

THE HINDU ANALYSIS



7TH MARCH

BY PRASHANT MAVANI



IN ENGLISH



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Make the neighbourhood first again

India is sliding towards a situation where it is neither feared nor loved by other South Asian countries



SUHASSINI HAIDER

Almost four years after Prime Minister Narendra Modi began his term with a "Neighbourhood First" moment, by inviting leaders of all South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries to his swearing-in ceremony, India's neighbourhood policy is clearly afloat. New Delhi's connect with its South Asian neighbours is weaker than it has been for a very long time.

A perfect storm?
The first problem is that for various reasons other governments in the SAARC region are either not on ideal terms with New Delhi, or facing political headwinds. In the Maldives, President Yameen Abdul Gayoom has gone out of his way to challenge the Modi government, whether it is on his crack-down on the opposition, invitations to China, or even breaking with New Delhi's effort to isolate Pakistan at SAARC. In Nepal, the K.P. Sharma Oli government is certainly not India's first choice, and Kathmandu's invitation to the Pakistani Prime Minister this week confirms the chill. And no matter which party is in power in Pakistan, it is difficult to see Delhi pushing for official dialogue, especially with the military on the ascendant once again. In other parts of the neighbourhood, where relations have been comparatively better for the past few years, upcoming elections could turn the tables on India. In Sri Lanka, the recent local



THE NEIGHBOURHOOD

cal election results that have gone the way of the Mahinda Rajapaksa-backed party could be a portent of its future re-election. In Afghanistan, Bhutan and Bangladesh, elections this year and the next could pose challenges for India. The next problem is the impact of China's unprecedented forays into each of these countries. Instead of lifting the Nepal government to sort out issues with India, for example, as it had in the past, China opened up an array of alternative trade and connectivity options after the 2015 India-Nepal border blockade: from the highway to Lhasa, cross-border railway lines to the development of dry ports. In Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Maldives and Pakistan, China holds strategic real estate, which could also be fortified militarily in the future. At present, it means China has a stake in the internal politics of those countries. While China's growing presence in infrastructure and connectivity projects has been well-documented, its new interest in political mediation must be watched more carefully as a result. When China stepped in to negotiate a Rohingya refugee return agreement between Myanmar and Bangladesh, or host a meeting of Afghanistan and Pakistan's foreign ministers to help calm tensions and bring both on board with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) connection between them, or offer to mediate between the Maldivian government and the opposition, it wasn't just breaking with its past policy of ignoring political dynamics in countries it invests in. Beijing is now taking on a role New Delhi should have been in a better position to play, and by refusing to play it Delhi is being shown up as unfriendly, partisan or, worse, ineffectual.

last week about Immigration has drawn fire there, with Bangladesh's Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan describing the remarks as untrue, unfounded and not helpful. While many of these factors are hard to reverse, the fundamental facts of geography and shared cultures in South Asia are also undeniable, and India must focus its efforts to return to a more comfortable peace, and to "Making the Neighbourhood First Again". The third issue is that the Modi government's decision to use hard power tactics in the neighbourhood has had a booming effect. Theoretically, given its central location in South Asia and being the largest geographically and economically, India should be expected to hold greater sway over each of its neighbours. However, the "surgical strikes" on Pakistan of 2016 have been followed by a greater number of ceasefire violations and cross-border infiltration on the Line of Control. The 2015 Nepal blockade and a subsequent cut in Indian aid channelled through the government did not force the Nepali government to amend its constitution as intended, and the subsequent merger of Mr. Oli's Communist Party of Nepal (CPM) with Prachanda's CPN(Maoist) is seen as a reversal of India's influence there.

Mr. Modi's decision to abruptly cancel his visit to Male in 2015 did not yield the required changes in the government's treatment of the opposition, and New Delhi's dire warnings about Mr. Yameen's emergency in the past month have led to the Maldives cancelling its participation in the Indian Navy's "Milan" exercises. Even in Bangladesh, the Indian Army chief, General Bipin Rawat's tough talking

• New Delhi's connect with its South Asian neighbours is weaker.

Maldives
Nepal
Pakistan
Sri Lanka

Afghanistan, Bhutan and Bangladesh, elections this year and the next could pose challenges for India.

Time for reversal
To begin with, despite conventional wisdom on the benefits of hard power and multipolar, India's most potent tool is its soft power. Its successes in Bhutan and Afghanistan, for example, have much more to do with its development assistance than its defence assistance. It's heartbreaking, therefore, that after sharp drops in 2016 (of 36%) and 2017 (of 18%) year on year, the budget allocations for South Asia have seen an increase (of 6%) in 2018. After the Doklam crisis was defused in 2017, India almost moved swiftly to resolve differences with Bhutan on hydropower pricing, and this February it announced a tariff hike for energy from Bhutan's Chukha project, the first in several years. Next, instead of opposing every project by China in the region, the government must attempt a three-pronged approach. First, where possible, India should collaborate with China in the manner it has over the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Economic corridor. Second, when it feels a project is a threat to its interests, India should make a counter-offer to the project, if necessary in collaboration with its Quadrilateral partners.

Learning from ASEAN
It will also be impossible to renew the compact with the neighbours without reviving the SAARC process. In their book *The ASEAN Miracle*, Khoro Mahbubani and Jeffrey Song describe in detail the need for SAARC to learn from the success of ASEAN. Mr. Mahbubani suggests that leaders of SAARC countries must more often informally, that they interfere less in the internal workings of each other's governments, and that there be more interaction at every level of government. They also say that just as Indonesia, the biggest economy in the ASEAN, allowed smaller countries such as Singapore to take the lead, India too must take a back seat in decision-making, enabling others to build a more harmonious SAARC process. "It is much safer to be feared than to be loved," wrote Niccolò Machiavelli, "when one of the two must be wanting." The government's challenge is to steer India towards a course where it is both feared and loved in appropriate measure, and away from a situation in which it is neither feared nor loved.

- 2015 India-Nepal border blockade
- Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, the Maldives and Pakistan, China holds **strategic real estate**, which could also be **fortified militarily** in the future.
 - Myanmar and Bangladesh
 - Afghanistan and Pakistan's
- Use hard power tactics: **boomerang effect**
 - surgical strikes: greater number of ceasefire violations and cross-border infiltration
 - Blockading Nepal didn't help.
 - Male visit cancellation



- India's most potent tool is its **soft power**.
 - Its successes in Bhutan and Afghanistan, for example, have much more to do with its development assistance than its defence assistance.
- **Budget allocations** for South Asia have seen an **increase**
- **Bhutan's Chhukha project**
- **Three-pronged approach**
- SAARC to **learn** from the success of **ASEAN**

The guilty men of Partition-

The guilty men of Partition

Partition was not just a British ploy to which Indian leaders succumbed

MOHAMMED AYOUB



It is commonly recognised that by 1946, leaders of the Muslim League were enamoured of the idea of Pakistan without thinking through its negative consequences for the Muslims in the minority provinces. This was ironic both because the Muslim League was founded primarily to protect the interests of Indian Muslims where they were the most vulnerable and because many leading figures in the League, including Mohammed Ali Jinnah himself, came from Muslim minority provinces.

It is less widely understood that Partition also suited the Hindu nationalists in the Congress. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel falls in this category as evidenced by the Bharatiya Janata Party's appropriation of his legacy. Hindu nationalists were concerned that the national persona of independent India would not be anchored in Hindu identity since Muslims would form more than a quarter of the population. Muslims would also be in a majority in half a dozen provinces, including the two large provinces of Bengal and Punjab.

The unequivocally secular Nehru eventually came to accept Partition for very different reasons. He realised that neither a strong state nor a planned economy, both dear to his heart, would be possible as long as the Muslim League was in control of Muslim majority provinces, an outcome indicated by the 1946 provincial elections. Nehru reluctantly concluded that it was better to hive off these provinces to prevent India remaining a weak state.

Initially, Jinnah wanted to use Pakistan as a bargaining counter to force the Congress to give the Indian Muslims a better deal in terms of political representation at the Centre and in the provinces. However, his two-nation theory, despite its non-congruence with India's historical record, took on a life of its own, trapping him in his rhetoric.

Jinnah was hoisted with his own petard when the Congress leadership concluded that Partition was not such a bad option after all. It was no coincidence that Nehru torpedoed the Cabinet Mission Plan, Britain's last effort to preserve a united but loosely federated India. Jinnah had to accept what he called "a mutilated and moth-eaten Pakistan" with the two largest Muslim majority provinces – Bengal and Punjab – divided at the insistence of the Congress on the basis of Muslim and non-Muslim majority districts.

The division of these two provinces on the basis of religious majorities is the conclusive evidence that, despite Mahatma Gandhi's opposition, and that of Maulana Azad and Khan Abdul Ghaffar Khan, the Congress Working Committee preferred Partition on communal lines to a united India. This was clear proof that despite its proclamations to the contrary the Congress accepted Jinnah's two-nation theory.

The responsibility for Partition is more widely shared than is commonly recognised. It was not, as some assert, just a British ploy to which Indian leaders succumbed.

Mohammed Ayoub is University Distinguished Professor Emeritus of International Relations, Michigan State University, and Senior Fellow, Center for Global Policy, Washington, DC

- **Reason for partition.** Why Nehru accepted it?
 - The unequivocally secular Nehru eventually came to accept Partition for very different reasons.
- **Muslim League** was in control of Muslim majority provinces
- **Hive off** these provinces to prevent India remaining a weak state.
- Jinnah wanted to use Pakistan as a **bargaining counter**
 - hoisted with his own petard
- **Cabinet Mission Plan**, Britain's last effort to preserve a **united but loosely federated** India.

'It is time to have a debate on proportional representation'

The former Chief Election Commissioner on the problem with electoral bonds, the unnecessary controversy over EVMs, and electoral reforms

ANURADHA RAMAN

Various electoral reforms are currently being debated, from improving transparency in party funding to holding simultaneous elections. In a wide-ranging conversation, former Chief Election Commissioner (2010 to 2012) S.Y. Quraishi addresses these issues. He also talks about, among other things, the challenge posed by electoral bonds, the concerns over the tampering of electronic voting machines (EVMs), and the problems with the first-past-the-post system. Excerpts:

Electoral bonds, as announced by the Union Finance Minister, hold the promise of making political funding transparent, which has been a long-standing demand of the Election Commission (EC). Do you think electoral bonds are the solution?

The people's right to know, which is more important in a democracy and critical for the fairness of elections.

I must add, however, that there is one good thing about electoral bonds: cash transactions will not happen as people will have to buy bonds through the bank.

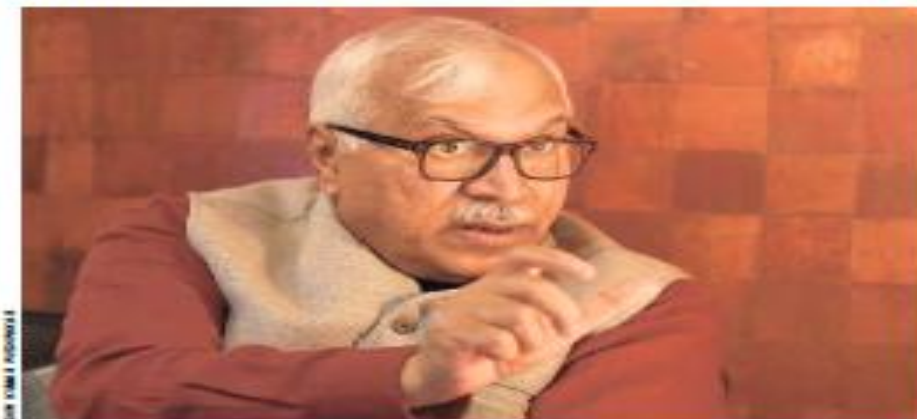
■ When the Finance Minister began his Budget speech, he said without transparency in political funding, free and fair elections are not possible. But what he offered was just the opposite. So far, all donations above ₹20,000 were disclosed to the EC. It is, of course, a different matter that political parties accept donations in crores and convert them into cheques of ₹20,000 – and this is more than 75% of all collection of political parties where sources are unknown. Now, with electoral bonds, 100% source will be unknown. The government has decided to give precedence to the donors' wish to be anonymous. There was a CII (Confederation of Indian Industry) report of 2015 which said that donors want anonymity for two reasons: one, other parties would make a beeline for their donations, and two, fear of political reprisal from those not getting the donation. The real reason probably was that they don't want the quid pro quo to get known. Finally, the donors' desire for transparency has got preference over citizens' desire for transparency and

The government, and not the public or even the EC, would know who is giving what, right?

■ Yes, absolutely. And it is the government which can harness the donor more than any political party out of power. Reprisal, if any, can come only from the government. The government has empowered itself to know exactly who is giving what to whom. This is not what we in the EC were expecting and striving for.

Is the removal of the 7.5% cap (based on profits over three years) on corporate donations a good idea?

■ Not at all. The cap existed for a good reason – that the companies should not start influencing political processes. Now companies can exist just to run India's politics. That is what crony capitalism is, and now it has been legalised. Billionaire-run companies will run Indian politics. The government has created the Frankenstein's monster for itself. Nobody is in power permanently. Therefore, instead of thinking of long-term national interest, short-



SONU KUMAR AGRAWAL

term political interest has been given precedence.

Has there been any reprisal against a donor in the past?

■ The solution lies in having a National Electoral Fund, where companies can donate without indicating preference for any political party and thereby avoiding the reprisal they claim to fear. The fund can be distributed transparently on the basis of actual performance. I have given a formulation: for every vote cast in favour of a candidate, ₹100 can be given. If 55 crore people cast their votes, the National Electoral Fund distributes ₹5,500 crore among parties/candidates.

Will that money be enough for political parties?

■ I would say more than enough. The seeds of my argument is that between 2009 and 2014, the total donation shown by all political parties was ₹4,000 crore. With all their efforts at blackmailing, arm-twisting and corruption, they got ₹4,000 crore.

Here they got ₹5,500 crore with dignity, by cheque, based on their performance, on objective criteria. And this is one figure which cannot be fudged. All political parties have been demanding an end to electoral corruption, and state funding of elections. We are opposing state funding of elections as that will be impossible to monitor, and suggesting state funding of political parties, [which is] easy to monitor. There will be no scope for fly-by-night political parties. They will have to first perform in an election before they receive any funds.

What do you think about simultaneous elections, an idea which has been mooted by the Prime Minister?

■ It is a desirable idea. It has many advantages, some of which were listed by the Prime Minister. And they mainly have to do with the huge costs and dislocation of normal life. I add two more. Money in elections is the fountainhead of all corruption. If you are always in election mode, you are always in cor-

After the 2014 elections, even with the third largest vote share of 20%, the BJP got zero seats. This is not democracy. We could look at the German model of a mixed (electoral) system.

ruption mode. Secondly, communalism and casteism are at a peak during elections. Hateful, divisive politics is the consequence of frequent elections.

The arguments in favour of staggered elections are equally strong. What do people want? As a Biju Janata Dal MP once remarked, people love elections as the vote is the only power they have. Secondly, election time provides work opportunities to lakhs of youth. At a recent Chhatra Samad in Pune, I heard this interesting remark from a young girl from Chhattisgarh: "Jab jab chunar aata hai, garb ke pet mein pulav aata hai" (Whenever the elections come, the poor get some food).

Thus, in a way, frequent elections are good for the economy as the money goes from the rich to the poor. Thirdly, national and local issues don't get mixed up.

Interestingly, initially the Prime Minister had mentioned that there should be simultaneous elections at all three levels. Somewhere down the line, the third tier has disappeared from the debate. So, you have already compromised on one-third of the suggested reform. Of the remaining two-thirds, half has been sacrificed by the suggestion of the Parliamentary Standing Committee and NITI Aayog that if it is not feasible to hold elections once in five years, let there be two in five years!

Fourthly, let's not forget that India is a federal country. Regional parties have an increasingly important role to play. If they feel threatened by the proposal, they are bound to oppose it, making consensus impossible.

In a scenario where 29 State governments have come to power with absolute majority, if at the Centre the government falls, why should the States suffer? Of course, the anti-defection law is there to discourage this to a considerable extent. But in an era of coalition governments, there is always the possibility of governments falling, when a partner chooses to leave.

You had mentioned in an essay that it is time to review the first-past-the-post system (FPTP). Has the demand for replacing FPTP with proportional representation (PR) become louder after the 2014 general elections?

■ When I wrote *An Undocumented Wonder: The Making of the Great Indian Election*, which came out in the middle of the elections of 2014, I

had written that FPTP was the best system for its simplicity. I had also discussed various PR systems but dismissed them as not being practical for India. After the 2014 elections, I felt compelled to change my position when we saw that even with the third largest vote share of 20%, one party (the Bahujan Samaj Party) got zero seats. This is not democracy. I think it is time to have a national debate on this. We could look at the German model where they have a mixed system – half PR and half FPTP.

Doesn't PR carry the threat of further dividing our society on caste, religious and other lines? When parties are promised seats in proportion to their votes, don't you think politicians will find innovative ways means of forming newer parties?

■ No way. In fact, it may make the competitive, no-holds-barred politics of today less bitter as the parties will have to have their presence in the legislatures according to their vote share instead of being wiped out completely even after getting a sizeable vote share.

There is a debate on EVMs. Should we go back to paper ballots?

■ Certainly not. Our EVMs have stood the test of time. Every I repeat, every political party has raised questions about EVMs at different times. And when with the same machines they come to power, they go silent.

In any case, after introduction of voter verifiable paper audit trail (VVPAT), there is no ground left to quibble. VVPAT makes the system transparent and foolproof.

The EC said that at least 25% of the booths in a constituency should have VVPATs. But ground reports suggest otherwise.

■ That must be old hat. The EC has now committed to the Supreme Court that every election in future would be with 100% VVPAT. The Gujarat and Himachal Pradesh elections were the first-ever full VVPAT elections. The dispute now is, how many machines would be counted for voter checks countercheck. The EC has said one booth per constituency. There are 200-300 polling booths per constituency. One is certainly too little for the purpose it was introduced. Let the EC discuss it at an all-party meeting to arrive at a consensus.

Has the credibility of the EC taken a hit?

■ In the context of CEC Achal Kumar Jyoti's decision on Gujarat election dates, you mean? But the same Mr. Jyoti was applauded for his verdict in the Gujarat Rajya Sabha elections. The problem lies in the process of appointment of Election Commissioners. They are appointed by the government of the day with no consultation with the Opposition. The controversy was unfair to Mr. Jyoti just because he was from Gujarat. We should have a collegium to appoint the CEC. When we can have a collegium system for the CVC (Central Vigilance Commissioner) and the CIC (Central Information Commissioner), which are not even constitutional bodies, why can't we have one for the most critical constitutional body, the EC? The most powerful electoral body in the world has the most defective system of appointment. This reform cannot wait.

- Budget speech, he said **without transparency** in political funding, **free and fair elections are not possible.**
- **Donors want anonymity**
- Solution lies in having a **National Electoral Fund**
- **Simultaneous Elections:**
 - If you are always in election mode, you are always in corruption mode.
 - Communalism and casteism are at a peak during elections.
- Mixed system — **half PR** and **half FPTP.**
- The problem lies in the process of appointment of Election Commissioners.



Populist wave

As Italians reject the mainstream parties, EU integration could take a hit

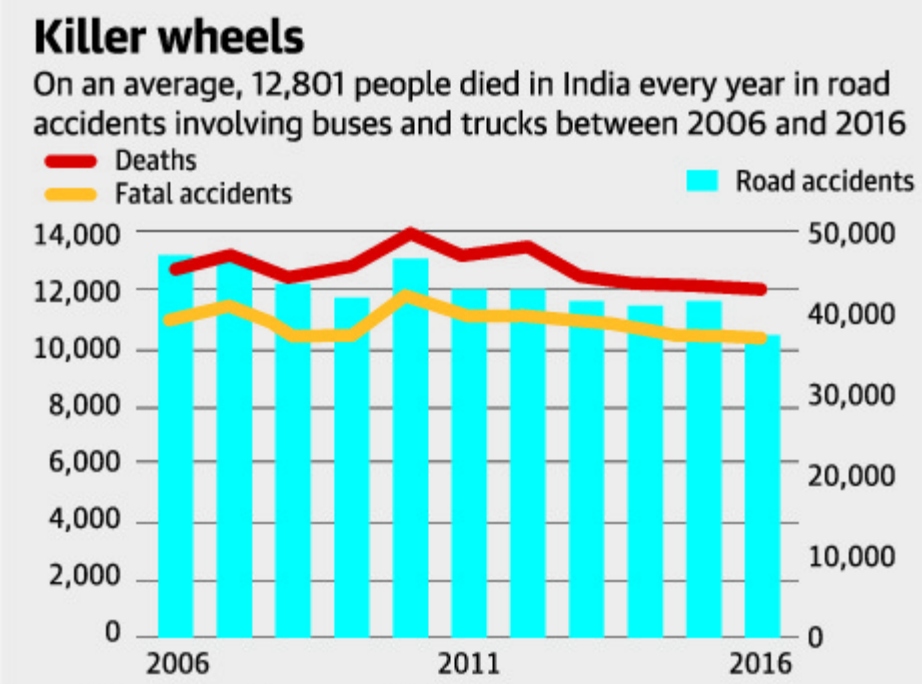
As the dust settles on the Italian parliamentary elections, it is unclear who the next Prime Minister will be. But two things are clear. First, the election was a strong rejection of the incumbent, centre-left Democratic Party (PD), which has managed just 19% of the vote. Second, there is a strong anti-establishment undercurrent, with the largest vote share (32%) to a single party going to the Five Star Movement (M5S). Given the recent changes in Italian electoral law, which now combines proportional representation and the first-past-the-post system, a party or coalition will need at least 40% of the vote to form the government. The centre-right coalition, which includes the scandal-ridden former Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi's Forza Italia, the anti-migrant and Eurosceptic Lega and the far right Brothers of Italy, has secured 36%. What's more, Lega, led by the rabble-rouser Matteo Salvini, has won over 17% of the vote, elbowing Mr. Berlusconi out of the role of kingmaker and reinforcing Italy's move away from the centre. It appears that a growing but troubled economy and the migrants crisis have left Italians disenchanted with business-as-usual politics as well as the European Union, a pattern that has become all too familiar across Europe over the last few years. Recovery from the 2008 financial crisis has been slow. Italy is growing at 1.5%, below the Eurozone average, and unemployment is close to 11%; some 18 million Italians are said to be at risk of poverty. A feeling that the rest of the EU has left Italy high and dry in tackling the migrants issue – over 600,000 have arrived in Italy since 2013 – has added to the sense of Euroscepticism.

Italy is going through a protracted period of political negotiations before a new government can start taking shape in Rome. The M5S, which had initially said it would hold a referendum on the euro, more recently toned down its stance but continues to seek greater economic freedom from Brussels. It has taken a strong stance against migration and says it wants to improve governance. Luigi Di Maio, the 31-year-old leader of the M5S, who for long had said the party would go it alone, is now seeking partners to form a government. This could, for instance, mean the M5S partnering with the PD or the Lega. Barring a shared Euroscepticism, the M5S and the Lega mostly differ in their values. In addition to its distrust of Europe, Lega has made no bones about its extreme and dangerous views, specifically its anti-migrant and anti-Muslim stance. Mr. Salvini has claimed the moral right to form a government given the centre-right coalition's share of the vote. However, politics makes for strange bedfellows, and an M5S-Lega government cannot be ruled out. Such an outcome would, however, severely hamper French President Emmanuel Macron's and German Chancellor Angela Merkel's plans for greater integration across the EU.

- Recent changes in **Italian electoral law**
 - combines proportional representation and the first-past-the-post system, a party or coalition will need at least 40% of the vote to form the government.
- The **centre-right coalition**
 - ✓ Scandal-ridden Forza Italia
 - ✓ Anti-migrant and Eurosceptic Lega
 - ✓ Far right Brothers of Italy
- Growing but **troubled economy** and the **migrants crisis**
- Italy is growing at **1.5%**, below the Eurozone average, and unemployment is close to **11%**; some **18 million** Italians are said to be at risk of poverty.

- Sri Lanka on Tuesday declared an **island-wide state of emergency** to curb growing anti-Muslim violence in the Central Province.
- “The emergency **allows us to deploy the army** in case of any violent clashes. There were concerns that the police were mishandling the situation over the last few days and we want to make sure the situation does not escalate.”
- The emergency will **lapse in two weeks** unless Parliament votes to extend it, legal experts said.

31 people were killed-



Source: Ministry of Road Transport and Highways

- **Pyongyang** is also ready to denuclearise the peninsula
- **North Korea** is willing to **hold talks** with the **United States** on **denuclearisation** and will suspend nuclear tests while those talks are under way, the South said on Tuesday after a delegation returned from the North where it met leader Kim Jong-un.

- The **Rs 12,700 crore Letters of Undertaking** (LoU) fraud at the Punjab National Bank (PNB) could punch a bigger hole in India's banking system as the closure of Nirav Modi and Mehul Choksi's jewellery businesses is likely to result in another **Rs 8,000 crore** of loans extended to them by banks turning into non-performing assets (NPAs).

- Opposition parties stalled business in both Houses of Parliament on Tuesday, ensuring that the **second day of the second half of the budget session was also a washout.**
- Parliamentary Affairs Minister Ananth Kumar said the **Government was ready for a discussion** on the alleged financial irregularities in the banking sector and Finance Minister Arun Jaitley would reply to the debate.

- Amid a conflict over “**judicial discipline**” within the Supreme Court in connection with certain land acquisition cases, a five-judge Bench, led by Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra, on Tuesday decided to resolve the conflict which once again threatened to lay bare the simmering tensions within the highest judiciary.
- Thus, **contradictory verdicts** on an identical subject of law dealing with compensation payable for land acquired largely from farmers by two different but numerically same Supreme Court Benches became a source of confusion among litigants and lawyers.

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- ONGC Videsh, the overseas arm of government-owned ONGC, has signed a cooperation agreement with Iran’s IDRO Oil to jointly bid for a \$900 million development plan of **Susangerd** oilfield in southwest Iran
- The **Susangerd field**, discovered in **2009**, is estimated to hold more than **5 billion barrels** of in-place reserves.

- India will receive its first LNG import from the U.S. later this month.
- The sale purchase agreement was signed in December 2011 and the cargo is expected to discharge LNG at the Dabhol terminal of GAIL on or around March 28.
- Under the terms of the agreement, GAIL would purchase approximately 3.5 million tonnes of LNG per year from Cheniere's Sabine Pass.

1. Who is the guardian of Fundamental rights?
 - A. Supreme Court
 - B. Parliament
 - C. Constitution
 - D. President
2. Uniform Civil Code mentioned in the Directive Principles of State Policy ensure
 - A. Economic equality
 - B. National security
 - C. National integration
 - D. Support of weaker sections of society

1. Discuss power of Lokpal in India?
2. What is the main issue with Lokpal appointment. How can we solve it?

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