

The Hindu & BL Editorials

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A win for the ages



India's cricket series victory over Australia showcases the élan of youth and grit of the old

India's historic second successive Test series win in Australia, and its breach of "Fortress Gabba", achieved in the end with boldness, chutzpah, the fearless freedom of youth, and a bit of T20-style bling batting, had cricket fans all over the world riveted to the screen. Even Sundar Pichai, the CEO of Google, had to make time for a match tighter than a well-strung mridangam. The win in Brisbane to retain the Border-Gavaskar trophy feels like an audacious, carefully planned heist but it was anything but that with the Indian team plagued by injuries at every step. At the best of times, Australia is a tough place for teams to compete, let alone win. No visiting team has beaten Australia at Brisbane since Vivian Richard's West Indies in 1988; except South Africa, the mighty West Indies of the 1980s, and England in 1932-33, no team has won successive series in Australia. To do that, England in fact had to employ the infamous "Bodyline". And to think that India won with a bowling attack whose most experienced bowler was all of three Tests old, this win is special indeed.

After being bundled out for a humiliating 36, captain Virat Kohli away on paternity leave, and the team virtually not having enough fit men to field a competitive XI, India had no right to harbour ambitions of a win. The team that torpedoed Australia consisted of a bowling attack that had about half-a-dozen Test wickets between them. Washington Sundar, T Natarajan and Shardul Thakur were in the squad to offer batting practice to their teammates in the nets, not torment the Australians. And yet, India won in a fearless, nerveless chase. Not surprisingly, the victory has set-off the season for hyperbole. The team is now being hailed as a metaphor for "New India". Why, at the start of the series, Virat Kohli dubbed himself the "representative of New India" when asked about

his aggressive, implacably positive attitude towards life and cricket. If that is indeed “New India”, then it could be argued that grit, stoicism in the face of pain and adversity, thrift, making the most out of what is available, and going about work with quiet determination — perhaps the way of “Old India” — had a bigger role in the dismantling of Australia. India played the ball, not the man as Australia would have wanted them to, overcoming tactics such as sledging. Without Pujara taking those countless body blows in facing more than 900 balls in four tests, Rahane’s detachedly-attached, near-Vedantic captaincy, R Ashwin and Hanuma Vihari’s pitch-penance in Sydney like Yogis who had trained themselves to curb desire, and bloody-minded will to live to fight another day, could there have been the flourishing finish of Rishabh Pant and Washington Sundar? This was clearly a team effort with every single player rising to the occasion when called to. As Sachin Tendulkar pointed out, the team found a new hero every session. A nation, business or a cricket team, cannot do without both the old and the new.

In bad faith: On the ongoing farmers agitation

State intimidation of protesting groups cannot serve as a substitute for political dialogue

The NIA’s decision to summon people associated with the **ongoing farmers agitation** as ‘witnesses’ in a sedition case is definitely out of the ordinary, even if not entirely surprising. Punjabi actor Deep Sidhu and farmers’ leader Baldev Singh Sirsa are among 40 people it has summoned in connection with a fresh case registered on December 15, 2020 against **Sikhs for Justice**, a U.S.-based organisation that is banned by India. Others summoned include functionaries of Khalsa Aid, a Sikh charity that provided material support to agitating farmers, and those who organised a community kitchen for them. **The insinuation of the NIA** in the very act of summoning them as ‘witnesses’ follows statements by BJP leaders that linked the agitation to Khalistani separatism. Law officers of the government told the Supreme Court last week that anti-national forces that had infiltrated the protests were misleading the farmers. This portrayal of critics of a government policy as either misled and ignorant or anti-national actors forecloses all possibility of any honest dialogue with them. That may not be an unintended outcome for a government that has never been enthusiastic about consultative processes. In this instance, the government and the Court proffer dialogue with protesters while agencies employ intimidatory measures against them.

Efforts to undermine the legitimacy of political actors opposed to the government have acquired a predictable pattern. Its critics are routinely labelled anti-national by social media trolls and functionaries of the ruling BJP. Investigations follow, often by central agencies, the **NIA and the Enforcement Directorate**. The state responses to agitators in Kashmir, Bhima Koregaon and during the protests against the Citizenship (Amendment) Act have been heavy-handed. That, probably, is the message that the government wants to convey to all dissenters, current and prospective: it will not feel restrained by principles of federalism or democratic norms in putting down protests. The NIA’s move cannot be seen delinked from this broader context. Sikhs abroad are a vibrant segment of the diaspora, having links with the motherland, including through

donations to religious and charity activities. Other diaspora groups also support activities, including in the fields of education and health. The Narendra Modi government has a policy of harnessing the strength of Indian diaspora everywhere for national progress. There has to be a high threshold to consider any such community activity as anti-national and no consideration of religion must influence that assessment. The NIA's instant move has been condemned as intimidation, among others, by the Akali Dal, until recently a BJP ally. Strong-arm tactics may be unavoidable when there is an immediate threat of violence. But replacing political dialogue with state intimidation is never strategically prudent. The government must talk to the farmers in good faith.

Top of the heap: On India's series win against Australia

India's series win in Australia came in difficult circumstances, and will be the stuff of folklore

On a magical Tuesday, **India's cricketing history gained a luminous chapter even as the shadows lengthened at Brisbane's Gabba.** When Rishabh Pant's winning four aptly concluded a **tense pursuit of 328 on a nerve-wracking fifth day** of the fourth Test, **Ajinkya Rahane's men seized the series at 2-1** to retain the Border-Gavaskar Trophy. As far as role-reversals go, this was stunning in its execution and jaw-dropping in its impact. It was a verdict that seemed improbable after India's 36, its lowest ever Test score, during the debilitating loss in the first game at Adelaide. But India progressed despite losing personnel to injuries or personal reasons. Skipper Virat Kohli took paternity leave while other regulars had to be benched following a spate of injuries. Yet, Rahane's men persevered, right from the established Cheteshwar Pujara and R. Ashwin to the latest rookies in the squad — Shubman Gill and Washington Sundar. At various points, the experienced professional and the fresh debutant joined forces and nourished miraculous dreams. The turn-around at Melbourne was followed by the stone-walling at Sydney. Finally, in a long tour that commenced on November 12, last year, a second-wind was found in the climax. India did not have any of its frontline bowlers at Brisbane but Mohammed Siraj astutely helmed the attack and Tim Paine's men were defeated by three wickets.

Winning a Test series against Australia in its backyard is considered as cricket's highest benchmark for excellence. This yardstick has lasted for two decades ever since the previous dominant outfit, the West Indies, suffered a decline. Seen in that context, what India has achieved over the course of two tours — in 2018-19 and the just concluded 2020-21 face-off — is nothing short of stupendous. Twice, India has defeated Australia by identical margins (2-1). However, the latest act will rank right up in an all-time list of great Test series ever since the sport's longest format commenced at Melbourne in 1877. When India last toured Australia, the host was blighted by the ball-tampering scandal and Steve Smith and David Warner were rightly put to pasture. Cut to the present, the visitor was up against a full-strength home unit. These are fraught times due to the pandemic and resultant bio-bubble angst, and even stepping out for a coffee is deemed an offence. To make it worse, India was never at its optimum potential and with every passing day, its list of the walking-wounded grew. There were even wry

jokes about how coach Ravi Shastri may be forced to turn out considering his diminishing resources. But India thrived and just like it did at Eden Gardens in 2001, adversity became its springboard for success against an old adversary.