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PROTEM SPEAKER NEW COLD WAR

Denial of *pro tem* Speaker post to Cong. MP kicks up row

Kerala CM Pinarayi Vijayan and Congress leader Satheesan slams Union government for appointing BJP MP Bhartruhari Mahtab to the post; they accuse BJP of undermining parliamentary traditions

The Hindu Bureau
THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan and Leader of the Opposition V.D. Satheesan on Friday criticised the Centre for ignoring the convention and not appointing senior-most member MP Kodikunnil Suresh, and eight-term Congress parliamentarian, as *pro tem* Speaker of the 18th Lok Sabha.

In separate statements, the leaders condemned the decision to appoint BJP MP Bhartruhari Mahtab, seven-term MP from Cuttack, as *pro tem* Speaker.

Casteist politics

Mr. Vijayan said the decision flouted established



Congress MP Kodikunnil Suresh speaks in the Lok Sabha during the Budget Session of Parliament in New Delhi. FILE PHOTO

parliamentary norms and showed the BJP’s blatant disregard for democratic principles. “By overlooking Kodikunnil Suresh, the senior-most MP in the 18th Lok Sabha, they undermine our parliamentary traditions. It smacks of the Sangh Parivar’s revanchist, casteist politics that dis-

criminate against marginalised communities. During the previous Lok Sabha term, the post of Deputy Speaker was kept vacant for five years. Their attitude of not accepting anyone from the Opposition benches to the position led to such a situation. We must stay vigilant in

protecting our democratic values and demand fair practices,” said Mr.Vijayan.

Mr. Satheesan said the denial of *pro tem* Speaker post to Mr. Suresh was anti-democratic and exposed the BJP’s anti-Dalit face.

“The decision not to make Suresh, who belongs to the Dalit community, the *pro tem* Speaker is part of the sectarian politics followed by the BJP and the Sangh Parivar. Such violation of parliamentary norms even in a situation in which the BJP has not secured an absolute majority is a challenge to the will of the people and the democratic system of the country. It also shows the BJP’s disregard and contempt for Kerala,” said Mr. Satheesan.

About Pro-tem Speaker:

- ❖ Pro-tem is a Latin phrase which translates to 'for the time being' in English, and so the pro-tem speaker is a temporary speaker appointed for a limited period of time to conduct the work in Lok Sabha or in state legislatures.
- ❖ A Pro-tem speaker is chosen for the conduct of the house when the Lok Sabha and legislative assemblies have been elected and the vote for the speaker and deputy speaker has not taken place.
- ❖ The Constitution does not expressly use the term 'Pro-tem Speaker'.
- ❖ The office of the pro tem speaker ceases to exist after the new Speaker of the House is chosen.



Who selects the Pro-tem Speaker?

- ❖ The Speaker Pro-tem is appointed by the President of India/Governor.
- ❖ The President/Governor administers the oath of office to the pro-tem Speaker.
- ❖ As per convention, a senior most member will be appointed as the pro tem speaker with the agreement of assembly members, who then carry on the activities until the permanent speaker is chosen.

Duties:

- ❖ Presiding over the first sitting of the Lok Sabha/ State Legislative Assemblies.
- ❖ Administering the oath of office to the newly elected MPs/MLAs.
- ❖ Conducting the floor test to prove the government's majority.
- ❖ Holding the vote to elect the speaker and deputy speaker

Question:

Q.1 Consider the following statements about Speaker Pro Tem.

1. The President appoints a member of the Lok Sabha as the Speaker Pro Tem.
2. The constitution mentions oath to the office of Speaker Pro Tem.
3. The Speaker Pro Tem has limited powers to that of the Speaker.

Which of the above statements is/are incorrect?

- (a) 1 and 2 only
- (b) 2 and 3 only
- (c) 1 and 3 only
- (d) 1, 2 and 3

Answer: (b) 2 and 3 are INCORRECT.

Key Points

- ❖ Pro-tem speaker is the temporary speaker who presides over the first meeting of the Lower House of Parliament after the general elections besides presiding over the sitting in which the Speaker and Deputy Speaker are elected if it is a newly constituted House.
- ❖ As provided by the Constitution, the Speaker of the last Lok Sabha vacates his office immediately before the first meeting of the newly-elected Lok Sabha.
- ❖ Therefore, the President appoints a member of the Lok Sabha as the Speaker Pro Tem. Usually, the senior-most member is selected for this. Hence, Statement 1 is correct.
- ❖ The constitution mentions no oath to the office of Speaker Pro Tem. Hence, Statement 2 is NOT correct.
- ❖ The President himself administers oath to the Speaker Pro Tem.
- ❖ The Speaker Pro Tem has all the powers of the Speaker. Hence, Statement 3 is NOT correct.



**A MANDATE FOR A NEW ECONOMIC APPROACH-PRESSURE
POINTS IN INDIAN ECONOMY**

New Cold War

Russia's pact with North Korea will deepen U.S. ties in East Asia

The security pact reached between Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in Pyongyang, in which both countries promised mutual assistance “in the event of aggression”, has echoes from the Cold War era. Russia and North Korea, erstwhile allies, are facing biting sanctions, but for different reasons. And, both are at odds with the West. Now, they seem determined to revive the alliance so that they can stand up to the western-led global order together. Mr. Putin's visit to Pyongyang, his first in 24 years, itself marked a new beginning. The Russian leader has supported multilateral efforts to curb the North's nuclear programme in the past. Moscow has also voted for sanctions at the UN Security Council against Pyongyang over its nuclear arsenals. But the Ukraine war appears to have altered Kremlin's geopolitical arithmetic and provided an opportunity for Pyongyang to make itself useful as an ally. When the Ukraine war dragged on and Russia came under western sanctions, Mr. Putin turned to Mr. Kim for ammunition and ballistic missiles. After Mr. Kim's visit to Russia in September 2023, North Korea reportedly supplied ammunition to Russia. Moscow stepped up supplies of food and fuel, and there was speculation that it could help the North's defence sector with critical technologies. While both have rejected reports of weapons trade, the security pact clearly elevates ties to the level of a de facto alliance.

Ever since the Ukraine war, Mr. Putin has steadily expanded Russia's cooperation with countries that are at odds with the U.S. He reportedly bought kamikaze drones from Iran. China has also emerged as a key economic, technological and energy partner. And, by promising to help North Korea, an isolated, one-family-ruled totalitarian state that is still technically at war with South Korea, in the event of an attack, Russia has signalled its readiness to play a larger role in northeast Asia. Mr. Putin, essentially a cold warrior, wants to build an axis of the 'others' opposed by the West to expedite the churn in the global order. China remains cautious but seems fine with the idea of its closest partners challenging the western order. This will have far-reaching geopolitical consequences. North Korea will now have little incentive to discuss denuclearisation. Russia, which already has testy ties with Japan, could see its relationship with South Korea deteriorating. The agreement is also likely to strengthen the emerging tripartite partnership in East Asia among Japan, South Korea and the U.S., further solidifying the new cold war between great powers, which is still in its early stages.

The Cold War:

- ❖ It was a period of geopolitical tension between the United States and the Soviet Union and their respective allies, the Western Bloc and the Eastern Bloc, which began following World War II.
- ❖ The Cold War never escalated to the point of direct confrontation between the US and the USSR. In fact, aside from the nuclear arms race.
 - Thus, the struggle for world dominance was primarily waged through propaganda campaigns, espionage, proxy wars, athletic rivalry at the Olympics, and the Space Race.
- ❖ The Cold War ended in 1991, after the collapse and dissolution of the Soviet Union.

Why was it called the 'Cold' War?

- ❖ It was called the Cold War for the following reasons:
 - First of all, neither the Soviet Union nor the United States officially declared war on the other. In fact, there was never any direct large-scale fighting between the two superpowers.

- ☛ The war was only waged through indirect conflict. The US and USSR supported regional conflicts in their own interests, known as proxy wars.
- ☛ It describes the 'chilly' relationship between the two Second World War allies.

Formation of Alliances:

❖ The western alliance was formalised into an organisation, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), which came into existence in April 1949.

- ☛ It was an association of twelve states which declared that armed attack on any one of them in Europe or North America would be regarded as an attack on all of them.
- ☛ Each of these states would be obliged to help the other.



- ❖ While, the eastern alliance, known as the Warsaw Pact, was led by the Soviet Union.
- ❖ It was created in 1955 and its principal function was to counter NATO's forces in Europe.
- ❖ Gray zone conflicts, unlike conventional conflicts, primarily rely on nonmilitary capacity.
- ❖ This contrasts with the Cold War era when the geopolitical standoff centered on the balance of power between militaries to shape the global security architecture

Mains Question (Homework):

Q.2 The Cold War was more of an ideological war, which had its impact in the succeeding years as well. Elaborate with examples (250 words/15 marks)

Approach:

- 1 Introduction: What was cold war and give a brief timeline about coldwar
- 2 Body: Mention the causes of cold war, mainly ideological differences and others. Mention its impact in the succeeding years
- 3 Conclusion: Write a conclusion discussing the impact on major geo-political events leading to the end of the cold war.



A mandate for a new economic approach

The results of the just concluded general election may partly be interpreted as signalling a discontent with economic conditions. The substantial drop in the number of seats won by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in Uttar Pradesh – which is among India's poorest and most rural States – aligns with this view.

Discontent, its sources

Dissatisfaction with governance is bound to be high at a time of unemployment and persistent inflation. Food-price inflation, in particular, has remained elevated for five years. It is highest for cereals and pulses, which are staples. For households at the bottom of the income distribution, food constitutes close to half their household expenditure. Past experience suggests that the price of food can be a determinant of how the electorate votes. For instance, historically high food-price inflation towards the end of its decade-long tenure had preceded the end of the A.B. Vajpayee-led National Democratic Alliance government in 2004. When it comes to jobs, the unemployment rate has mostly been higher since 2014. The Periodic Labour Force Survey also shows a decline in the real earnings of regular employees and the self-employed, being substantial in the case of the latter. These are some of the sources of the economic discontent that may have propelled the shift away from the BJP.

In the spirit of democracy, which he constantly refers to, Prime Minister Narendra Modi must now honour the mandate given by the people. His government must address the sources of their discontent. This would require a change from the economic approach that has been followed for the last decade. We are yet to see indications that the government has this in mind. The Finance Minister has promised 'reforms', and some supportive commentators have spoken of how they are essential for growth. Two points spring to mind as reforms are brought to the table.

First, Mr. Modi's much praised reforming zeal has not translated to a higher average growth rate after 2014. Reforms understood as changes in the policy regime are effective only to the extent that they affect the forces of demand or supply. Clearly, this has not happened strongly or widely enough in the economy, whatever the reforms undertaken by the present regime so far.

Second, the growth that we have seen since 2014 has not brought along with it the things that Indians aspire to. I have already mentioned the high food inflation. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations estimates that close to 75% of the Indian population cannot afford a healthy diet. This is not surprising given the extent of increase in food prices in the past



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To continue with the 'winning formula' – i.e., the economic policy of the past decade – would be to ignore the people's verdict, which is a reflection of their discontent

five years and the highly unequal distribution of income in the country. Apart from affordable food, Indians aspire to infrastructure, both physical and social. Social infrastructure is constituted mainly by health care and education. Physical infrastructure is almost everything that is necessary both for everyday life and engaging in economic activity. Both are crucial for living.

The economic policy of the past decade has focused on attracting foreign investment, moving to digital payment in all spheres, building a manufacturing sector through subsidy and, in the past three years, unleashing a highway construction spree. Combined with this, there have been a host of transfers, cash for farmers and housewives and free rations for the poorest. This might appear to be a winning formula, but it has not been enough to bring the BJP back with a majority. To continue with this would be to ignore the people's verdict. To honour it would require going beyond vague pronouncements on reforms or doubling down on welfare transfers, even if there was fiscal capacity for this. Showcasing macroeconomic stability also will not do. Till the COVID-19 pandemic, the central government had had fair success with fiscal consolidation, though not equally with inflation control, but that could not prevent growth from sliding even before COVID-19 had struck. While you certainly do not want macroeconomic instability, we can now see that it does not necessarily bring more growth or deliver the goods citizens aspire to. Continued high growth in India would require a rise in the investment rate. Private investment is guided by anticipation of demand. The private investment rate in India has not budged for a decade. Whether it will rebound at a time when its principal cheerleader, Mr. Modi, has lost his majority in Parliament is to be seen.

Glaring deficits

So, if 'more reforms' is not the way for economic policy to respond to the electorate, then what is? It would be to undertake specific interventions at the pressure points which currently signal a presence. The first, as already flagged, is the rising price of food. Other than the promotion of millets, agriculture has been a generally neglected aspect of the Modi economic package of the last decade. The relentless rise in prices of staple foods is the sign of an under-developed economy, and sits uncomfortably with the goal of a 'Viksit Bharat'. While wheat production only experiences shortfalls in certain years, the production of pulses, a major source of protein for workers, has chronically fallen short of demand for decades. Making India self-sufficient in pulses must be taken up in mission mode. The supply of fruits and vegetables, the sources of

vitamins and minerals, is hobbled by the absence of cold-storage facilities and poor transportation.

A second pressure point in the country is to be found in the Indian Railways. Its leadership appears to have been caught unawares by the rise in long-distance migration for work. Pictures of reserved compartments on long-distance trains swarming with ticketless travellers have sent shock waves across the country. In such a situation, to treat high-end 'Vande Bharat' trains as a priority, not to mention the bullet train, is a serious failure of judgment when it is not actually irresponsible.

A third pressure point is the strained water supply situation in our mega cities. First Bengaluru and now Delhi have witnessed severe deficits this summer. These are India's leading agglomerations and water shortage can cripple their economic potential, apart from endangering social harmony. 'Nal se jal' must seem a distant dream to many.

The public sector is crucial

I have selected only a small set from the many deficits in India today, but this would be sufficient to see the point being made. Expressways and a Digital Stack, which the BJP has championed, have their place for sure, but connecting cities and digitising India are not the most pressing of the country's needs right now. The country needs infrastructure that supports both everyday life and economic activity. The first is easily understood, but the second perhaps not. Firms, including the self-employed, need producer services ranging from efficient transportation and steady electricity supply to sewerage and waste disposal facilities. When such services are unavailable, production cannot take place, and employment cannot expand.

The relatively high growth in India over the past quarter century has not delivered these services sufficiently, and they are unlikely to be supplied by the private sector within any time frame. Only the public sector can supply them at scale. Surely, this must be obvious to Mr. Modi as he travels the world to attend summits held in locations with impressive public infrastructure. His economic approach has banked too much on the private sector to take the lead in developing the country. But this has not materialised in a decade, and it is unlikely to change. The government, however, can undertake course correction now. Instead of promising, or even implementing, liberalising reforms, it should move swiftly to address the pressure points that are so obvious. It has set 2047 as the date to make the country a developed economy. However much it may grow by then, India will remain underdeveloped without the infrastructure to support life.

A progressive Indian policy on Myanmar outlined

Three years on, the military in Myanmar, which overthrew the elected civilian government in February 2021, continues to kill, maim and displace its own people. India has steadfastly maintained formal relations with this regime, which has so far murdered more than 5,000 people and displaced some 2.5 million people. In its second tenure, the Narendra Modi government did very little to engage with the pro-democracy resistance, which now has both political and military wings. Indian foreign policy scholars and practitioners have doggedly defended this policy by arguing that India needs to work with the junta if it has to protect its “interests” in Myanmar and not get swayed by an idealistic preoccupation with “values”.

How India can step out of China's shadow

But, in foreign policy, there is no clear line between “values” and “interests” simply because neither has a standard definition. It all depends on how a country defines these terms. This is also the case with India's Myanmar policy. New Delhi has long defined its “interests” in the Southeast Asian country in narrow strategic terms. But now, it needs to leverage a unique set of “values” to better defend its interests. It is possible for India to put in place a more progressive, values-driven Myanmar policy that works in favour, and not against, its national interests.

This new policy should have two key pivots, namely, democracy and human security. The new National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, therefore, needs to take four interlocking steps immediately.

First, India needs to use its credentials as the largest federal democracy in the region to sharpen its influence in Myanmar. For long, Myanmar's pro-democracy political elites and civil society have looked up to India as a model of a federal democratic union with a well-oiled power-sharing arrangement between the centre and various subnational units. This is even more relevant today as the democratic resistance in Myanmar, which is led by the National Unity Government (NUG), dozens of ethnic revolutionary organisations, civil society organisations, and trade unions, strives to replace the military-drafted 2008 constitution with a



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New Delhi's stance of defining its 'interests' in the Southeast Asian country in narrow strategic terms needs to change

federal constitution. By helping this vibrant opposition achieve its aim through capacity-building and knowledge exchange programmes, India can distinguish itself from China, its primary regional competitor in Myanmar. Both Beijing and New Delhi can sell military hardware to Myanmar, but only India can sell the spirit of federal cooperation. Here is a chance for the new Indian government to outmanoeuvre the Chinese in their own 'backyard'.

Weapons sales and humanitarian outreach

Second, India needs to immediately halt all weapon sales to the Myanmar military. According to the advocacy group, Justice For Myanmar (JFM), Indian state-owned military hardware manufacturers have sold a range of non-lethal and semi-lethal equipment to the junta since the 2021 coup. In its most recent report, published on March 27, the group claimed that on January 2, the Indian Air Force transferred a package which had 52 items, including navigation and communication parts, to its Myanmar counterpart. Another recent investigation by Frontier Myanmar claims that India sold more than \$1.5 million worth of navy-grade diesel to junta-linked entities since the coup. New Delhi needs to immediately put a stop to these, as the Myanmar military continues to use all its three services – the army, air force, and navy – to attack non-combatant civilians using imprecise lethal tactics.

Third, India needs to immediately open cross-border humanitarian corridors to help civilians affected by the conflict along three border provinces – Sagaing Region, Chin State and northern Rakhine State. According to United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) data, Sagaing Region has seen the largest quantum of internal displacement in all of Myanmar since the coup (as of March 25, 2024). Rakhine comes next, while Chin State sits tenth in the list. Continuing air strikes by the junta and clashes between armed groups in these areas have only pushed more civilians across the borders. New Delhi needs to first revoke its plans to fence the India-Myanmar border and reinstate the Free Movement Regime,

or the FMR, which the Union Home Ministry suspended in February 2024. Then, it should engage existing humanitarian aid networks along the India-Myanmar border to send emergency relief assistance including medicines, food and tarpaulin to the other side. Mizoram, where a multi-layered asylum and aid ecosystem is already operational, is a good starting point. India should also collaborate with local and international non-governmental organisations with experience in the field. Best practices from Thailand, which recently started cross-border aid deliveries into Myanmar, should also be adopted. New Delhi should use its clout to ensure that the aid is not distributed by the junta, which not only has a disastrous track record in this field, but is also not even in control of large areas along the India-Myanmar border. It is also possible to run cross-border aid corridors without allowing contraband to pass through, with stringent checks and pre-delivery vetting.

Detention of asylum seekers

Fourth, the Narendra Modi government should immediately halt the detention and deportation of asylum seekers from Myanmar. This is especially so in the case of Manipur, where the BJP-led government has so far deported 115 asylum seekers to Myanmar – the latest round was on June 11. These are people who entered India not because they wanted to or with mal-intent, but because they were forced to. Regardless of the fact that India has not ratified the 1951 Refugee Convention, it is incumbent upon the government to treat them as refugees in need of humanitarian assistance and protection rather than as “illegal immigrants”. Both the Indian Constitution and international law allow the Indian state to do so. In fact, the customary international legal principle of non-refoulement discourages India from deporting refugees back to a home country where they face a threat of persecution or death. The Centre should also urge the BJP-led Assam government to release the 27 Chin refugees detained in the State and house them in a humane refugee shelter.

India, the “*Vishwabandhu*”, routinely claims to stand with the people of Myanmar. It should now walk the talk.