the same month said Japan was “heading towards becoming a nuclear power in five years.” This is a common refrain of Kissinger’s, who for decades fretted over the specter of a remilitarised Tokyo and pushed for the US to move closer to China to restrain it.

Kishida will have no such plans. But he should not be so quick to dismiss the discussion. In a world where conflict between the US and China seems increasingly possible, Japan must not be afraid to have real talks about how it would respond, including what part atomic weapons would play — and what might happen if the US nuclear umbrella (perhaps in the hands of a less reliable White House) was no longer extended over the country. Russia’s invasion of the Ukraine has powerfully demonstrated that at least some of the post-Cold War assumptions were wrong; Japan can’t afford to be left in a decades-old debate when conflict around Taiwan seems closer than ever.

Oppenheimer may have revived an unhelpful reinterpretation of WWII. But assuming viewers in Japan get a chance to experience it, it might trigger a more useful discourse in the country that experienced the horrors firsthand.

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India can't lead the Global South and not feed it

Even if it is soon lifted, the export ban is a big mistake for India, both economically and geopolitically.



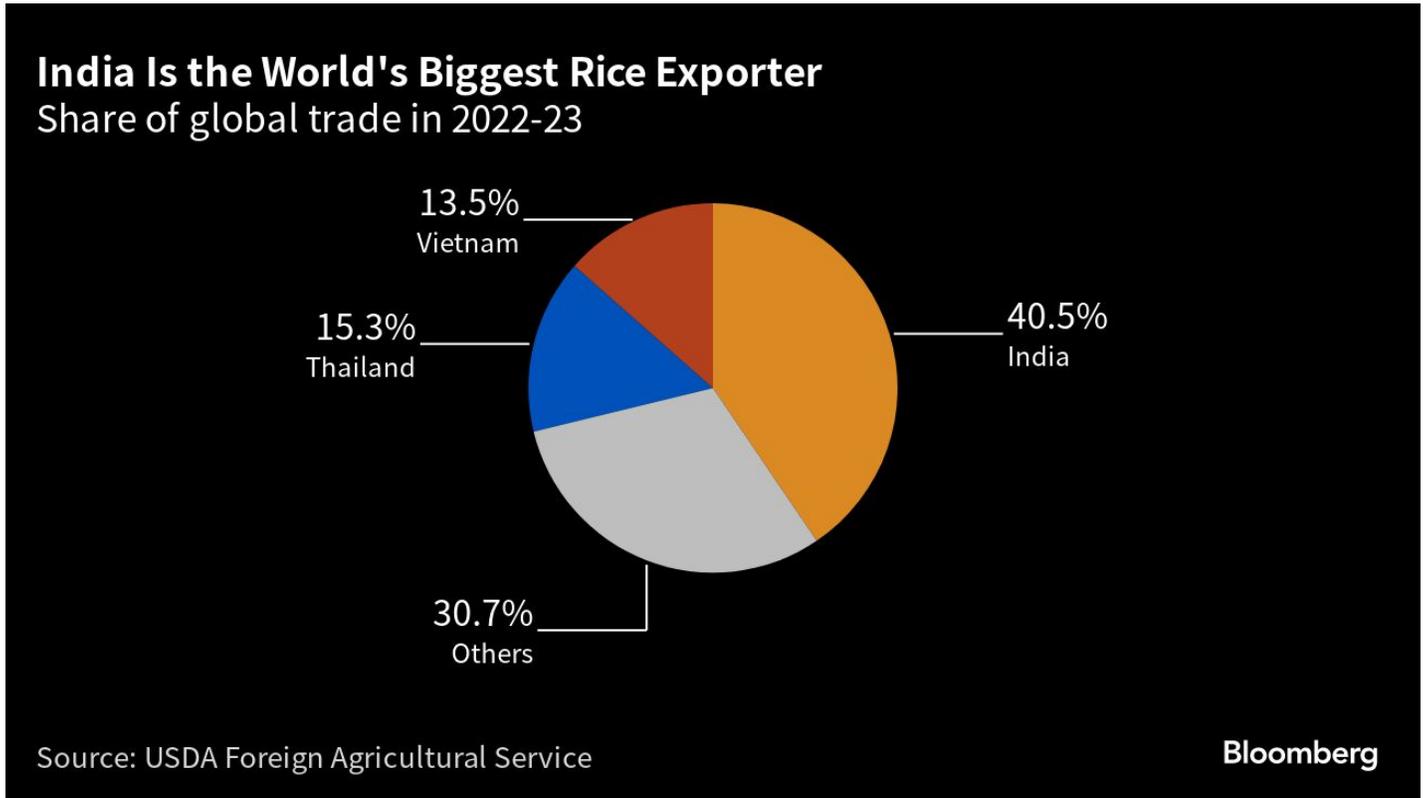
Bloomberg Opinion, JUL 27 2023, 10:20 IST | UPDATED: JUL 27 2023, 10:20 IST



By Mihir Sharma

Global food markets have been thrown into chaos yet again — not only because of Russia’s decision to pull out of the Black Sea grain deal, but also India’s announcement that it would ban the export of many varieties of rice. The partial exit of the rice market’s largest trading nation, with about a 40 per cent share of exports, has led to fears that food inflation will race out of control, particularly in countries of the Global South that are already struggling with high debt levels and inflated food and fuel bills.

Even if it is soon lifted, the export ban is a big mistake for India, both economically and geopolitically. It dramatically undermines Indian leaders’ recent claims that this country is the natural and responsible leader of the developing world.



New Delhi’s justifications for its decision are familiar: rising food prices at home, with a general election looming next year. Low food inflation has traditionally been a crucial determinant of electoral success in India — and domestic prices for rice have risen over 10 per cent in the past year. The government blames ballooning exports.

Also Read: [New Economic Update: IMF Urges India To remove export restrictions](#)

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What's not clear to most Indian economists is why export bans are the best answer for domestic consumers when the government is also sitting on vast stocks of rice that it could easily distribute to poorer Indians or release into the open market to cool down prices.

The fact is, for control-mad bureaucrats in New Delhi, export bans have become the first, not last, response to rising domestic prices. Just a few months after the Russian invasion of Ukraine roiled wheat markets last year, for example, India shut down wheat exports — once again, callously increasing food insecurity in the emerging world just when it was at its most vulnerable.

Indian bureaucrats like to claim — including at the World Trade Organization — that their restrictive trade policies are meant to protect our millions of subsistence farmers. In practice, however, farmers are the last thing on policy makers' minds. If agricultural income was the government's number-one priority, it would not shut down exports just as prices are rising and farmers have an opportunity to make a rare profit.

Also Read — [Rice prices set to climb further after India export ban, trade at standstill](#)

If India is to take on a leading role in the world, it must understand that its decisions have global ramifications. Even in richer countries such as the US, consumers — many from the Indian diaspora — have stampeded supermarkets in attempts to hoard various Indian varieties of rice.

Indian policy makers have their defense ready against such complaints. They will point out that the ban doesn't extend to the most popular Indian variant, basmati. (This will be little consolation to Indians abroad, particularly those from South India, who prefer shorter-grain varieties.)

They could also, with perfect truth, point out that in spite of the ban on exports announced last year, India actually shipped out almost twice as much wheat during the summer of 2022 as it had the previous year. This wasn't because of leakages in the system. Partly, it was because contracts signed before the ban were still fulfilled.

But it was also because other governments could lobby Indian officials to make exceptions for specific wheat shipments. A similar system will be put into place for rice.

That's India trying to have its cake and eat it too. It wants to hold onto its grain while also casting itself as a bountiful provider to the rest of the developing world.

I'm not sure this trick will work more than once. It's one thing to buy Indian grain on the open market; it's quite another to have to go, hat in hand, to Indian diplomats and ask for rice or wheat because you are worried about food riots.

More likely, India's short-sighted decision will build up resentment over time. In fact, anger might grow rather quickly if global rice prices hit a 10-year high and the developing world blames shortages largely on the Indian ban.

The central prong of India's case for leadership to the Global South was always that, unlike the West or China, it saw other developing countries as equals. Indian policymakers should rethink arbitrary export bans that leave those nations feeling like supplicants instead. Global leadership requires taking on responsibility for the world, too.

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No confidence motion will not bring solace to Manipur

The Prime Minister is a good public speaker, and now he has been handed an opportunity to speak on any issue and in any manner he likes in is reply.



Bharat Bhushan, JUL 27 2023, 09:55 IST | UPDATED: JUL 27 2023, 09:55 IST



The outcome of the [vote of no confidence moved by the opposition parties](#) in the Lok Sabha is no secret. They are not going to get the Prime Minister's scalp. The Opposition does not have the numbers in the Lok Sabha. Yet it serves a purpose. The Opposition feels that the no-confidence motion was their last resort to get a meaningful debate on Manipur in Parliament.

...ever, then it would have been at the mercy of the presiding officers of the two houses of Parliament and the government's willingness.

In the Lok Sabha, it tried [an adjournment motion under Rule 184](#) which would have entailed voting after the debate on the motion. The Treasury benches wanted the debate under a rule that would not involve voting.

In the Rajya Sabha, [the Chairman did not allow a discussion under Rule 267](#) which permits the suspension of the scheduled business to allow time for an in-depth discussion of an urgent matter. There is no formal motion required, no voting, and no time limit to the duration of the discussion. Rajya Sabha Chairman Jagdeep Dhankar is known to have criticised such motions for having become “[a known mechanism of causing disruption](#).” Indeed, the last instance of a discussion under this rule being accepted was on demonetisation by the then Chairman of Rajya Sabha Hamid Ansari.

Instead, in the Rajya Sabha, the government wanted the debate under Rule 167, which limits the time allotted for discussion to two-and-a-half hours. Now, some [MPs from the North-East have given notice](#) for a debate under Rule 167 to the Chairman, which entails the government's reply after a debate, the response of the mover of the motion followed by voting. It remains to be seen whether this will be allowed.

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The Opposition was also insistent that Prime Minister Narendra Modi speak in the debate. With the government reluctant to agree to this pre-condition, the Opposition was perhaps pushed into moving a vote of no confidence. The Speaker has no choice once this is done but to suspend all business of the House, and take it up for discussion.

The Opposition, through the no confidence motion, has ensured that a structured debate will take place, and that it will take priority over all other business in the Lok Sabha. An assured discussion has been secured with a structured response from the Treasury benches. The debate normally takes place over two to three days with the Leader of the House, the Prime Minister, replying to the debate as the last speaker on the subject defending his government. No clarifications can be sought on his reply.

This means that up to the day of the Prime Minister's reply — i.e., the first two days — the Opposition grabs the media headlines. The effectiveness of the Opposition's position would depend on the speakers fielded. The Opposition will obviously prioritise the Manipur issue but because of the general nature of the no confidence motion, it is free to underline the failure of the government on other fronts as well.

Normally, the opposition parties introduce a no confidence motion towards the fag end of the life of a particular Lok Sabha session, even while aware that it will be defeated. It might be recalled that the Left parties moved a no-confidence motion [against the Manmohan Singh government in July 2008](#), barely six months before the next general election was to be announced, and [against the Narendra Modi government in July 2018](#). Both were defeated as expected. However, what these no confidence motions achieve is to set the agenda for the upcoming general election.

Nevertheless, the no confidence motion may not be an unmitigated victory for the Opposition. If the focus of the Opposition was to somehow get Modi to speak — then he will speak but on issues which will include Manipur among many others. A no confidence motion by its general nature expressing lack of faith in the government cannot focus only on one issue. The field is open to the government to showcase what it thinks are its achievements. The issue is also no longer whether the Prime Minister should speak on Manipur or not. He must defend his government and is free to emphasise the areas he wants. In that sense, the focus will be diverted from the immediate as well as the long-term implications of the ethnic cleansing in Manipur.

Undoubtedly, the Prime Minister is a good public speaker, and now he has been handed an opportunity to speak on any issue and in any manner he likes in his reply. He does not have to limit himself to Manipur, and he makes headlines every time he attacks the Opposition by the pungency of his rhetoric. Manipur's crisis could, thus, get buried under the political rhetoric of the government. Perhaps, the Prime Minister was waiting for just such an opportune moment which has been served to him on a platter.

Modi not only uses street language when he engages in political slugfest, but also tends to view the Opposition from the perspective of a streetfighter. The history of his public and rare parliamentary speeches show that he is not shy of stooping low — [comparing a woman MP's laughter to the laughter of a demoness in the Ramayana TV serial](#), alleging that former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was the “[only person who knows the art of bathing in a](#)

(Bharat Bhushan is a Delhi-based journalist.)

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Manipur may not recover from this indifference

Violence, silence, and stereotype blend together to create the symbolic hypocrisy of the BJP-led regime.



Shiv Visvanathan, JUL 26 2023, 15:31 IST | UPDATED: JUL 26 2023, 15:31 IST



Every atrocity from rape to genocide generates a standard etiquette of social response. There is no sense of feeling and little reference to justice. All one needs are the correct words.

The [recent Manipur violence](#) brings this hypocrisy out dramatically. Think of Prime Minister Narendra Modi traversing the world for two months, suddenly playing patriarch fighting for the honour of every woman. Congress leader Sonia Gandhi [responds in contempt](#), but has little to say about the Prime Minister [equating events in Rajasthan with Manipur](#). Delhi Chief Minister and Aam Aadmi Party leader Arvind Kejriwal [cuts in with the right comment](#) but creates at the most a storm in a Delhi tea-cup.

Our outrage, and our sense of horror seems to have been normalised into a standard behavioural response. Even Pavlov's lab rats might show more eccentricity. Very soon outrage lapses into indifference or hypocrisy. The responses are finally dictated more by electoral politics than by any sense of understanding or empathy.

Today, responses to violence have been ritualised both as acts of production and consumption. The recent riots reveal that violence today is an act of policy normalised through electoral politics. Violence in fact, is symbolically consumed through a digital repetition that replaces memory. A video footage enacts the second round of violence reproducing the act of rape. There is little sense of outrage, only vicariousness. The very act of replay reproduces a sense of mimicry. History repeats itself, not as a farce but as a video recording.

Politicians are equally empty. Outrage, in fact, becomes an emptying out of responses. The question is, how do we confront such a response. How do we rewrite a constructive narrative which violence and media have been repeating to ensure a point. The predictable sense of outrage lacks new shades of morality. The human being disappears. As sociological categories take over, society reads the marginal and the minority as dispensable. Some want them to be abandoned in any future narrative.

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In fact, two models of violence appear clearly in the current era. The first is represented by the crisis in Himachal Pradesh, where development becomes a form of violence for the erasure of organic communities and ecologies. The second, in Manipur where violence is a form of development consolidating existing power structures. Violence becomes a currency of power; violence becomes a language of the hegemonic outlining of who gets what and who does not. Violence underwrites the existing social contract. Violence also delimits your repertoire of rights with Meitei and Naga claiming turf, while the Kuki is caught in the liminality of terrains. Violence becomes both a symbolic and material text legitimising the politics of current discourse.

One must reread violence several times because the standard protests are skin deep. One must read it symbolically, ecologically, and demographically.

Language needs to be reinvented. The Prime Minister uses cliché echoing “anguish” as he stands in “the temple of democracy”. Piety in the form of correctness hides distance. Even a quick investigation shows that [the FIR for the incident was gathering dust](#), and the Prime Ministers belated reaction, which was a combination of caution and distance, adds to the suspicion. Words like horror used too often get lost in the stereotypes. One needs a return to storytelling.

One must realise the role of woman in Manipur. One senses this as one recollects the role of the mothers of Manipur in confronting [the earlier violence of the Assam Rifles](#). One finds another resonance when one recollects Irom Sharmila’s epic fast for over 15 years. One must grasp that violence, silence, and stereotype blend together to create the symbolic hypocrisy of the regime.

A different sense of civics and governance is crucial. The citizen must emerge in these narratives. One must ask, whether the communities are consulted after such events. A civil rights report needs to retell the story. Truth can hardly be left to current regimes where the body becomes a site of violence and indifference, reinforcing electoral politics.

One needs a different therapy, a new kind of storytelling, a narrative that echoes the truth commissions, in reworking the tacit structures of violence. Today, stereotypes and violence become two sides of an indifference from which Manipur may not recover. The emptiness of democracy is stark.

(Shiv Visvanathan is a social scientist and professor, OP Jindal Global University.)

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