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Realpolitik takes over

India-Israel ties are no longer hostage to idealistic concerns

Relations with Israel always pit a government's interests against its instincts. There is a strong, instinctive sympathy among the public and among many leaders for the cause of Palestinian statehood. But there is an equally strong acceptance that Israel is a country that has become indispensable to India's security and technological interests.

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi's decision to break both the taboo against State visits to Israel and end the hyphenation of Israel and Palestine makes it official that India's realpolitik interests outweigh its idealistic concerns. The trajectory of New Delhi-Tel Aviv ties was such that the prime minister's decision seemed quite natural to most Indians.

Mr Modi's State visit to Israel has only underlined what has already been evident how important this small country is for India's future. Israel already is crucial in providing the security edge that India needs to face off its multiple enemies. Russia may provide the same fighters to India and China, but the electronic extras that Israel puts into the Indian aircraft contribute to India's aerial superiority against its northern neighbour. Israel is probably the closest external ally India has in the area of cybersecurity. And, as the predominance of space in the agreements that Mr Modi signed indicates, space is the next hardware frontier in bilateral relations. Yet, as Mr Modi indicated a number of times, Israel's greatest contribution to India's future may be in the most mundane of areas: Water. Israel is a superpower when it comes to water recycling, conservation and desalination. How exactly India will be able to harness Israel's knowhow in this field is still unclear.

Among the religious Right, whether Hindu or Muslim, there is a tendency to see the India-Israel relationship through the prism of domestic sectarian politics. Israel is not a model for anyone when it comes to communal relations. But given what Israel can and does contribute in the way of solutions to India's many problems, New Delhi is right to no longer hold the bilateral relationship hostage to idealistic concerns.

In Bihar, the Congress must be an honest broker

The coalition will survive if the party gives CM Nitish Kumar the respect he deserves

The rumblings within the alliance in Bihar are getting louder. But is a temblor inevitable? It's hard to tell. For it's risky to be clairvoyant about complex alliances. They mostly collapse when social pacts on which they rest wither away. On the face of it, a major chunk of Bihar chief minister Nitish Kumar's support base isn't hostile to his alliance with Lalu Prasad's RJD and the Congress. The campaign for disbanding it is led by the middle and upper classes, besides vocal sections of the civil society that keep harping on the RJD chief's tainted image. Pragmatism demands that Nitish Kumar keeps his options open for the 2019 polls. But for him it will be a quantum leap to walk out of the ruling alliance whose term ends in 2020, a year after the next general elections.

What's currently on display is brinkmanship between two different temperaments: Lalu Prasad is an overbearing extrovert; Nitish Kumar is a man of few words. Besides opposite personalities, they differ on the alliance's approach to the BJP-ruled Centre. The CM is too matured to be going all guns booming against the BJP regime. He needs New Delhi's assistance to deliver on his promises in the state. That realism compounded after he imposed prohibition in Bihar, which punched a big hole in the state's earnings.

It isn't surprising then that the JD(U) leader is even-handed in his approach towards the Centre and his allies in the Opposition. He did come across as standing with the BJP on demonetisation, GST and Ramnath Kovind's candidature for the presidency, but his stand was well-argued and did not impinge on ideology. The coalition's future could be safe if the Congress, plays an honest broker. It must give Nitish Kumar the respect he deserves. There isn't a leader in the Opposition camp with his credentials to speak on corruption — or on the growing agrarian crisis as former union minister for agriculture.

beyondthebite

RAJDEEP SARDESAI



How a public protest divided India

Many TV channels gave it a miss because they didn't see any TRPs in an urban-centric gathering

This is a tale of two distinct events: One staged by the common citizen, the other by our VVIPs. The 'Not in My Name' protests were held in several cities by a few thousand people to show solidarity with victims of hate violence. There were no elaborate rituals, no full page newspaper ads, no glitzy stage, no lal batti cars and no 'don't you know who I am' attendees. Yes, there was the odd 'celebrity' — a Shabana Azmi here, a Girish Karnad there — but the majority were anonymous, well-intentioned Indians: From 18-year-old college students to an 80-year-old retired government typist.

The midnight session of Parliament to 'celebrate' the launch of the Central Goods and Services Tax Act (GST) was populated by the power elite of this country, each one lining up with typical VVIP splendour. The pomp and pageantry of the Indian State was on full display and Parliament had been lit up like a bridal house on a wedding day. The scent of power wafted across the Central Hall of Parliament, the order of seating a reflection of an individual's status within the charmed circle. With portraits of the founding fathers casting their benevolent gaze over the proceedings, this was pitched as a 'historic' event, a second 'freedom at midnight'

moment. There was nothing 'historic' or choreographed about the 'Not in my Name' protests. A simple Facebook post by just one concerned citizen had gone viral, sparking off a spontaneous reaction of outrage at the killing of another faceless young Indian because of his religious identity.

There were no lengthy obituaries to Junaid: Most of those present didn't even know the deceased. Yes, there was some soulful music and rousing poetry but nothing that appeared remotely stage-managed. A few people wore black bands and some others carried banners, but there was mostly an air of quiet anger and contemplation.

By contrast, the Parliament session was like a luminous sound and light show, dominated by the speeches of our leaders with constant table-thumping and cheering whenever the netas spoke of how the GST would transform the lives of the poor. The leaders praised each other cutting across party lines, a ritualistic exercise in feel-good self-promotion by a tightly-knit club. This was a rare moment of national political consensus, spoiled only by the rather churlish decision of a few Opposition parties like the Congress to stay away from the 'festivities'. The event was carried 'live' across every TV station in the country, each anchor competing with the



There was nothing really 'historic' or choreographed about the 'Not in my Name' protests
RAJ K RAJ/HT PHOTO

other to emboss the occasion with superlatives. The 'Not in My Name' protests were carried on a few English news channels, but the more watched regional and Hindi channels chose to give it a miss, probably because they didn't see any TRPs in a small, urban-centric gathering. The Right-wing commentary on social media spoke of how such events were monopolised by the usual suspects: Secular liberals who raised their voice

WHEN WILL THE URBAN CITIZENRY PROTEST FOR THE FARMER OR PARLIAMENT HOLD A MIDNIGHT SESSION TO ADDRESS THE FARM CRISIS THAT IS SPREADING ACROSS THE NATION?

only because a Muslim had been killed. "Where were you when RSS workers are killed in Kerala or Kashmiri Pandits in the Valley," was a common refrain, the "what-abouts" accusations designed to push an ominous 'them' versus 'us' polarisation.

It is almost as if the genuine anger of a citizen in the face of violent bigotry is somehow illegitimate but the majesty of the State must not be subject to inconvenient truths. Which is why, if given a choice, I would have rather attended a simple citizens' protest in the true spirit of democratic dissent than an ostentatious Parliament jamboree.

Post-script: While citizens raise their voice against lynchings and the State applauds itself over the GST, here is another reality to ponder over: In June, over 25 farmers in BJP-ruled Madhya Pradesh and Congress-ruled Karnataka committed suicide. When will the urban citizenry protest for the farmer or Parliament hold a midnight session to debate the agrarian crisis?

Rajdeep Sardesai is a senior journalist and an author
The views expressed are personal

BORDER TROUBLE



A protest in Ahmedabad, May 3, 2013. The latest stand-off in Sikkim reflects China's desire to break the age-old bonhomie between Bhutan and India
AFP

The Sikkim standoff is a war of words, not a war

Despite the ratcheting up of tensions by the Chinese ambassador to India, New Delhi should be patient



SRIKANTH KONDAPALLI

China's Ambassador to India Luo Zhao-hui expressed his belligerent stance that there can be "no compromise" and that the "ball is in India's court" in resolving the nearly three-week-old standoff at the Sikkim-Tibet-Bhutan borders. In the light of the G20 summit meeting at Hamburg this week and where Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Xi Jinping are expected to meet, his comments appear to be part of a diplomatic hard-ball being played by China.

Since Chinese efforts to construct a road in the Bhutanese-claimed area closer to Sikkim began, the situation is snowballing into a war of words, if not a war in reality. Yet, despite ratcheting up by the Chinese side, we can only expect some flashes in the pan.

First, while a British Indian-Qing Dynasty Convention of March 1890 outlines a border treaty between Sikkim and Tibet along the watershed principle, no demarcation of territories was made subsequently. The areas of the current stand-off in Sikkim-Bhutan areas were never formalised. As the areas at the junction of three countries, Indian consent is necessary for finalising a border treaty.

The Chinese argument that Indian Army had "intruded" into its territory was con-

tested by the Bhutanese government on June 20. The Bhutanese also countered that Beijing was violating the 1988 and 1998 understanding on status quo. China has also been selective by citing the 1890 treaty while terming the 1914 McMahon Line as "unequal". Such selective arguments are bound to weaken Chinese positions in the short term.

Second, invoking the special relations between India and Bhutan, Indian troops stopped the Chinese from building a road in the contested territories of Bhutan and China. For India, the building of a Chinese road with military back-up in Chumbi valley has security consequences for the vulnerable Siliguri Corridor. Such brazen actions by China are matched by the Indian resolve to protect its interests. Still, it is only expected that the current stand-off then will fizzle out with stiff Indian resistance. The rhetoric on the Chinese side has taken a turn towards escalation. Their foreign ministry spokesperson's comments on July 3 suggested Indian troops are "trespassing" into China's territory!

China's recent statements on Singapore, Vietnam and Japan followed a similar pattern of psychological war and coercive diplomacy. In this backdrop, India needs to brace for more such rhetoric but to observe patience and perseverance. Not only does India need to further strengthen its ties with South Asian countries but also respond strategically, in the larger region of Asia at the diplomatic, economic and military levels.

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democracywall

HARSH MANDER



Don't allow the politics of hatred to devour us

There were many similarities but as many differences between the two attacks on trains in the US and India

Within the span of one month, in two opposite corners of the planet, men acted out their hate against young teenaged children. In both compartments, knives flashed, blood flowed, and people died, only because of the fury of prejudice. Yet both stories are as different as light is from darkness.

One May 28, in Portland in the US, two young teenaged friends were travelling by train. One was black, the other visibly Muslim as she wore a hijab. Suddenly a white man in his thirties racially harangued the two girls. He shouted they did not belong to the country, did not pay taxes, and should go back to Saudi Arabia.

Three men separately approached the enraged man, forming a protective ring between him and the terrified girls. "You guys can't disrespect these young ladies like that," they said to him. As they argued, the man got even more infuriated and threatened them. Just as the girls were trying to get off the train, the man suddenly attacked their protectors with a knife. He slit the throats of two of the men, and savagely sliced into the thigh of the third.

One mortally wounded man, 23-year-old Taliesin Namkai-Meche fell on the floor of the compartment. A few passengers tried to stem his bleeding. "I am going to die," he said. As they picked him up, his last words were, "Tell everyone on the train that I love them." The second man whose throat was slit was 53-year-old Rick Best, an air force veteran, too died on the platform. It was only the third young man, a poet, 21-year-old Micah Fletcher, who survived.

There was an outpouring of grief and gratitude for these heroes. One of the girls said to KPTV, "They didn't even know me. They lost their life because of me and my friend and the way we looked and I just to say thank you to them and their family and I appreciate them because without them we

WHEN THE LONE SURVIVOR OF THE PORTLAND ATTACK, MICAH FLETCHER, WAS CALLED TO A PROGRAMME TO HONOUR HIM, HE SAID: 'DON'T MAKE US HEROES JUST FOR TRYING TO SAVE OUR CHILDREN'

probably would be dead right now."

Less than a month later, on June 24, again on a train, again a Muslim teenager, became the target of hate assaults, this time in India. The boy Junaid Khan, with his brothers Hashim and Shaqir, was returning to his village in Haryana by a local train, after his Eid shopping in the walled city of Delhi. The boys found seats to sit, and began to play Ludo on their phone. At the station Okhla, a large crowd got it. Junaid got up and gave his seat to an old man. A group of men demanded that the other brothers also vacate their seats. When they held on, the men abused them racially, asked them to go to Pakistan, and taunted them for being circumcised. They pulled off their skullcaps, tugged their beards, and thrashed them. They did not let them get off at their station. Instead, as the train sped ahead, they took out knives, and stabbed the three brothers, and threw them off at the next station.

It is remarkable that both these hate attacks at two ends of the planet, in the world's two largest democracies, in similar ways targeted Muslim teenagers, by men frenzied by majoritarian prejudice. In both, train compartments were sites of violence, and in both knives were used to kill.

Sadly the similarity ends there. In Portland, white co-passengers heroically came to the rescue of the children, and paid for this with their lives. In India, not one passenger helped the boys, and even the old man who Junaid gave his seat joined other passengers in further goading the killers. In the station, no railway staff or shopkeeper came to help the boys even as the youngest one bled to death.

American people were moved by the heroism of the three men, and raised donations of \$2.2 million dollars. But Fletcher, the lone survivor, said that the country should really be most worried not about him but the two girls who endured the hate attack. "It is they who need counselling and support to be able to face life with courage," he reminded his countrymen and women. When he was called to a programme to honour him, he said, don't make us heroes just for trying to save our children.

In both our countries, feverish politics of hatred are fighting our capacities for love and courage. In both we cannot let hatred win.

Harsh Mander is author, *Looking Away: Inequality, Prejudice and Indifference in New India*
The views expressed are personal

innervoice
HAVE YOU TRIED MEDITATION TO CALM THE BODY AND MIND?



Sant Rajinder Singh

Life in today's world is stressful. People are anxious about their health, finances, relationships, safety, and work. How do you deal with this anxiety without it harming yourself or your loved ones? Meditation can help calm the body and mind. The state of relaxation that the body experiences while meditating further does good to one's body. So, you can expect improved sleep patterns, lower blood pressure, enhanced immune and digestive systems, and a reduced sensa-

tion of pain.

During the day, our mind is filled with thoughts and problems surrounding us. When we sit for meditation, those problems start to bother us less and we develop sustained concentration. That, coupled with reduced stress and tension, renewed energy, and improved relationships, makes us more efficient and productive, and better equipped to deal with life's challenges.

When we are in a state of physical and mental calmness, we have more control over our reactions towards life's stressors.

We can make better decisions. We can react more calmly to others, alleviating the tension in our relationships.

And once we connect to a place of happiness and peace within us, we experience a reduction in our anxiety. When we enjoy that state of calm, we then want to return to it, and we realise that we can tap into it anytime we want.

Inner Voice comprises contributions from our readers
The views expressed are personal
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