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INDIA BRACES TO EVACUATE NATIONALS FROM SUDAN



Rescue at hand: Indian citizens stranded in Sudan arrive at Port Sudan for their evacuation from the country.PTI

Operation Kaveri to rescue 3,000 stranded Indians; 500 of them have reached Port Sudan, says Jaishankar; two C-130J heavy-lift aircraft and naval ship on standby for the mission

India has started Operation Kaveri to evacuate its nationals from conflict-torn Sudan, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on Monday. According to information available here, nearly 3,000 Indians are stuck in various parts of Sudan, including the national capital, Khartoum, and distant provinces such as Darfur.

“Operation Kaveri gets under way to bring back our citizens stranded in Sudan. About 500 Indians have reached Port Sudan. More on their way. Our ships and aircraft are set to bring them back home. Committed to assist all our

brethren in Sudan,” Mr. Jaishankar said in an announcement.

India had earlier stationed two C-130J heavy-lift aircraft in Jeddah and sent INS Sumedha to Port Said for the operation.

The evacuation acquired urgency in view of the total breakdown of essential services in Sudan. Food and water are in short supply, and there is power outage.

Indians in the region have reached out to the government, showing videos of indiscriminate attacks that also targeted residences of the Indian community and looting of essential items by the rebel paramilitary.

The political crisis in Sudan turned into a countrywide armed conflict on April 15 after a disagreement between the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) over the Security Sector Reform (SSR) spiralled into an armed confrontation between the commanders of the two wings.

The conflict left hundreds of Indians stranded at the airport in Khartoum. They subsequently took shelter in nearby hotels as fighting intensified.

The fighting also enveloped the Indian Embassy in Khartoum, forcing Indian diplomats to work remotely while they maintained contact with the members of the Indian community stranded in the country.

Sources had earlier told The Hindu that the Embassy was in contact with all sides in the conflict and was urging them for a ceasefire to ensure speedy evacuation of Indians. A WhatsApp group was created on April 16 to coordinate for safety and possible evacuation.

The process finally began on Id when Saudi Arabian military forces airlifted a few Indian nationals along with citizens of several “brotherly and friendly” countries. India had maintained contact with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, the United States, the U.K., and Egypt over the evolving situation on the ground. Mr. Jaishankar, who was on a visit to Latin America, had broken his trip in New York where he discussed Sudan with UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres. He had earlier spoken to his counterparts from Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

AFTER DEATH OF TWO CHEETAHS, M.P. SEEKS NEW SITE FOR THE FELINES

On Sunday, the Kuno Park had its second cheetah fatality in less than a month.

The Madhya Pradesh Forest Department has asked the Central government for an “alternative” site for cheetahs currently introduced at the Kuno National Park (KNP), which has seen the death of two felines in less than a month.

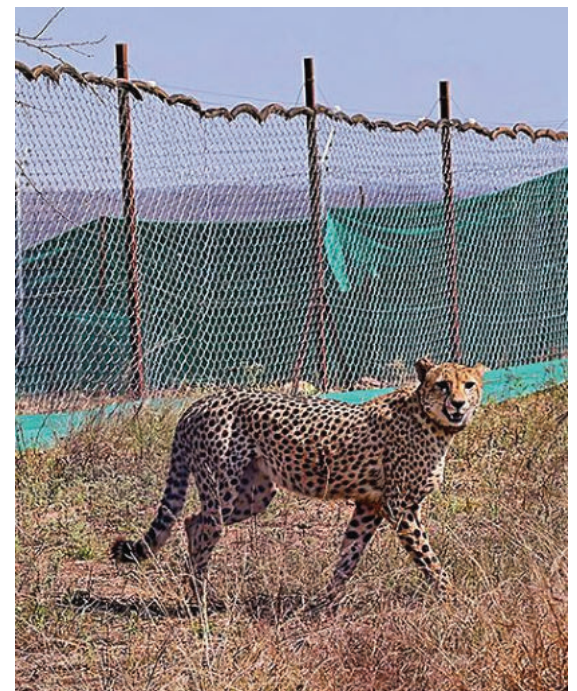
A senior State forest official on condition of anonymity said they do not have enough logistical support for the upkeep of the cheetahs, brought in two batches of eight and 12 from Namibia and South Africa, respectively, since September last year.

“We need nine staffers to keep an eye on one cheetah round the clock. We don’t have enough hands,” the official said.

However, S.P. Yadav, Head of Project Cheetah and senior official in the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA), told The Hindu that “as of today [Monday] we haven’t got such a request but if we do, we will look at it”.

He also said that mortality among cheetahs was expected and Project Cheetah’s planning factored this in. “Even if 50% of the animal population survives, it should be considered a success,” he said. While the existing population of cheetahs would remain within the larger Kuno landscape, newer batches of imported cheetahs would be located in Gandhi Sagar and Nauradehi wildlife sanctuaries in M.P. These are reserves that are still being developed to be made suitable for hosting cheetahs.

On Sunday, the KNP witnessed a second cheetah fatality in less than a month as a six-year-old male feline named Uday, translocated from South Africa in February, died. The exact cause of the feline’s death has not been identified yet, an official earlier said. The incident is seen as a major setback for the ambitious Project Cheetah, under which 20 felines were translocated to KNP in Sheopur district from Namibia and South Africa in separate batches in September 2022 and February this year. One of the eight Namibian cheetahs, Sasha, aged more than four-and-a-half-years, died of a kidney ailment on March 27. Another cheetah, named Siyaya, recently gave birth to four cubs in KNP. Besides, cheetah Oban, now



renamed Pavan, has strayed out of the KNP multiple times.

Two-States plan

Asked about the space shortage, the M.P. forest official said it was secondary and added that “not just space, we need a lot of logistics”. Notably, before the cheetahs were imported, some experts had cautioned that shortage of space was likely to affect the cheetah reintroduction project at the KNP, which has a core area of 748 sq. km and buffer zone of 487 sq. km.

M.P. Principal Chief Conservator of Forest (Wildlife) J.S. Chauhan said his department has written a letter to the NTCA, requesting for an alternative place for the cheetahs. “If we start developing our sites like the Gandhi Sagar or the Nauradehi in M.P. as alternate sites, it will take two years and three years, respectively,” an official said.

The M.P. forest officials, however, pointed out that it is not a matter about two States. “The Centre has a major role to play. We need a note from the

Centre to proceed. We desperately need intervention from the Centre. If they don’t take the decision, it will be detrimental to the interest of the cheetah project,” a State forest official said.

According to some wildlife experts, a cheetah needs 100 sq. km area for its movement. However, KNP Director Uttam Sharma said, “Nobody exactly knows how much space a cheetah needs given the fact that these felines became extinct here seven decades ago. In fact, we are learning about them after their translocation.”

Bhopal-based journalist Deshdeep Saxena, who writes on wildlife and environment, said the international community of cheetah experts and biologists has always questioned this project for its “unscientific approach”. There are issues of lack of space and prey for the African cheetahs in KNP, he claimed.

THE WAGNER GROUP’S ACTIONS IN AFRICA

In which countries in Africa is the Wagner group active? What explains its dynamic relations with different countries across the African continent? What has the UN said about the Wagner group? What role does Russia play in the activities of the mercenary group?

The story so far:

After fighting erupted in Sudan’s capital Khartoum on April 15, questions have been raised over the involvement of the Wagner group, which has been active in African countries for years.

What is the Wagner group?

The Wagner group is a Russian paramilitary organisation headed by Yevgeny Prigozhin. Though it has been reportedly engaged in counter-militancy operations in Africa, its involvement is believed to have a more extensive scope covering political, economic and military fields. There have also been reports of the group supplying arms and weapons, and training regional forces in fighting jihadist threats. Despite its involvement in the Russia-Ukraine war, the Wagner group’s presence in Africa has continued. By siding with the domestic actors in a civil war situation, the group’s actions have impacted the democratic process in Africa.

Additionally, the West has been raising concerns over human rights violations and abuse of civilians related to the Wagner group’s presence in Africa.

How active is the Wagner group in Africa?

The Wagner group has been active in Sudan, Mali, the Central African Republic, Mozambique and Libya in Africa. The activities are related to providing direct support to authoritarian governments, supporting rival leadership engaged in internal wars, filling the void created by the withdrawal of the French military engagement, taking part in resource exploitation etc.

The Wagner group presents itself as a security provider to a few governments, mostly authoritarian ones in Africa. It has also been supporting rival leaders engaged in a civil war. In Sudan, it began deployments during former President Omar al-Bashir’s rule in 2017. The group’s ties with Sudan aimed at guarding mineral resources, notably gold mines, and therefore, supported Bashir’s government against international opposition. It also played a direct role in suppressing the Sudanese uprising in 2019 that toppled Bashir’s regime. In Sudan, Russia has recently forged a strong relationship with the Rapid Support Forces (RSP) and its commander, General Mohamed Hamadan Dagalo. The latter is a rival leader fighting against the Sudanese army. However, there are, as of now, only speculations on Wagner’s involvement in the ongoing violence in Sudan. Besides, Russia is set to sign an agreement with Sudan to build a military base in Port Sudan on the Red Sea.

Interestingly, in the Central African Republic, the Wagner Group is active beyond being engaged in security-related activities. According to a German news source DW, which refers to a report of eleven European media on the group, Wagner makes profits importing timber, “the government in Bangui granted a subsidiary unrestricted logging rights across 1,87,000 hectares.” The same source refers to a contract which gave access to Wagner subsidiaries to the Ndassima gold mine after withdrawing concessions from a Canadian mining company.

The Wagner group is also filling in the void created by anti-French sentiments which led to the withdrawal of the French forces from Africa. In Mali, the Wagner group trains local forces and provides security services in fighting extremist groups. Wagner’s deployment in Mali was followed by a nose-dive in France-Mali relations and the end of France’s Operation Barkhane.

A similar role of the Wagner group could be found in Burkina Faso. The country is reportedly involved with the Wagner group to deal with surging jihadist violence. After officially announcing the end of the French operation in November 2022, Burkina Faso turned towards Moscow taking similar steps as Mali did.

In Libya, approximately 1,200 Wagner mercenaries are believed to have fought for rebel leader Khalifa Haftar. Libya witnessed a civil war for the entirety of the 2010s before a ceasefire which is holding tenuously.

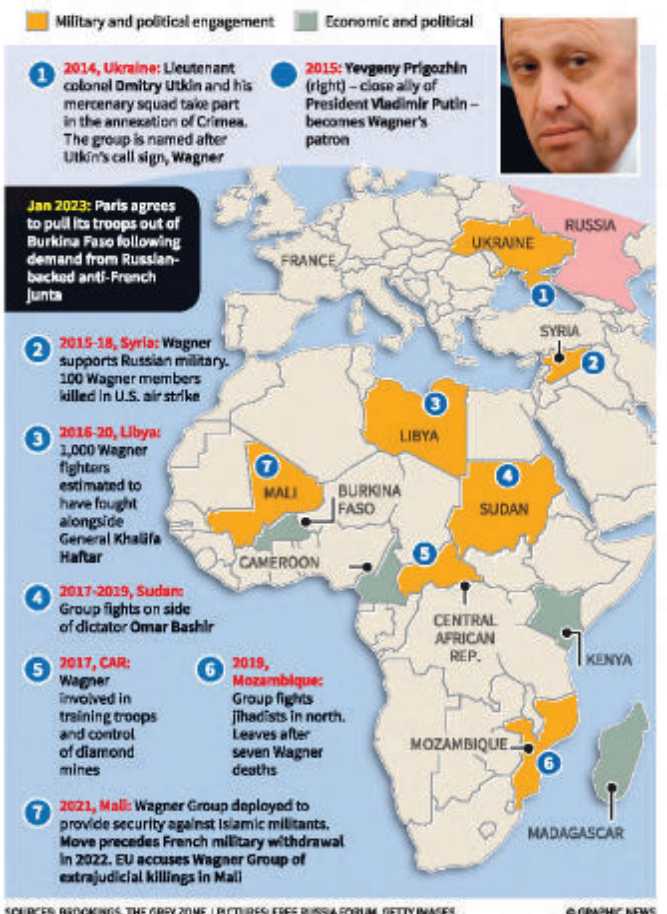
What is the group’s endgame in Africa?



In the open: An advertising screen, which promotes the Wagner group, is seen on a building in Moscow, Russia on March 27. The slogan on the screen reads: “Join the team of victors!”. REUTERS

Mercenaries in Africa

The Wagner group, a Russian paramilitary organisation, has been involved in multiple counter-military operations in Africa. While legally, the group is not a Russia-based private military company, it works closely with the Russian security apparatus



The primary goal of the group is to gain access to natural resources. Numerous reports from CNN in the U.S. to Al Jazeera in West Asia have referred to Russia's objectives in securing access to Africa's rich natural resources. The Wagner group's presence and moves make up one of the strategies to achieve this objective for the country.

Secondly, Russia sees the Wagner group as an instrument of diplomacy in Africa. The Russian strategy in Africa comes with minimal cost economically but with heavy political returns. Moscow secured 15 abstentions from African countries in the UN's resolution condemning its aggression in Ukraine. Moreover, Eritrea and Mali sided with Russia voting against the resolution.

And finally, Russia's access to African mineral deposits is believed to be providing crucial financial support to continue the war in Ukraine. For Russia, strong ties with African countries mean a pipeline of influence for Russia's war in Ukraine.

What are the implications for Africa?

For African countries, increasing dependency on Wagner mercenaries implies more violence, intimidation and uncertainties. A UN report in June 2021 said that private military groups, "particularly the Wagner Group," have violently harassed people and committed sexual violence. France, the U.S. and international human rights organisations accuse the mercenaries of extrajudicial killings in the Central African Republic and Mali.

Secondly, the group posits a threat to democratic governance in Africa. The collapse of relations between the West and Sahel countries, especially Mali and Burkina Faso, paved the way for Russia to position itself as

BANGLADESH LISTS OUT ITS PRIORITIES FOR INDO-PACIFIC

Bangladesh will work with all the stakeholders for peacekeeping, peace building and counter-terrorism initiatives in the Indo-Pacific region, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs has said. In an important policy announcement ahead of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's visit to Japan, the U.S. and the U.K., Dhaka came out in support of "rules-based international order" and "free and uninterrupted movement and trade".

Bangladesh will aim for "inclusive development by strengthening free, transparent and rules-based international order," the Ministry has said.

The announcement on Dhaka's Indo-Pacific priorities was made for the first time on Monday in a document titled "Bangladesher Indo-Pacific Ruprekha" (Indo-Pacific outlook). Significantly, the document was released during a press conference that was held to announce Ms. Hasina's visit to Japan, the U.S. and the United Kingdom that will begin on Tuesday.

Bangladesh will also pursue the agenda of "women, peace and

an alternative. In time, Russian gained leverage in Africa through its assistance without conditionalities. However, deepening relations between African leaders and Russian mercenaries pose a significant threat to democratic values. Increasing trends among African governments seeking Russian mercenary assistance for mounting security concerns indicate increasing authoritarian footprints across the continent.

What is the status of the Wagner group globally and inside Russia?

According to the UN's International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries, the states should bear the responsibility for the activities of the mercenaries who violate principles of international law which threaten sovereign equality, political independence, territorial integrity of states and self-determination of people. Legally, Wagner is not a Russia-based private military company though it works closely with the Russian security apparatus. Private mercenary groups are illegal in Russia. However, in 2018, Putin recognised the group saying that the Wagner group has the right to pursue its interests anywhere in the world as long as they do not break the Russian law. His statement read: "I repeat they are not breaking Russian law and have the right to work and promote their business interests wherever they like in the world." Most recently, after the group was reported engaging with the Russian Army fighting in Bakhmut, a statement from the Russian parliament said: "All those who defend our country — soldiers, volunteers, mobilised men, and members of PMC Wagner — are heroes."

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security" in the Indo-Pacific.

Spelling out the country's priorities, the document declared that Bangladesh supports "existing structure of maritime security and wants to strengthen it". It further said that it supports "unobstructed oceanic movement". As part of its strategy, Bangladesh will support upholding of national sovereignty and oppose interference in the internal affairs of members of the region.

"To ensure free flow of trade despite future crisis and emergencies, Bangladesh will strengthen regional and global value chain and will direct its agriculture, industry and services sector to that direction," the statement stated.

The document mentioned "responsible behaviour in cyber and outer space". Bangladesh has not joined any regional initiative in the Indo-Pacific and its representatives had earlier stated that Dhaka was not planning to participate in regional initiatives.

ADANI PORTS BEGINS \$130 MN BOND BUYBACK IN DEBT REJIG

The debt buyback is the company's first since the Hindenburg report; the ports-to-cooking oil conglomerate hopes to regain investor confidence by reassuring them about its liquidity position

Adani Ports and Special Economic Zone (APSEZ) on Monday started its first debt buyback programme since the conglomerate was targeted by a U.S. short seller in January.

APSEZ floated a tender to buy back as much as \$130 million of its July 2024 bonds and similar amounts in each of the next four quarters, it said in an exchange filing, as it looks to regain investor confidence by showing that its liquidity position is comfortable.

Shares of Adani group companies plunged after Hindenburg Research in a January 24 report accused it of accounting fraud and improper use of offshore tax havens for stock manipulation.

APSEZ said it had started a buyback programme for its 3.375% 2024 maturity dollar-denominated bonds.

"The purpose of the tender offer is to partly prepay the company's near-term debt maturities and to convey the comfortable liquidity position," it said in a statement.

"After the successful completion of this tender offer, the company expects \$520 million notes to remain outstanding."

Adani returns

The Adani Group's APSEZ has forayed into the capital market for the first time since the Hindenburg Research report



- The company will be buying back \$130 million of 2024 maturity dollar-denominated bonds
- The buyback is intended to reassure investors of the company's liquidity position
- Adani shares were pummeled after Hindenburg accused the group of accounting fraud and stock manipulation

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WARLESS PUNJAB

The Centre and the State must guard against the revival of separatism

The news, on April 23, of the arrest of Amritpal Singh, a self-appointed campaigner for a separate nation for the Sikhs, was received by the public of Punjab with a sense of relief. He had been on the run for weeks, and now faces charges under the National Security Act (NSA) as well as several first information reports. He has turned out to be a cipher — neither he nor his cause of Khalistan appears to have any significant support among Sikhs. The secessionist has been shifted to Dibrugarh jail in Assam, over 2,000 kilometres away from Punjab to avoid any potential turmoil. Taking over as the head, last year, of 'Waris Punjab De', a social organisation established by the late actor-turned-activist Deep Sidhu, Mr. Amritpal's rise to controversy and infamy was as intriguing as it was quick. He styled himself after Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale, the militant leader who was killed in 1984 after many years of bloodshed in the State. In February, Mr. Amritpal led a mob that had stormed a police station with swords and guns to free compatriots from custody, showing the State police and the government in a bad light. But then it was not entirely surprising. For months, he along with his supporters, flaunting swords, guns and sharp weapons, had moved across Punjab. The question still lingers as to how that was being allowed in Punjab, which has lived through an era of bloody

secessionism through the 1980s and 1990s.

Though he comes across as self-styled, the Khalistan propagandist appears to have supporters and handlers within and outside India. The State of Punjab is on the border with Pakistan, that has sought to instigate a section of the population into violence for decades. The campaign for Khalistan is active among the Sikh diaspora too. The ruling Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) government in the State is now patting itself on the back for the arrest, but the situation should not have reached this point. Even the police operation to nab him turned out to be an embarrassment, as he managed to flee and remain on the loose. Though the instigator is now behind bars, his call for violence and brazen communalism, which went on with impunity for several months, triggered memories of the polarisation between Hindus and Sikhs caused by separatist terrorism that had pulverised Punjab for long. The ripple effects were felt even in other countries. The Centre and the State, under the Bharatiya Janata Party and AAP, respectively, should work closely to get their administrative actions and political messaging correct and effective to keep Punjab peaceful and insulated from the meaningless lure of secessionism.

BATTING FOR BORROWERS

Penal levy on loan defaulters should not be usurious

The Reserve Bank of India's recent draft circular on penal charges on loan accounts is a welcome move that should give respite to individual borrowers. The RBI has emphasised that it wants to ensure that lenders do not seek to unduly profit from borrowers' defaults in servicing their loans even as it allows the credit provider to reprice the loan in case a borrower's 'credit risk profile' has changed. The central bank's draft guidelines on 'Fair Lending Practice' are aimed at obviating a practice where lenders have hitherto levied a penal interest over and above the contracted rate of interest when borrowers delay repayment or default. Observing that the regulatory intent of a penal levy was solely to foster credit discipline among borrowers through a negative incentive, the RBI noted that lenders, however, had in practice turned the penal interest into a revenue enhancement tool. Supervisory reviews had found that some entities were in fact charging 'excessive' rates of penal interest, leading to hardship to the borrowers and disputes. Lenders had also, in certain cases, been capitalising the penal interest, thereby increasing the principal amount that the borrower would ultimately have to repay. The banking regulator has now emphatically laid down that penal charges should be recovered separately and must not be added either to the principal outstanding or the rate of interest

charged on the loan. Lenders could, however, still follow the normal process for compounding the outstanding primary interest, it clarified.

The RBI's decision to step in to ensure a fair and transparent approach to credit pricing has to be seen in the context of the sharp uptick in retail lending in recent years. While industry's share of outstanding bank credit had shrunk to about 24% as of February 2023, from over 43% in 2014-2015, the omnibus category of personal loans had surged to 30%, from just 19% eight years ago, making it the largest credit category. The central bank has made clear to lenders that while it gives them the freedom to set the quantum of penal charges proportional to the default or non-compliance with the terms of the loan contract beyond a preset threshold, the threshold itself should not be discriminatory within a specified loan or product category. And the penal charges so levied on individual borrowers cannot be at a rate higher than a similar charge applicable to corporate borrowers. Crucially, the penal charge must be communicated upfront when finalising every loan and unflinchingly reiterated to the borrower in every subsequent reminder for loan repayments. Small borrowers are sure to heave a sigh of relief as the RBI has made clear it will not brook any usury.

PENDING BILLS, THE ISSUE OF GUBERNATORIAL INACTION

The Tamil Nadu Governor was again in the news recently when the Tamil Nadu Assembly passed a resolution urging the President of India, among other things, to fix a timeline for assent to be given to Bills passed by the Assembly. The immediate provocation for the resolution was the Governor's public statement, on April 6, where he implied that if the Bill passed by the legislature transgresses constitutional limits, then it is the Governor's responsibility not to give assent. Several Bills passed by the Assembly have been pending as the Governor has not made any decision.

Relevant Articles

Passing a resolution by the Assembly, requesting the President of India to issue directions to the Governor to ensure that he functions in accordance with the Constitution is a new constitutional development. Article 355 of the Constitution says that it shall be the duty of the Union to ensure that the government of every State is carried on in accordance with the provisions of this Constitution. The general meaning and purpose of the Article was explained by B.R. Ambedkar in the Constituent Assembly: to provide justification for the "invasion of the provincial field" which the Union government may have to do. But the Constitution is a dynamic document whose concepts and doctrines have been interpreted and reinterpreted and also expanded by courts from time to time to meet the changing needs of society.

Although this Article was meant to provide justification for central intervention in the States, its scope and range needs to be widened. The Constitution requires the Governor to act when a Bill is passed by the Assembly and present it to him as per the options given in Article 200. If he does not act in accordance with the Constitution and sits on the Bills indefinitely, he is

creating a situation where governance of the state cannot be carried on in accordance with constitutional provisions. In such a situation, the government of the State has a constitutional duty to invoke Article 355 and inform the President about it, and request her to give suitable instructions to the Governor to ensure that the government is carried on in accordance with the Constitution. In that view of the matter, a resolution by the Assembly should be considered legitimate action.

Article 200 provides options to the Governor when a Bill is presented to him after being passed by the legislature. These options are: to give assent; to withhold assent; to send it back to the Assembly to reconsider it; or to send the Bill to the President for his consideration. In case the Assembly reconsiders the Bill as per the request of the Governor under the third option, he has to give assent even if the Assembly passes it again without accepting any of the suggestions of the Governor. It is only logical to think that when the Constitution gives certain options to the Governor he is required to exercise one of them. Since sitting on a Bill passed by the Assembly is not an option given by the Constitution, the Governor, by doing so, is only acting against constitutional direction. A judicial pronouncement on this matter is needed to eliminate the confusion.

In the United Kingdom

As regards the option of withholding assent, a plain reading of Article 200 suggests that, theoretically, the Governor can do so. But the question is whether the Governor should withhold assent to a Bill passed by the legislature. To answer this question, we may usefully turn our attention to the practice followed in the United Kingdom, whose model of government was

adopted by our Constitution. D.D. Basu, in his commentaries on the Constitution, says: “the position of the Governor in this respect is that of the sovereign in England. In theory the sovereign can refuse to give his assent but this right has not been exercised since the reign of Queen Anne. The veto could now only be exercised on ministerial advice and no government would veto Bills for which it was responsible. Refusal of royal assent on the ground that the monarch strongly disapproved of a Bill or that it was intensely controversial would be unconstitutional.”

So, the question of crucial importance is whether under Article 200, the Governor can withhold his assent to a Bill in exercise of his discretionary powers. Or, whether he can do so only on the advice of the Council of Ministers. Under Article 154 of the Constitution, the Governor can exercise his executive powers only on the advice of the Council of Ministers. So, there is a view that the Governor can withhold assent to a Bill only on ministerial advice. But some experts ask as to why the Council of Ministers should advise the Governor to withhold assent after the Bill has been passed by the Assembly. If the government did not want to proceed with the Bill, it could withdraw it at any stage of consideration by the Assembly. Similarly, if the government wanted to repeal it after it becomes an Act, it could have it repealed by the House.

Of course, the government can advise the Governor to withhold assent if it has second thoughts on the Bill after it has been passed — this seems to be the position in the U.K. where the sovereign refuses assent only on ministerial advice. However, it seems that under the Indian Constitution, the exercise of the power vested in the Governor to withhold assent may not be confined to one situation, namely, where the Council of Ministers advise the Governor to do so.

But the larger question is why a Governor should be allowed to withhold assent when the Bill is passed by the Assembly. A Bill is brought before the Assembly when there is some urgency about a legislation. It may be a part of the policy of the elected government which is responsible to the people. When such a Bill is passed, what authority does a Governor who is

an appointee of the Union government have to reject it? Under the constitutional scheme, the Governor is only a constitutional head and has no real powers. Then, how can such a Governor veto a legislative measure brought by the government and passed by the Assembly? Withholding assent means the death of that Bill. Thus, the Governor can with one stroke of the pen completely negate the will of the legislature, and thereby negate the will of the people. The Constitution cannot be assumed to be permitting the Governor to do that. Only the judiciary can set it right by way of a clear enunciation of the law.

Issue of justiciability

Finally, it is necessary to look at the question of justiciability of the whole issue of assent by the Governor. D.D. Basu, quoting judgments of the Supreme Court, says that it is not justiciable. One of the judgments is *Purushothaman Namboothiri vs State of Kerala* (1962). The issue that was decided in this case was that a Bill which is pending with the Governor does not lapse on the dissolution of the Assembly. But this judgment does not deal with the justiciability of the process of assent. Similarly, *Hoechst Pharmaceuticals Ltd. And ... vs State Of Bihar And Others* (1983) deals with the power of the Governor to reserve a Bill for the consideration of the President. The Court had held that a Governor reserves a Bill for the consideration of the President in exercise of his discretion. The Court cannot go into the question of whether it was necessary for the Governor to reserve the Bill for the consideration of the President; thus, this case too does not deal with the justiciability of assent. The issue that is agitating State governments is the non-decision/indecision on the part of the Governor on a Bill passed by the Assembly. So, on the question whether the government can challenge the inaction of the Governor in a court of law, the answer seems to be in the affirmative.

The framers of the Constitution would never have imagined that Governors would sit on Bills indefinitely without exercising any of the options given in Article 200. This is a new development which needs new solutions within the framework of the Constitution. So, it falls to the Supreme Court to fix a reasonable time frame for Governors to take a decision on a Bill passed by the Assembly in the larger interest of federalism in the country.

INDIAN DIPLOMACY AND THE HORSES OF INTEREST, MORALITY

During her official visit to India, on April 10-12, 2023, Ukraine's First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Emine Dzhaparova bluntly put across the dichotomy of India's pursuit of its interests in global affairs — as it always must — and, at the same time, appear to follow the path of morality, as a Vishwa Guru. She tweeted [Emine Dzhappar]: “Happy to visit India that gave birth to many sages, saints and gurus. Today #India wants to be the Vishwaguru, the global teacher and arbiter. In our case we've got a very clear picture: aggressor against innocent victims. Supporting [Ukraine] is the only right choice for true Vishwaguru.”

Echoing a wider view

Naturally, Ms. Dzhaparova was forcefully presenting her country's case, but what she said cannot be ignored because what she asserted publicly, is, according to some observers, being articulated discreetly and privately by foreign diplomats. They are pointing to the wide variance between India's desire to be a moral teacher and the cold pursuit of its interests in not condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine. All this is meant to push India to criticise Russia openly for its invasion of Ukraine even though India has made its unhappiness with Russia's action against Ukraine already clear, including through Prime Minister Narendra Modi's oft-quoted comment, “This is not an era of war.”

India has been accused in the past of contradictions in what it prescribes for the global community and what it pursues itself. When India was severely critical of U.S. actions in Vietnam, and earlier the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt in 1956 against President Gamal Abdel Nasser's nationalisation of the Suez Canal, U.S. and western diplomats often pointed to its relative 'silence' on Soviet operations in Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and later Afghanistan. However, there was a basic difference between the dialectic of Indian discourse on foreign affairs then and what is now being projected as part of the Vishwa Guru project. Then, India's foreign policy principles were rooted in contemporary World Order's principles. Now, the inspiration flows from the wisdom of ancient India, with the claim that its worldwide application would contribute to the welfare of the planet.

The West's stand

India is not the only country which coldly pursues its interests while being critical of others for not adhering to global principles. The serial offender in this respect is the United States. While advocating democracy, it has sided with the most obnoxious dictators. Its (and indeed western

Europe's) decades of support for the apartheid regime in South Africa is a shameful and hypocritical record of breaking every norm of the World Order. India's opposition to apartheid and being in the forefront of the decolonisation process flowed from the principles of its freedom movement itself. However, the Indian approach then did not seek to play to any national constituencies, and combative language was seldom, if at all, used especially at senior political levels. That has now changed. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar has led the charge to forcefully point to the contradictions in western prescriptions to the rest of the world in the context of the Ukraine war and the pursuit of its own interests. But his aggressive dismissal of western liberal criticism of the Modi government's policies goes back to 2019. A few months after he became Minister, Mr. Jaishankar famously said in the U.S. that India's reputation was not made by a newspaper in New York. Mr. Jaishankar has gained enormous popularity in the country for his pugnacious statements. It is this that has led him to be declared by a national newspaper to be the third most powerful person in the country, ahead even of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh Sarsanghchhalak, Mohan Bhagwat.

Some Sangh Parivar intellectuals avoid the use of the word 'Vishwa Guru' in their writings, but assert that ancient Indian heritage can show the path to lead the world out of its present troubles. They lay stress on Indian traditions of spiritual democracy, celebration of diversity, harmony with nature, the framing of development policies keeping the interests of the poorest in mind, and the idea of a world as a family. It can hardly be disputed that these strands of thought were present in Indic intellectual traditions and are of great value to prevent the looming disasters facing the planet. However, there are two issues which cannot be skirted. One: these were not the only ways the world was conceived in Indic thought. For instance, the idea of a lawless world where the brave and powerful prevailed was part of the political idea contained in the term 'matysa nyaya'; two: how often were these Indic principles applied in reality, for ancient India history was also full of turbulence and violence? Besides, did spiritual democracy extend to the social sphere? Yes, what India can be justly proud of is the continuity of spiritual traditions and the absence of dogma in them. It will be sad if dogmatic assertions are now made regarding these traditions.

It is impossible to straddle the two horses of interest and morality in the diplomatic sphere. Ms. Dzhaparova has publicly pointed out just that.



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