

Topic1: Strange turn: on SC's order regarding Ayodhya dispute

The Supreme Court's attempt at mediation in the Ayodhya dispute is incongruous

Mediation, especially when it is at the instance of a court, is a welcome option for those embroiled in protracted civil disputes. A compromise could indeed be preferable to an order that may leave one side aggrieved. However, it is questionable whether this principle can be applied to all disputes and in all situations. The Supreme Court's order appointing three mediators to find a solution to the Ram Janmabhoomi-Babri Masjid dispute is quite strange and incongruous, given that all such previous attempts have ended in failure. Further, the case is ripe for final hearing, and not all parties favoured mediation. The dispute over the site at Ayodhya, where a 16th century mosque stood until it was torn down by Hindutva fanatics in December 1992, has remained intractable since 1949. After the demolition of the Babri Masjid, the President referred to the Supreme Court the question whether there was a temple to Lord Ram before the mosque was built at the site. The court, in a landmark decision in 1994, declined to go into that question. More important, it revived the title suits and, thereby, restored due process and the rule of law. The present attempt by the Supreme Court to give mediation a chance within a narrow window of eight weeks goes against the spirit of the 1994 decision. After all, it was that verdict that made possible the 2010 judgment of the Allahabad High Court, which favoured a three-way split of the site among Ram Lalla, the Sunni Wakf Board and the Nirmohi Akhara, which is under appeal.

A welcome feature of the court-mandated mediation attempt is that it will not consume much time; the same eight weeks are needed for preparation for the final hearing. The confidentiality rule will be helpful as none would want the atmosphere to be vitiated by premature disclosures when the country is in election mode. However, the inclusion of Sri Sri Ravi Shankar as one of the mediators is controversial. In the past, he has made remarks to the effect that Muslims ought to give up their claim and that the failure to find a negotiated settlement will result in "civil war". It is true that the prolonged problem has had an adverse impact on the body politic and some "healing" is required. But the injury to the country's secular fabric was caused by fanatical Hindutva groups that launched a revanchist campaign on the plea that some temples had been turned into mosques by invaders. The only way to heal this festering wound on the body politic is to render complete justice not only in the civil case, but also for the criminal act of the demolition. No one must be left with the impression that the exercise is aimed at privileging the faith-based argument that the mosque stood at the exact spot where Lord Ram was born over the legal question on who holds the title to the land.

WORD		MEANING	SYNONYMS
Mediation	Noun	Intervention in a dispute in order to resolve it; arbitration.	Conciliation, Arbitration, Reconciliation,
Dispute	Noun	Disagreement or argument.	Debate, Discussion, Discourse, Disputation,
Incongruous	Adjective	Not in harmony or keeping with the surroundings or other aspects of	Out Of Place, Out Of Keeping, Inappropriate, Unsuitable, Unsited

		something	
Embroid	Verb	Involve (someone) deeply in an argument, conflict, or difficult situation	Involve, Entangle, Ensnare, Enmesh, Catch Up, Mix Up, Bog Down, Mire
Protracted	Adjective	Lasting for a long time or longer than expected or usual.	Long, Very Long, Of Considerable Length
Aggrieved	Adjective	Feeling resentment at having been unfairly treated.	Resentful, Affronted, Indignant, Disgruntled,
Ripe	Adjective	Having arrived at the fitting stage or time for a particular action or purpose)	Ready, Fit, Suitable, Right
Fanatics	Noun	A person filled with extreme and uncritical enthusiasm, especially for an extreme religious or political cause.	Zealot, Extremist, Militant, Dogmatist, Devotee,
Intractable	Adjective	Hard to control or deal with.	Unmanageable, Uncontrollable, Ungovernable
Demolition	Noun	The action or process of demolishing or being demolished.	Destruction, Flattening, Razing, Levelling, Bulldozing, Clearance
Revive	Verb	Improve the position or condition of.	Resuscitate, Bring Round, Bring To Life, Bring Back,
Restore	Verb	Bring back or re-establish (a previous right, practice, or situation)	Reinstate, Put Back, Replace
Verdict	Noun	A decision on an issue (especially by a court)	Judgement, Adjudication, Adjudgement, Decision
Confidentiality	Noun	The state of keeping or being kept secret or private.	
Vitiate	Verb	Spoil or impair the quality or efficiency of	Ruin, Wreck, Destroy, Upset, Undo, Mess Up
Premature	Adjective	Occurring or done before the usual or proper time; too early	Untimely, Early, Too Soon, Too Early, Before Time
Disclosure	Noun	a fact, especially a secret, that is made known	Revelation, Surprising Fact, Divulgence, Declaration, Announcement, News, Report
Controversial	Adjective	Public disagreement.	Contentious, Disputed, Contended, At Issue, Moot
Ought	Modal verb	Used to indicate duty or correctness, typically when criticizing someone's actions.	Ought To, Should
Negotiate	Verb	Try to reach an agreement or compromise by discussion	Discuss Terms, Hold Talks, Discuss A Settlement, Talk, Consult Together
Prolonged	Adjective	Continuing for a long time or longer than usual; lengthy.	Continuous, Ongoing, Steady, Continual, Continuing
Adverse	Adjective	Preventing success or development; harmful; unfavourable	Unfavourable, Disadvantageous, Inauspicious, Unpropitious,
Healing	Noun	The process of making or becoming sound or healthy again.	
Secular	Adjective	Not connected with spiritual or religious matters	Non-Religious, Lay, Non-Church, Temporal, Worldly, Earthly, Profane
Revanchism	Noun	A policy of seeking to retaliate, especially to recover lost territory	Conservatism, Ultra-Conservatism, The Right
Plea	Noun	A request made in an urgent and emotional manner.	Appeal, Entreaty, Supplication, Petition, Prayer
Invader	Noun	A person or group that invades a country, region, or other place.	Attacker, Raider, Plunderer, Pillager, Marauder, Looter
Festering	Adjective	(of a negative feeling or a problem) becoming worse or more intense, especially through long-term neglect or	

		indifference.	
Wound	Noun	An injury to living tissue or physical body caused by a cut,	Injury, Lesion, Cut, Gash, Laceration, Tear, Rent, Puncture, Slash
Impression	Noun	An idea, feeling, or opinion about something or someone	Feeling, Sense, Fancy, Suspicion, Sneaking Suspicion,
Privilege	Noun	A special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group.	Advantage, Right, Benefit, Prerogative, Entitlement, Birthright, Due

Topic 2: Road through Rome?

Italy’s proposed endorsement of the BRI highlights the dilemmas within the EU

Italy’s plan to endorse the Belt and Road Initiative, the first such move by a G7 member, will boost China’s global ambitions. In turn, this highlights the difficulties facing the EU and the U.S. in formulating a concerted response to counter China’s growing might. On its inception in 2013, the BRI envisaged linking about 65 countries along a modern Silk Road, the transformation of China into a high-income economy and the renminbi’s elevation into a global currency. Today, it has expanded to over 80 countries, mostly least developed and developing economies, as Beijing seeks to bolster its Made in China 2025 industrial policy. The lure of the BRI is attributed largely to the informal nature of the deals Beijing negotiates with partner-states, with attractive loan terms and sans political strings. Their opaque nature has spurred criticism that recipients risk being pushed into a debt trap. But the glitches facing some of the BRI infrastructure projects have merely led to calls for renegotiation rather than their roll-back. The BRI has moved forward, along with Beijing’s other venture, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank. Many Central and Eastern European countries, EU members and aspirants alike, are part of the “16+1” group, which includes China, collaborating in infrastructure ventures.

However, Italy, an EU founder-member, will be the first major developed economy to participate in the BRI. Rome’s ruling eurosceptic and anti-establishment coalition has been enthusiastic in signing on. Its timing is seen to have something to do with the difficulties the government has faced in balancing its growth targets with the EU’s stringent fiscal norms. These tensions surfaced in recent negotiations with Brussels that led to a revised Italian budget. Italy is counting on its BRI endorsement to boost investment in it, given recent reductions in Chinese outflows into the EU. Rome is expected to sign an MoU to participate in the mammoth endeavour during a visit this month of President Xi Jinping. Italy’s move comes at a moment of increasing concern in European capitals, especially Paris and Berlin, to counter Chinese mergers and acquisitions of European firms to protect the bloc’s strategic economic sectors. The Trump administration has, in keeping with its America First policy, invoked national security provisions rarely deployed in international trade and targeted Beijing with punitive import tariffs, ostensibly to protect domestic industries. China’s phenomenal economic expansion since joining the WTO in 2001 has almost altered the global landscape. But attempts to block Chinese businesses may prove short-sighted. Instead, Western democracies should strive to live up to their repeated pledges, since the 2007-08 global financial crisis, to eschew protectionism and promote rules-based open and free global competition.

WORD		MEANING	SYNONYMS
Endorse	Verb	Declare one's public approval or support of.	Uphold, Support, Defend, Maintain, Confirm
Dilemma	Noun	A situation in which a difficult choice has to be made between two or more alternatives, especially ones that are equally undesirable.	Quandary, Predicament, Difficulty, Problem, Puzzle,
Ambition	Noun	A strong desire to do or achieve something.	Aspiration, Intention, Goal, Aim, Objective, Object
Concerted	Adjective	Jointly arranged or carried out; coordinated.	Joint, United, Jointly Planned, Coordinated,
Might	Modal verb	Used in reported speech, to express possibility or permission.	
Inception	Noun	Starting point of an institution or activity.	Establishment, Institution, Foundation, Founding, Formation,
Envisage	Verb	Contemplate or conceive of as a possibility or a desirable future event.	Foresee, Predict, Forecast, Foretell, Anticipate, Expect, Think Likely, Envision
Elevation	Noun	The action or fact of raising or being raised to a higher or more important level, state, or position	Promotion, Upgrading, Advancement, Advance, Preferment
Bolster	Verb	Support or strengthen.	Strengthen, Support, Reinforce, Make Stronger, Boost, Fortify
Attribute	Verb	Regard something as being caused by	Ascribe, Assign, Accredite, Credit, Impute, Allot, Allocate
Negotiate	Verb	Try to reach an agreement or compromise by discussion.	Arrange, Work Out, Thrash Out, Hammer Out, Reach An Agreement On, Agree On,
Sans	Preposition	Without	Devoid, Bereft, Deprived, In Need
Opaque	Adjective	Not able to be seen through; not transparent	Obscure, Unclear, Dense, Uncertain, Indeterminate, Mysterious
Spurred	Adjective	(Of a rider or their boots) having a spiked device on the heels for urging a horse forward	
Debt trap	Noun	A situation where it is difficult or impossible to repay the debt	
Glitches	Noun	A sudden, usually temporary malfunction or fault of equipment.	Crash, Breakdown, Fault, Failure, Defect, Flaw, Collapse, Impairment
Collaborate	Verb	Work jointly on an activity or project.	Cooperate, Join, Join Up, Join Forces, Team Up
Euro-sceptic	Noun	A person who is opposed to increasing the powers of the European Union.	
Coalition	Noun	A temporary alliance for combined action, especially of political parties forming a government	Alliance, Union, Partnership, Affiliation,
Enthusiastic	Adjective	Having or showing intense and eager enjoyment, interest, or approval.	Eager, Keen, Avid, Ardent, Fervent, Warm,
Stringent	Adjective	Strict, precise, and exacting.	Strict, Firm, Rigid, Rigorous, Severe, Harsh, Tough
Mammoth	Adjective	Huge	Huge, Enormous, Gigantic, Giant, Colossal, Massive,
Endeavour	Noun	An attempt to achieve a goal	Attempt, Try, Bid, Effort, Trial, Venture
Invoked	Verb	Call on (a deity or spirit) in prayer, as a witness, or for inspiration.	Pray To, Call On, Appeal To, Plead With, Supplicate, Entreat, Solicit, Beseech, Beg, Implore, Importune, Petition

Phenomenal	Adjective	Remarkable or exceptional, especially exceptionally good.	Exceptional, Extraordinary, Remarkable, Outstanding, Amazing, Astonishing, Astounding,
Expansion	Noun	The action of becoming larger or more extensive.	Growth, Increase In Size, Enlargement, Extension, Augmentation, Development, Evolution
Eschew	Verb	Deliberately avoid using; abstain from	Abstain From, Refrain From, Give Up, Forgo, Forswear, Shun, Renounce, Swear Off, Abjure, Steer Clear Of, Have Nothing To Do With

