[**Chasing the bumblebee in flight**](https://www.dawn.com/news/1723735/chasing-the-bumblebee-in-flight)

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IT’S come to this. The wingspan of the bumblebee given its body mass should not allow the bumblebee to fly. The bumblebee doesn’t know this so it goes ahead and flies anyway.

Nursery riddles like the one above can perhaps explain Prime Minister Modi’s irrational invincibility against his more numerous opponents. Do the count. The [demonetisation](https://www.dawn.com/news/1295150) disaster would have brought any other leader to their knees, not Mr Modi. The [Covid-19 nightmare](https://www.dawn.com/news/1623524/a-hell-out-here-covid-ravages-indian-villages) that struck every Indian home should have made any prime minister contrite, not Mr Modi. Countless follies — check with the hapless migrant workers — would have damned any reputation, not Mr Modi’s.

Perhaps one needs to dig into mythology for explanation; Hindu or Greek doesn’t matter. Both would have some characters with special boons. “As the dose of the rivals’ abuses increases, the people are increasing their dose of trust and love too,” Mr Modi exulted at an election meeting in Uttar Pradesh en route to his second innings in 2019.

It probably doesn’t matter anymore, therefore, what any US administration thinks of Modi privately, for he is the man who has the gavel to conduct the assembly of G20 leaders next year, adding another handy string to his bow before the race for a third innings starts the following year. So it hardly matters that a State Department official bracketed him with Saudi Arabia’s tyrannical ruler in a guileless slur. Mohammed bin Salman, the official had said, was being allowed into the US just like Narendra Modi and some others were let into the country.

The slur could be of some emotional worth to the few with the nostalgia of a world that looked up to India’s leaders, in particular to Gandhi and Nehru as the uncanny builders of a miraculous democracy. But that’s about all. As that miracle began to wane in 2014, Mr Modi’s popularity only rose.

The West needs the likes of Modi and the Saudi prince — one as a self-paying conscript to battle China; the other as the one who could help arrest Russia’s oil revenues.

The Indian foreign ministry says it’s surprised at Washington’s bracketing of Modi with the Saudi prince though the two are close friends.

The same ministry had a foreign secretary once, the venerable J.N. Dixit. The day the Babri Masjid was razed, Indian ambassadors around the world were in a state of panic. What were they to say to their host governments? “Tell them that a bunch of hoodlums have tried to besmirch India’s fair name. We are dealing with them,” Dixit directed the embassies to tell the world. It’s very different today.

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The Saudi ruler is but one in a menagerie of right-wing rulers present and past that Modi has embraced albeit with different outcomes to them. Egyptian coup leader Abdel Fattah El-Sisi is the new invitee as chief guest at the Jan 26 Republic Day parade. Egypt’s economy is in tatters, its wheat supply remains in a shambles, its tourism revenues have tanked and Sisi’s own job is at stake. It’s not that he wasn’t warned. Brazil’s Jair Bolsonaro, a previous guest of Modi, was recently laid low in close elections. Donald Trump turned down the invite to the parade yet visited Modi with military order forms. Trump lost his second bid despite Modi rooting for him.

The two are very similar in that they are both violently divisive personalities. The difference is that Trump is feared by his country’s deep state that may not let him return to power, whereas Modi is loved by India’s own variant of it. His Israeli pal has claimed power, yet again without a majority. By hook or by crook, Benjamin Netanyahu is in dire need of stalling damning criminal cases that loom over his future. And Modi’s friends in Kyiv and Moscow are battling for survival against each other, wondering which side Modi’s really on.

That the American barb was water off a duck’s back for his party became evident all too promptly in Gujarat.

Campaigning for the Bharatiya Janata Party ahead of the assembly polls, Home Minister Amit Shah, Modi’s right-hand man, was on a familiar mission. Far from being contrite over the bloodletting in 2002, for which he was censured and Modi denied visas to several countries, Shah [boasted](https://www.dawn.com/news/1723470) to a cheering crowd how the “perpetrators of violence were taught a lesson in 2002”. The “perpetrators” thus taught a lesson included Zakia Jafri whose poet-politician husband was slaughtered before her eyes, and Bilkis Bano, who was raped and left for dead with the rest of her family. The convicted killers were [released](https://www.dawn.com/news/1705205) on India’s independence day just ahead of the Gujarat polls.

The BJP has never lost an election in Gujarat after the advent of Modi and reports say this time around may not be different.

“During the Congress rule in Gujarat, communal riots were rampant,” Shah declaimed along a familiar script. “Through such riots, Congress had strengthened its vote bank and did injustice to a large section of society.” The vitriol hadn’t lost its toxicity in 20 years. Shah claims the BJP gained a retributive electoral victory in 2002 and there’s peace ever since.

“After they were taught a lesson in 2002, these elements left that path. They refrained from indulging in violence from 2002 till 2022. The BJP has established permanent peace in Gujarat by taking strict action against those who used to indulge in communal violence.”

In June this year, in a judgement that has been called ‘questionable’ by former apex court judges, India’s supreme court dismissed an appeal by Zakia Jafri, whose husband was among those killed in the orchestrated violence. The judgement also slammed those who had helped her, including Teesta Setalvad, who was put in jail for providing legal assistance to the widow. As for the bumblebee in flight, it refuses to be distracted by the mayhem below.

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