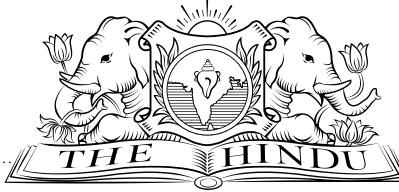


8 EDITORIAL



Mr. Modi in Israel

He affirms special ties, underplays historical stress India has given to the Palestine issue

While welcoming Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Tel Aviv, his Israeli counterpart, Benjamin Netanyahu, said his country had awaited the visit for "seventy years". Since the birth in 1948 of Israel, whose admission to the UN India subsequently opposed, Israeli leaders had always sought full diplomatic ties. And once the Narasimha Rao government established full diplomatic ties in 1992, Israel pushed for full acknowledgement of bilateral relations on the international stage. As a result, the significance of Mr. Modi's visit to Israel, as the first Indian Prime Minister there, was the trip itself. This was reflected in the camaraderie between the two Prime Ministers, who spent practically every waking moment together. The agreements signed during the visit, on water, agriculture, space and science and technology, are important no doubt, but not path-breaking. They simply underscore ongoing cooperation in such fields – as well as in the defence sector, India being one of the biggest buyers of Israeli military equipment. Cooperation on cybersecurity issues, discussed by officials during Mr. Modi's visit, constitutes a breakthrough of sorts, given that Israel tends to limit cooperation in this area to a few countries. A decision was announced to upgrade ties to a strategic partnership, signalling a final step to total normalisation of relations. Perhaps this is why Mr. Modi's address to Israelis of Indian origin in Tel Aviv, with a promise to address visa issues and improve air connectivity, had an emotional pitch different from his meetings with the diaspora elsewhere in the world.

However, the best friendships are judged not just by bilateral bonhomie, but by the ability to discuss uncomfortable issues. With Mr. Modi's visit India has, for all purposes, de-hyphenated its ties with Israel and Palestine, something Israel has always wanted. In a clear repudiation of the Indian practice of keeping Palestinian leaders prominently in the loop, Mr. Modi made a point of not visiting the Occupied Territories. The departure was more prominent in the joint statement, that contained a short paragraph on the "Israel-Palestine" peace process, with no reference to UN resolutions, the two-state solution, or even the need to resume talks, that Mr. Modi had spoken of during the visit of Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to India just a couple of months ago. It would have been more in keeping with India's stature on the international stage, and its particular leverage with all players in West Asia especially on Palestine, had Mr. Modi made a visible attempt to extract from Israel a commitment to the peace process. India's evolving ties with Israel no doubt are based on pragmatism and the desire to eschew hypocrisy – but Mr. Modi has infused his visit with a symbolism and substance that could well mark a point of departure in India's moral support to the Palestinian cause. By way of comparison, U.S. President Donald Trump visited Palestine too when he went to Israel in May.

Déjà vu in Brazil

With the President caught in a scandal, the country braces for more instability

Brazil, Latin America's largest economy, has been coasting along comfortably with record low inflation for a decade and healthy foreign direct investment to sustain the path of recovery from a recent recession. But the "Lava Jato" anti-corruption movement that rocked it three years back seems to be a long way from delivering on the promise of democratic and transparent governance. Inquiries into public fraud by politicians and captains of business have brought skeletons tumbling out of the cupboard. When Dilma Rousseff, then President, was impeached last year, it had appeared that the worst was over. But now the incumbent President, Michel Temer, has been indicted by Brazil's top prosecutor. The script is sickeningly familiar. Ms. Rousseff was implicated over a scandal in the state-owned oil giant and its construction arm. The accusation against Mr. Temer is complicity in the authorisation of heavily subsidised public loans for a private corporation in return for political patronage. He has vehemently denied the charges, and termed the Lava Jato campaign, which he had once sympathised with, a witch hunt against political representatives.

The course of the investigation against Mr. Temer is as yet uncertain. But his position appears far less precarious than that of his predecessor. The requisite vote in the lower House of Congress to authorise a criminal trial may not materialise eventually, as most members are themselves facing investigations. Representatives from his centre-right Brazilian Democratic Movement Party and Ms. Rousseff's Workers' Party have called for the resignation of Mr. Temer. But indications are that few have the appetite to precipitate the situation further. Moreover, upon Ms. Rousseff's downfall, Mr. Temer, who was Vice-President then, had been catapulted to the country's highest office. With the next presidential election scheduled for 2018, the search for a successor may not be easy. This continuing turmoil puts at risk assurances of reforms to Brazil's labour laws and generous pension system. The controversial raising of the retirement age was seen as a major push to overhaul what was one of the world's most envied social security programmes. Arguably, the Brazilian Left leaned too much towards an unsustainable populist agenda in the heady years of the commodities boom. But its counterparts on the Right appear ill-equipped to position themselves as a realistic alternative despite attempts to attract overseas investment. Like other nations in the region, Brazil badly needs a strong centre that is not tempted to tilt at the windmills of populism. That is the best chance of ensuring accountability to the people and engagement with the rest of the world.

Making of a monumental crisis

Parliament must resist a proposed amendment that compromises the 100-m no-construction zone



NAYANJOT LAHIRI

India's monumental heritage is on the brink of a shameful shift. The Central government is poised to introduce an amendment to the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Act, 1958, in Parliament, which would remove the security net that exists around our nationally protected monuments.

Endangered structures

Why is this security net necessary, and why is its proposed infringement shameful? Our protected monuments, from the Taj Mahal to the monuments of Mamallapuram, have a designated prohibited area – at least a 100-m radius – to protect them, where no new construction is allowed. It is similar to the zoning around tiger reserves where the core area is set apart for the animals to live in, and where human disturbance is not permitted. Just as this is done to prevent human-animal conflict, zoning around monuments is necessary to prevent monuments from defacement and to prevent the present from displacing the past by marinating historical landscapes. Monuments, it needs to be remembered, are endangered structures and vulnerable to human interference. If tigers have disappeared across large parts of the habitats they occupied even till the early part of the last century, so have several of India's protected monuments. As it is, there are a mere 3,650 monuments which are nationally protected in a country where the records with the government show some

5,00,000 unprotected and endangered monuments.

The track record of the government in maintaining our nationally protected monuments, to put it most charitably, is an indifferent one. There are encroachments by government agencies and individuals. The 2013 report of the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) noted that of the 1,655 monuments whose records were scrutinised and which were physically inspected, 546 of them were encroached. This may well be because of a lack of basic manpower in the form of monument attendants. In 2010, the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI) stated on record that its staff strength did not permit the deployment of even a single person on a regular full-time basis at more than 2,500 of its monuments. This meant that more than two-thirds of India's monuments that the Central government is supposed to protect were poorly guarded. At the same time, the CAG pointed to connivance by ASI officials as well. As the files of the ASI reveal, there are also numerous instances where politicians have proactively protected those who have illegally occupied the prohibited zone around monuments.

The only protection for our defenceless heritage has come from courts of law because there are legal provisions which, at least on paper, prevent the encroachment of the prohibited zone around monuments. The idea itself, that a security net ought to be created around heritage buildings, can be traced to Jawaharlal Nehru. As Prime Minister, he complained to the Union Minister of Education in 1955 that India's old and historical places were getting spoilt by new buildings being put up around them. In order to prevent intrusions, Nehru suggested that the



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government "lay down that within a certain area no building should be put up without permission". An example of his proactive approach in creating such protective barriers is the enclosure encircling the tomb of Abdur Rahim Khan-i-Khana in Nizamuddin. This was built after Nehru had visited the site and suggested that the adjacent grounds be converted into a garden because, as he put it, he did not want the colony of Nizamuddin East to extend into the area around the tomb. This idea eventually found its way into the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains Rules of 1959.

Because of these rules, the High Court of Delhi in 2009 struck down all permissions that had been illegally granted by the ASI through an Expert Advisory Committee. As a consequence of this judgment, in 2010, the Government of India set up a committee which recommended a new bill to Parliament. It is now known as the Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Sites and Remains (Amendment and

Validation) Act. Unanimously passed in March 2010, this legislation brought the prohibited and regulated zones around monuments within the ambit of the Act itself.

As a consequence of this statute, the National Monuments Authority was set up. It is shocking that even after these years, a major task of this authority remains to be done, that of preparing heritage bye-laws for nationally protected monuments. If India's rulers cared at all for our monuments, by now not only would the bye-laws pertaining to the 3,650 national monuments have been prepared, they would also have been tabled in Parliament as was required by law. Instead of expediting the preparation of those bye-laws, the government has sought to dilute the 100 m prohibited area around nationally protected monuments. The proposed amendment aims to allow the Central government to construct within that area all kinds of structures. Incidentally, the Cabinet note shows that the Ministry of Culture, instead of protecting monuments, is now acting a clearing house for the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways. The

amendment is necessary, the Cabinet note states, because, among other things, an elevated road needs to be built in front of Akbar's tomb in Agra! The Ministry of Culture needs to be reminded that it is the nodal agency for protecting our monuments, not endangering them. Otherwise, it is better for the government to abolish this ministry since cultural protection is far from what it seems to be doing.

One people, two norms

What makes this amendment shameful is that our Ministers live in the Lutyens Bungalow Zone in New Delhi where overhead metro lines have not been permitted because, quite rightly, they would have permanently marred the aesthetics of the area. Hundreds of crores of rupees have been spent to ensure that there are no ugly railway corridors across that area. Yet, the ruling class has no compunction in pushing for a legislation which would allow overhead contraptions in the vicinity of our national monuments. Does the government believe that the aesthetics around government bungalows matter but not around monuments? Or is it possible that they believe that monuments do not matter and only highways do?

India's monuments form an irreplaceable archive of our civilisational heritage. Our pride in our heritage has always been surplus while caring for that heritage suffers a huge deficit. Surely, India's archaeological heritage, as diverse and priceless as our natural heritage, seventy years after Independence, deserves better than what has fallen to its lot.

Nayanjot Lahiri's most recently published book is 'Monuments Matter: India's Archaeological Heritage Since Independence'. She is a professor of history at Ashoka University

Postscript to the proxy war

Tensions threaten to spiral between the U.S. and Iran ahead of the coming battle for southern Syria



MOHAMAD BAZZI

On June 18, a U.S. warplane shot down a Syrian regime jet after it bombed American-backed rebels in northern Syria – the first time the U.S. has downed a Syrian warplane since the start of the country's civil war in 2011. Two days later, the Pentagon announced it had shot down an Iranian-made drone in the country's south-east, where American personnel have been training anti-Islamic State fighters, and where a complex geopolitical battle is unfolding.

Since President Donald Trump took office, the U.S. military has struck the Syrian regime or its allies at least five times. Even if the Pentagon may not want to directly engage Syrian forces, or their Russian and Iranian-backed allies, there's a danger of accidental escalation, especially as various forces continue to converge on eastern and southern Syria to reclaim strategic territory from the Islamic State (IS).

Mr. Trump's willingness to use military force against Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his chief supporters risks sparking a widening confrontation, while distracting from what Mr. Trump insists is his top priority: defeating the IS in

both Iraq and Syria. As a presidential candidate, Mr. Trump campaigned on a pledge to avoid direct U.S. involvement in the Syrian conflict. Today, he has become a major player in a regional proxy war that could determine West Asia's dynamics for decades.

The Syrian conflict has expanded into a war that involves regional and world powers – including the U.S., Russia, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar – whose interests sometimes overlap, but at other times lead to multiple confrontations and uncomfortable alliances. Under the Obama administration, U.S. policy in Syria was focused on containing the IS, largely ignoring Mr. Assad, and keeping American allies from fighting each other.

The Iran factor

The dangers are particularly acute when it comes to Iran, which made dramatic battlefield moves of its own last month when it launched several missiles from inside Iran against IS targets in eastern Syria. Officially, Iran's Revolutionary Guards said the volley of missiles fired at Deir al-Zour province was a response to a pair of attacks by IS militants in Tehran on June 7, the first time that the terrorist group had struck inside Iran.

After shooting down the Syrian jet, the Pentagon insisted it would protect the Syrian rebels it has been training and arming for more than a year to launch the assault on the IS in Raqqa, capital of its self-proclaimed caliphate. "The coalition



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does not seek to fight Syrian regime, Russian, or pro-regime forces partnered with them, but will not hesitate to defend coalition or partner forces from any threat," the U.S. statement said. And foremost among those threats, in the eyes of the Trump administration, is Iran. While Mr. Trump has changed his mind on a number of foreign policy questions since taking office, he has been consistent in his belief that Iran poses the greatest threat to U.S. interests in West Asia.

Nowhere is Iran projecting its regional power more extensively than Syria. Since the war started, Tehran has sent billions of dollars in aid and thousands of troops and Shiite volunteers to support Mr. Assad's men. Over the past two years, Russia and Iran, along with Hezbollah and several Iraqi Shiite militias, helped the Syrian President consolidate control and regain territory he lost to Syrian rebels and foreign jihadis. In December, with intensive Russian airstrikes and Iranian ground support, his forces

recaptured the rebel-held sections of Aleppo, Syria's largest city. It was Mr. Assad's biggest victory since the war began. The next prize for the Syria government and its allies is the eastern province of Deir al-Zour, home to the country's modest oilfields. This desert expanse includes several border crossings between Syria, Iraq and Jordan – and the strategic highway connecting Damascus and Baghdad.

In recent weeks, Syrian troops, along with Hezbollah and other Shiite militias, have been moving to consolidate control over the area and to connect with Iranian-backed militias that are fighting to dislodge the IS from the Iraqi side of the border.

The Trump administration is worried that with these gains, Iran and its allies will carve out a "Shiite crescent" extending from Iran, through Iraq and Syria, and into Lebanon, where Hezbollah is the most powerful political and military force. Such a prospect looms large not only for the U.S. administration, but also its allies in the Arab world, especially Saudi Arabia.

Since taking office, Mr. Trump and his top advisers have shifted their rhetoric to reflect more explicit support for Saudi Arabia and its Sunni Arab allies, and, in turn, a harsher view of Iran. The shift was cemented during Mr. Trump's visit in May to the kingdom, which he chose as the first stop on his maiden overseas trip as President. Like his Saudi hosts, Mr. Trump

framed the problems of West Asia as due solely to Iran's belligerence and terrorism by Islamist extremist groups, despite the kingdom's destabilising activities across the region, including its ongoing catastrophic war in Yemen and its recent blockade of Qatar.

Meanwhile, Iranian officials are growing increasingly frustrated at the Trump administration's constant attacks on the July 2015 agreement Tehran signed with the U.S. and five other world powers to limit its nuclear programme in exchange for the lifting of international sanctions.

While Washington is eager to portray its latest actions in Syria as defensive measures, Mr. Assad's regime and its Iranian allies view them as an aggression, noting that the Pentagon shot down a Syrian jet in Syrian airspace.

And by flexing their military reach in Syria with a missile launch, Iran's Revolutionary Guards and other regime hardliners risk inflaming more tension with the Trump administration – tension that could boil over in the coming war for dominance of southern Syria.

There is a danger that one of the many players in this conflict could overreach and provoke a new confrontation that spirals out of control.

Mohamad Bazzi is a journalism professor at New York University and former Middle East bureau chief at *Newsday*. He is writing a book on the proxy wars between Saudi Arabia and Iran

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Letters emailed to letters@thehindu.co.in must carry the full postal address and the full name or the name with initials.

Modi-Bibi bonhomie

There can be no two opinions that the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Israel is historic. The red-carpet welcome he has received at Ben Gurion Airport is also unprecedented. While all our former Prime Ministers have preferred to meet Israeli leaders only in Delhi for varied reasons, Mr. Modi has established a new normal by making a trip to Tel Aviv. One only expects that the visit results in a mutually beneficial relationship between the two countries without affecting the good ties India has nurtured all along with Palestine. The visit should also not affect India's support for Palestine in its justified struggle to become an independent entity.

YVONNE FERNANDO,
Chennai

■ It was indeed a very proud moment for all of us to see Mr. Modi being received at Ben Gurion Airport by his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu, an honour hitherto given only to the U.S. President and the Pope. He struck an emotional chord with Mr. Netanyahu by remembering his brother Yonathan, who had laid down his life saving a hijacked plane in Operation Entebbe exactly 41 years ago. This put a greater personal touch to his rapport with Mr. Netanyahu. He visited Yad Vashem, a memorial for the Holocaust victims, and met young Moshe, whose parents lost their lives in the 26/11 Mumbai attacks. All these send out an unequivocal message to Israel that India stands with it in times of grief. The signing of a strategic

partnership on various non-security issues, including on space cooperation, by the two countries would surely give our relationship a further push. I earnestly hope that the bonhomie created during the visit also leads to more people-to-people contacts through the promised Indian Cultural Centre in Israel and by making it easy for Israelis of Indian origin to get Overseas Citizen of India (OCI) cards.

VIPLAV JAIN,
Islamabad

misleading the public," July 6). With most of them – not just Pakistan but also Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka – we seem to be having problems. Mr. Modi's foreign policy, dominated by hugs and unannounced visits, does not seem to be working.

There is no doubt that the incident with China is more in the nature of gameplay, coming subsequent to the increased proximity of India to the U.S., including New Delhi's recent call for 'freedom of navigation' amid disputes in the South China Sea region. We have never been able to anticipate situations like the imbroglio with China and defuse them in advance. More often than not, it seems that we walk into a situation unaware of what's going on. Some time back, it was reported that China is

building multiple dams on the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra and that this would reduce the water flow of the river drastically. This initially caused consternation but ultimately we had to accept this without much of a quid pro quo.

Confrontation is not always the desired path in international diplomacy

and should be used as a last resort when all other methods of conflict resolution have been exhausted. Alertness and preparedness should be the hallmarks of India's foreign policy.

S. KAMAT,
Alto Santa Cruz, Goa

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS: >>In the graphic that accompanied "Trump slams China over N. Korea" (World page, July 6, 2017), the operational missiles of North Korea were erroneously shown as 'under development' and those being developed as 'operational'.

>>The net profit figure was wrongly given as ₹3,233 crore in the headline and text of a Business page story (July 6, 2017) on the rise of Citibank's net profit for the financial year ending March 2017. The correct net profit figure is ₹3,626 crore (and not ₹3,233 crore after tax).

It is the policy of The Hindu to correct significant errors as soon as possible. Please specify the edition (place of publication), date and page. The Readers' Editor can be contacted by Telephone: +91-44-28418297/28576300 (11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday to Friday); Fax: +91-44-28552963; E-mail: readerseditor@thehindu.co.in; Mail: Readers' Editor, The Hindu, Kasturi Buildings, 859 & 860 Anna Salai, Chennai 600 002, India. All communication must carry the full postal address and telephone number. No personal visits. The Terms of Reference for the Readers' Editor are on www.thehindu.com

LEFT, RIGHT, CENTRE

Should we grow GM crops?

We've moved from dismal regulation of Bt cotton to outright delinquency in bid to commercialise HT mustard



ARUNA RODRIGUES
has filed a PIL against
GM crops in the
Supreme Court of
India

To hide her nakedness, India has borrowed a 'fig leaf' from U.S. regulation

LEFT of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), i.e., in the non-regulation of these novel laboratory organisms. The U.S. invented GMOs and commercialised them despite serious safety concerns expressed by government scientists.

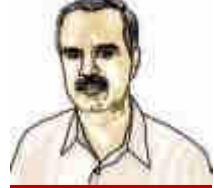
Myths and realities

GMOs carry risks of 'unintended' effects and toxicity, which confront us with a double problem: scientists don't know what to look for, and health impacts become apparent only in the long term, such as can-

cer. California reaffirmed last month, despite GM behemoth Monsanto's best efforts, that its glyphosate, will be included in a list of chemicals labelled as "cancer-causing" (following the categorisation of glyphosate by the World Health Organization as a "probable carcinogen").

There is serious concern that Monsanto may have known for 30 years that glyphosate is an endocrine (hormone) disruptor; no regulatory agency anywhere regulates for endocrine disruption despite overwhelming evidence from Argentina of horrendous birth defects because of glyphosate used in herb-

GM crops offer a promising solution to meet the world's food security needs in the foreseeable future



SHIVENDRA BAJAJ
is executive director of
the Association of the
Biotech-Led Enterprises –
Agriculture Focus
Group (ABLE-AG)

Are GM crops important? Are they needed? Are they safe? And

RIGHT who will benefit? These questions should be put to rest now. GM crops have benefited India and the world tremendously. There is not a single proven evidence of any ill-effects of biotech crops on human or animal health.

Ramping up output

Food security has improved around the globe over the past five years, but hunger and food insecurity persist. On its part, India continues to

battle huge challenges with regard to its agriculture output. Biotechnology, around the world, has helped farmers grow 311.8 million tonnes more food in the last 15 years. Given the increased growth of global population and increased urbanisation, GM crops offer one of the promising solutions to meet the world's food security needs in the foreseeable future.

Much of the debate around agri-technology has centred on agri-biotechnology, of which GM crops is a part. Biotechnology is a technology well proven within India, as evidenced in the spectacular success of

icide-tolerant (HT) soybeans. In this context, Bayer's glufosinate, the herbicide linked with Indian HT mustard, is an acknowledged neurotoxin banned in the EU. The Supreme Court-appointed technical expert committee recommended a ban on any HT crop in India for this among several other reasons.

The myths that have sustained the propaganda of a safe and highly productive GM crop technology for two decades – that it "will feed the world" – are fast dissolving. The current stable of GMOs comprises just two products, Bt (e.g. Bt cotton) and HT crops (HT mustard), and they account for nearly 99% of GMOs planted worldwide. Both, on



empirical evidence (including India's Bt cotton), are proven unsustainable technologies. There are promises of GMOs with traits for disease, drought etc., but these are complex, multi-gene traits and remain futuristic. What is abundantly clear is that traditional breeding outperforms GMOs hands down.

Going against evidence
Globally and in India, the conflict of interest is pernicious: our regulatory institutions/ministries are funders, promoters, developers and regulators, a fine blend of multitasking. There is neither independence nor rigour. Add to this the serious lack of expertise in risk assessment,

and we are sitting on an agri-biosecurity powder keg. These matters are fully attested to in four official Government of India reports. We have moved from dismal regulation in Bt cotton in 2002 to outright delinquency evident in the current 'plot' to commercialise HT mustard. The regulation is subterranean, unconstitutional and also in contempt of Supreme Court orders pertaining to Bt brinjal/mustard.

The HT mustard field trials, which were accessed under the Right to Information Act, are a revelation of regulatory shambles. This hybrid-making HT mustard, on the government's own admission in the Supreme Court, has not out-yielded our best non-GMO hybrids and varieties. Yet this is the notion sung in

high decibels in an ever-increasing crescendo by the media.

We must learn from the lessons of the history of hazardous technologies, DDT, asbestos, etc. But GMOs, critically, stand apart from these. GMOs are self-replicating organisms and genetic contamination of the environment, of non-GM crops and wild species through gene flow is certain: it cannot be contained, reversed, remedied or quantified. Our seed stock will also be contaminated at the molecular level. Any toxicity that there is will remain in perpetuity. The traits for disease, saline and drought resistance, yield, etc. are found in nature, not biotech labs. We must maintain India's still-rich genetic diversity for the future of our agriculture.

A major challenge is to develop low-input, high-output agriculture. This cannot be achieved without technology



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Crop plants, like any other biological species, have threats from many pests and pathogens.

CENTRE In evolutionary biology this constant battle between hosts, pests and pathogens is called an arms race. Every crop has a few major and minor pests and pathogens. The latter, however, can always turn into a major threat due to large-scale cultivation of the crop and climate change.

The two important ways of protecting crops involve dispensing agrochemicals, or breeding species for resistance. The latter is environ-

mentally more benign as it reduces the use of agrochemicals and the preferred source is tapping the germplasm within the crop species. Resistance-conferring genes can also be sourced from wild relatives of crops, a process that may take up to 15 years. In many cases, no source is available even within the wild relatives.

The technique of genetic engineering, in common lexicon called GM technology, allows the introduction of a resistance-conferring gene from any biological source. Bt cotton is a very fine example of using a resistance-conferring gene

from a bacterial species to tackle bollworms, a common cotton pest. The alternative to Bt would be pesticides and further, these have to be new molecules, as those in use before the introduction of Bt cotton are no longer effective. However, we must understand that no resistance lasts forever. Therefore, one has to discover and use new sources of resistance – or stack genes together – that work through different mechanisms to confer longer resistance.

The development of GM technologies is a major achievement of the recombinant-DNA era that started in the 1970s. This has been followed by remarkable developments in

genome sequencing. Today genomes of all the major crops have been sequenced and the information is available freely. An interesting use of GM technology is employing Barnase/Barstar genes to develop an efficient system of hybrid seed production in a crop. Our centre at the University of Delhi has deployed this method in oilseed mustard for developing productive hybrids. The system has cleared all the required biosafety parameters and is currently awaiting the Central government's nod for field deployment. Hybrids yield higher than pure-line varieties and will help the country in reducing its edible oil deficit. In

the last financial year, around ₹68,000 crore worth of edible oils were imported by the country. This amount should have been earned by our farmers.

Agenda-driven criticism

Why are GM technologies – that could provide a country like India long-term food and nutritional security – so vociferously attacked by ideologues of different hues? This is because urban populations are too remote from the issues bedeviling Indian agriculture. GM-bashers also have the tacit support of ideologues of both the Left and the Right. The classical Left has a historical dislike of big transnational companies, which control most of the GM technologies. For the neo-Left ideologues, GM is an easy target to remain relevant. Then we have nativists, who believe everything that is good happened a few thousand years back. Before 1900 agriculture was mostly organic. But the world population then was around 1.6 billion; today it is around 7.5 billion. It is not possible to feed people with pre-1900 agriculture.

A major challenge today is to develop low-input, high-output agriculture. This cannot be achieved without technology. The government must take decisions on GM technologies on the basis of scientific evidence. Once some successful interventions are in the field, the post-truth world that GM-bashers have created will disappear in no time.

SINGLE FILE

Thinking multilateral

India has sent conflicting signals through its approach to three recent events

POOJA BHATT



The last two months have been an eventful period in India's foreign policy engagements. The culmination of three events – One Belt, One Road (OBOR)/Belt and Road Forum (BRF), Shangri-La Dialogue and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) meet – saw high-level exchanges among

countries of the Asia-Pacific region. However, India's different responses to the three events point to complexities that might hinder its approach.

The first event, the BRF held in Beijing, was attended by 29 heads of states, more than 100 senior government officials and 70 international organisations. New Delhi, critical of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), chose not to attend. It thus sent a strong political signal of its discomfiture to the leaderships of both China and Pakistan.

When it comes to the annual Shangri-La Dialogue, which brings together Defence Ministers and other high-level officials from 28 nations in the Asia-Pacific, India has attended 12 out of 16 meets since its inception in 2002. This year though, India was conspicuous by its absence, which was due to a combination of factors – late confirmation from New Delhi's end and a 'programme oversight' by the organisers. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley, also additionally holding the portfolio of defence, was hard-pressed for time and Minister of State Subhash Bhambhani was deputed to head the Indian delegation. India decided to pull out when he was told to attend one of the 'plenary sessions' and not given a speaking role at the main session.

It missed out on an important avenue to put across its views due to the absence of a full-time Defence Minister. That said, New Delhi could have sent a suitable delegation instead as was done by China and Pakistan. Chinese delegation, led by Lt. Gen. Le Hei, raised several issues like U.S. arms sale to Taiwan, navigation in the South China Sea and Korean peninsula nuclear issue. On a related note, India is working on its own version of multilateral dialogue forums. The 'Raisina Dialogue' and 'Gateway of India Dialogue' have celebrated two successful editions. India may be keen not to give too much importance to other similar forums.

The third engagement was at the SCO, which India and Pakistan joined on June 9 after having remained observer states for several years. Speaking at the summit in Astana, Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed his desire for enhanced connectivity and trade exchanges and also pledged his commitment in the collective fight against terrorism. The SCO will be India's wedge to make inroads into Central Asia.

The Indian government has invested significant diplomatic capital in bilateral engagements. However, regional multilateral engagements are equally important, given the commonality of threats and the Indian leadership should actively participate in them. They also provide avenues for bilateral discussions on the sidelines. Until any platform disregards India's 'core interests', New Delhi should consider attending similar high-level engagements in the future.

Pooja Bhatt is a PhD candidate at School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University

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CONCEPTUAL Gresham's law ECONOMICS

When the price of a currency in terms of another currency is arbitrarily fixed by lawmakers, it leads to shortage in the supply of the currency that is undervalued, while there is at the same time an over-supply of the currency that is overvalued. Gresham's law is often expressed using the phrase "bad money drives out good money", and is named after the 16th Century English financier Thomas Gresham. The economics of price controls, which predicts price ceilings and price floors to result in supply shortages and surpluses respectively, thus applies to currencies as much as it does to goods.

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ACT ONE

The wedding certificate

The Law Commission has recommended the need for a law to make the registration of marriages compulsory

KRISHNADAS RAJAGOPAL

The Law Commission of India has communicated to the government the need for a new law to make the registration of marriages compulsory.

The intervention was based on a request from the Department of Legal Affairs in February 2017 that forwarded a request from the Legislative Department for ways to end the continued prevalence of practices such as child marriages, bigamy and gender violence in Indian society.

Bearing in mind the diversity of family laws, customs and traditions, it has endeavoured to create an all-India framework under which all marriages can be registered regardless of the differences in the procedure of solemnisation.

The Commission has found that the act of compulsory registration of marriage would be acceptable across the religious

spectrum and that marriages can be registered under any of the prevailing marriage acts.

Multiple family laws

Such a law, the Commission said, would supplement the domain of family laws that already exist.

It accepted that the subject of personal laws is "wide and complex", but said the rule on compulsory registration is only aimed as a "procedural change" to protect hapless women from fraudulent and illegal marriages. It suggested that the Registrar who is responsible for the registration of births and deaths shall be responsible for the registration of marriages as well.

The Commission recommended that an amendment Bill should provide that if the birth or marriage or death is not registered within the specified time limit, then the Registrar shall, on the pay-

ment of a late fee, register the death or birth (a) within a period of 30 days; (b) within one year, only with the written permission of the prescribed authority; and (c) after one year, only on an order of a First Class Magistrate.

It has also said production of a marriage certificate should be made mandatory for anyone applying for any benefit on behalf of the spouse; for making application to government departments; and for getting benefits of any welfare schemes like agricultural and education loans.

It said that though some States already provide web portals for online registration, it would be desirable to have a centralised national portal. The Commission opined that availability of forms and documents in regional languages must be ensured to make the portal easily accessible to all citizens.

DATA POINT

Air India's falling share

Relative to other privately owned airlines, Air India's share of domestic passenger traffic in India has steadily fallen from close to 20% in January 2014 to 13% in May 2017

