



A thought for today

Two children of same cruel parent look at one another and see in each other the image of the cruel parent or the image of their past oppressor. This is very much the case between Jew and Arab

AMOS OZ

Coming Out Party

Modi's visit to Israel marks a pragmatic turn in Indian foreign policy

As Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Israel is hailed as a historic moment marking 25 years of full diplomatic relations, it's surprising that it took so long for an Indian PM to visit Israel. India had recognised Israel way back in 1950. But progress in bilateral ties since then has been impeded, it has to be said, more by New Delhi than by Tel Aviv.

In that sense, Modi's visit to Israel is a coming out party for bilateral ties and marks a pragmatic turn in India's foreign policy. New Delhi can certainly boost ties with Tel Aviv without diluting its position on the two state solution vis-à-vis Palestine. The argument that Israel's treatment of Palestinian Muslims should make India wary of deeper engagement doesn't cut much ice. There are many countries such as Saudi Arabia and China which score poorly on the human rights index, but India maintains wide-ranging relations with them. Why should Israel, a vibrant democracy, be treated differently? Even on the specific question of oppression of Muslims Pakistan, China and Saudi Arabia do much worse (look at Pakistani/Saudi suppression of Shias or Ahmadiyyas, or Chinese suppression of Uighurs).

From a historical perspective, Israel's support for India during the 1971 war and the Kargil conflict had long laid the foundation for a strategic partnership. Modi's visit now should fast track engagements across both traditional and non-traditional sectors. While defence ties are slated to receive a further fillip – since April India has inked three missile deals with Israel worth \$2.6 billion, and is looking forward to receiving armed drones – agreements on space cooperation and water and agriculture are also on the anvil.

The latter is particularly relevant as Israel is a country that turned the desert green with its agriculture technology, while Indian agriculture is increasingly water depressed. Additionally, Israel has the second largest number of start-ups in the world and a strong R&D culture – things that India should leverage. Co-production in sectors such as defence, IT and space technology will boost the Make in India initiative. Both India and Israel are victims of terrorism and could gain much through further enhancing counter-terror cooperation. Lastly Israel has strong ties to the Jewish lobby in the US, which in turn is well connected to the Trump administration. Those are useful connections New Delhi could turn to its advantage.

Netagiri Again

Transfer of courageous UP cop Shreshtha Thakur sends the wrong message

A woman cop standing up to power in Uttar Pradesh is summarily given transfer orders: this is how we enforce the law in India. Is it any surprise then that the law isn't taken seriously and lawlessness prevails in UP and other states?

The UP government's decision to transfer Shreshtha Thakur, circle officer in Bulandshahr district, to the remote district of Bahraich is a deplorable one that sends all the wrong signals. The 34-year-old police officer earned widespread praise for standing up to a group of unruly BJP workers and sending five of them to jail for breaking the law. On June 22, Thakur and her team stopped Pramod Lodhi, a local BJP worker, for not wearing a helmet while driving a motorbike. He was joined by his supporters who misbehaved and obstructed her in carrying out her duties. Thakur refused to budge. Local BJP leaders made this a prestige issue and a delegation of party MLAs and MPs even met chief minister Yogi Adityanath demanding action against her, which soon followed.

The incident has highlighted the need for urgent police reforms where they are respected as independent professionals playing an important role in society, rather than as a force playing second fiddle to local political heavyweights. Else only VIP protection will get priority and lawlessness will prevail in the rest of society. Adityanath was elected to change this state of affairs, and he must not forget this. Prime Minister Narendra Modi had intended to shake up India's culture of VIP privilege by abolishing red beacons on their vehicles. However, to really dent VIP privilege it is necessary to do away with the most important perk of politicians in power: the right to command policemen as minions to do their bidding.

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Yoga doesn't always help

Sometimes you end up doing the I-can't-get-up asana

Shinie Antony

If you're on your yoga mat right now trying to figure out which leg or hand to move to un-entangle yourself, take a deep breath. Here come some new studies that almost stand this traditional exercise form on its head. Finally, something to say to all those sitting in the Self-righteous Asana!

You could hurt your eye by being upside down, says one research study; optic nerves can protest or glaucoma can worsen. If you routinely stand on your head/shoulder in sheershasana and sarvangasana to show off, stop! Use feet instead. Or label forehead, 'this way up'.

Existing injuries can intensify with yoga, says another study. And maybe you should pull up a chair now and then, it hints, as sitting in the lotus position could strain hips, and knees. Musculoskeletal damage, like pulled muscles, slipped discs or strained wrist can befall before you can say 'pranayama'. Shoulder, elbow, wrist and hand pain could start with all that pressure on upper limbs. For the already injured, around 21% of the injuries were worsened by yoga.

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Yoga does benefit – the instructors. And it doesn't kill. Spectators watching from a distance are safe, unless they come under a random foot slipping from an uttanapadasana gone wrong. As for practitioners, a US study in the International Journal of Yoga said that only 1% in 24,000 were injured enough to stop. The rest are still in downward dog.

Least Bad, Most Transformative

GST in its present form is not perfect, but nevertheless profoundly good

Baijayant 'Jay' Panda



Too often we disparage the good because it is not perfect. There is no better, or more ironic, demonstration of this than some of the whingeing about the just launched Goods and Services Tax.

Of course, by now we should be inured to the spectacle of political parties in the opposition stridently opposing the very same issues they had championed when in government. As also parties in government pushing through initiatives they had vehemently opposed when in opposition. But what is remarkable about GST is opposition parties opposing what they have only recently not just agreed and given shape to, while being in the opposition, but also voted for in Parliament.

That process lasted more than two and a half years on the home stretch, from the December 2014 reintroduction of the GST bill in Parliament till just hours before last week's midnight launch, with last-minute revisions to the rates on some items. Overall, the process had taken 18 years since being conceptualised in then Prime Minister Vajpayee's economic advisory panel.

The nearly two-decades long journey saw different actors rise to the occasion at different times, laying the groundwork for a fundamental rejig of India's indirect taxation system. For instance, it saw the sagacity of Vajpayee, who assigned the task of designing GST to a committee headed by Asim Dasgupta, a PhD in economics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) then serving as the finance minister of Communist Bengal.

Also on display were the brave attempts, without requisite support in Parliament, by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and his finance ministers P Chidambaram and Pranab Mukherjee. They first mentioned GST in the 2006 budget and in 2011 introduced the bill. As with many important initiatives during the UPA's hapless decade, GST did not



dramatically simplifies India's indirect taxes, as well as ease of doing business.

Furthermore, it removes the cascading effect of taxes on the vast majority of items consumed by Indians. And in doing so, creates inbuilt incentives for compliance, with evaders willy nilly having to bear higher input costs than their GST-compliant peers and competitors.

Most importantly, it finally unites India as a single market after seven decades of Independence. The value of that cannot be overstated, with incalculable benefits likely to emerge from no longer hobbling ourselves with fragmented regional markets and disparate tax regulations.

In some ways, the implementation of GST has the potential to be as transformative for India's economy as the Interstate Commerce Act was for the United States. That was enacted in 1887, more than a century after US independence, to overcome regional monopolies by railway companies. Paving the way for federal rather than state regulations in a host of sectors, it unified America's fragmented domestic markets and helped propel it to become the largest economy in the world.

So why would an opposition party, which loses no opportunity to brag about having first moved the GST bill in Parliament, forfeit the opportunity to share the credit at its gala launch? The reason is not cussedness, as some believe. It is, instead, cold political calculus.

Right or wrong, their calculation is that the complexity of such a radical tax makeover will lead to serious glitches and sustained dissatisfaction. In other words, ideal circumstances to stir the political pot, but only if you have kept adequate distance from the celebrations. That approach by the principal opposition party – essentially, waiting for this government to trip up – has been more or less its only strategy for the past three years. It has not worked so far, and there is no reason to believe it suddenly will now. To be relevant again, they must go beyond hoping for their nemesis to implode.

The writer is a BJD Lok Sabha MP. Views are personal

GST bill's listing in Parliament during UPA years put a crucial building block in place, making it difficult thereafter for Congress to oppose its passage beyond a point

democracy, took a toll. The best description of GST now is that it is the least bad of all the versions that stood a chance of being legislated.

But why should we be excited about what some call a suboptimal version? The answer lies in welcoming that which, even if not perfect, is profoundly good. GST immediately replaces more than a dozen existing taxes. Although not as simple as it should ideally have been – and perhaps can evolve to be in future – GST today nevertheless

pass. Nonetheless, its listing in Parliament put a crucial building block in place, making it difficult thereafter for Congress to oppose its passage beyond a point.

However, it needed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's massive electoral successes, not just in the 2014 general election that gave him the numbers in the Lok Sabha, but also in subsequent state elections that in turn have been adding to his numbers in the Rajya Sabha, for GST to become feasible. And even after that, it took his steely-eyed determination to leave a lasting legacy, and finance minister Arun Jaitley's considerable strategic and negotiating acumen, to make GST finally happen.

None of that means GST in its present form is perfect, in fact far from it. It is not the simple, one-rate, one set of documentation, national tax originally envisaged. The give and take process of reaching a final iteration that could get sufficient votes in the Parliament of the planet's largest, most diverse

'Modi's Israel visit breaks a long-term political taboo in India ... most chief ministers pushed for better ties'

Narendra Modi is the first Indian prime minister to visit Israel. His three-day visit to Tel Aviv marks the 25-year anniversary of India-Israel diplomatic relations which were established fully by Narasimha Rao in 1992. *Nicolas Blarel, assistant professor of International Relations at Leiden University and author of 'The Evolution of India's Israel Policy', spoke to Rohit E David on the significance of PM Modi's Israel visit and its strategic implications:*

■ Do you think PM Modi's visit to Tel Aviv finally lifts the curtain over the India-Israel relationship?

The Modi visit is a public acknowledgment of what had until now mostly been a low-key but robust commercial and defence relationship. However, I disagree with the depiction of ties as being kept under the public radar since the India-Israel relationship has become public and normalised over the last decade. Yet, the Modi visit is important in the sense that it breaks a long-term political taboo in India.

■ Why did no Indian PM visit Israel so far?

Modi has personal admiration for Israel. He travelled to Israel in 2006 when he was chief minister of Gujarat. It has taken him three years as PM to visit Israel. Modi travelled to many Gulf states and Iran before going to Israel. There is a lot of ideological legacy that he had to take care of. Finally, India is

reciprocating Ariel Sharon's visit in 2003. This trip by an Indian PM was long overdue.

BJP was more open to having relations with Israel in 1998 and 2004 but it was in a coalition. Had BJP been re-elected in 2004, maybe an Indian PM would have visited Israel then. Under the Congress government it was very clear that this was not going to happen.

Manmohan Singh barely mentioned Israel during his 10 years.

The main achievement of this visit is just going there. Most of the chief ministers in India have pushed for better ties with Israel.

■ What is the outlook for India finally receiving armed Heron drones from Israel?

India has been buying Israeli surveillance drones – Heron-1, Searcher, Harpy – since the late 1990s. All of these are from Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) which has also designed the Heron armed drones. Procurement of armed drones had been under consideration for a decade but there was no political backing under the previous UPA governments. Final clearance happened under Modi's government. India purchased 10

Heron TP armed drones in September 2015 but these still need to be delivered. Delivery could be announced during the Modi visit. While there have been some rumours about possible joint production and technology transfer, it is not clear if this was part of the initial 2015 deal.

■ How important is Israel for India's counter-terrorism strategy?

Both countries established a joint working group to counter terrorism back in early 2000. There has been a lot of cooperation on surveillance and intelligence. India has purchased a lot of materials from Israel to prevent cross border infiltration including drones. Beyond this technical cooperation, there hasn't been any strong counter terrorism effort. Both countries are dealing with two different types of terrorism.

■ Modi will not be going to Ramallah. Where does this leave Palestine?

Until now, when Indian ministers and President Pranab Mukherjee visited this region it was always part of a joint

visit to Tel Aviv and Ramallah. The major signal this time is that it is a standalone visit. We have seen a slight move in India's voting pattern towards Palestine in international fora. India has been taking more neutral stands rather than consistently opposing Israeli operations in Gaza.

India's relation with Palestine will not be hampered by this visit. Modi had invited Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas to India earlier this year. India had reiterated its support to Ramallah for the peace process. We might see some mention by Modi during this visit of resuming the peace dialogue between Israel and Palestine. There's a possibility that India could play the role of a mediator between the two. Israel and Palestine relations for India are now not at the expense of each other.

■ What can India gain from Israel on water management and irrigation?

There has been cooperation on agriculture in arid lands, especially drip irrigation, since the early 1990s. Since 1992, drip irrigation projects launched by various Israeli private companies in India have grown from \$1 million worth to more than \$1 billion. Israeli companies represent about 75% of the Indian market. Future opportunities lie in bringing drip irrigation to small-scale farmers. The Modi visit will most likely yield a MoU to facilitate business in this area but there is greater potential in direct interactions between state governments and private Israeli actors.

dilbert



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Layers Of Meaning In Jewish Tradition

Marguerite Theophil

The oral tradition provided space for questioning, adaptations and additions in a way the written word, the textual, cannot accommodate.

In the Jewish tradition, the fixed sacred texts of the Torah have been kept adaptable to deep questioning and changing social circumstances through a form of telling called 'midrash' – stories created to explain, to fill gaps or explain apparent inconsistencies in the Torah. Midrash is actually a way to adapt the 'fixed-ness' of the stories in the Bible; it has been, over many years, encouraged as a way to explore the rich, layered or implied and hidden meanings of the Torah.

These stories elaborate on incidents in the Bible that highlight a principle of Jewish law or provide a moral lesson. The renewed tellings brought it up to date for learners of each generation, a kind of interpretation, often explaining

an original narrative by the insights of a later age.

Some ask, "But is it true?" and wise ones answer, "True enough!"

A friend who is a Jewish Rabbi smiled when I told him of how as a child I had been strangely distressed when I had first heard the story of Noah's Ark. I had been happy to hear that Noah and his family and all those animals entering the ark 'two by two' had been saved, but had been horrified that so very many others – 'wicked people' I was told, but still lovingly created by God – had drowned and perished!

He told me of a midrash that had helped him; a story that allowed me to form a new perspective.

In the Biblical narrative, fleeing from the Egyptian army, Moses led his people to freedom, but the expanse of the Red Sea blocked their path. Moses

prayed, and with God's intervention, the sea miraculously split and the Jewish people walked safely to the other side. But their enemies who had followed them died, engulfed by the waters as the waves closed in.

The relieved and grateful Jewish people danced in celebration and sang in praise of God. And we are told that in heaven too, the angels broke into song.

But the Almighty rebuked the angels, "How can you sing when my people are dying?"

Our tendency of literal interpretation of scriptures only shows us a God who seemed to take sides, but suddenly the midrash story guides us to the deeper and all too often forgotten truth that all are God's children. All of us are 'chosen'.

When scripture or religious teaching is taken literally, it is so easy for

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Golda Meir



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