



## On a new keel

With Benjamin Netanyahu's visit, India and Israel have fully normalised bilateral ties

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to India this week was the final step in the process of fully normalising the bilateral relationship. That process began in 1992 when India established diplomatic ties with Israel, with major milestones in 2003 when Ariel Sharon became the first Israeli Prime Minister to visit India, in 2015 when President Pranab Mukherjee visited Israel, and in 2017 when Narendra Modi became the first Indian Prime Minister to visit Israel. With Mr. Netanyahu's six-day visit, the focus is now on the future, and their joint statement drew a 25-year timeline in which to realise the potential of the strategic partnership. The close personal equation between the two leaders was evident throughout the visit, with Mr. Modi hosting Mr. and Ms. Netanyahu in Gujarat, where they flew kites and took part in a roadshow. Mr. Netanyahu also made the traditional trip to the Taj Mahal, and a symbolic journey to Mumbai's Chabad House, one of the sites of the 26/11 terror attacks where Israeli citizens were among those killed. On business, Mr. Modi welcomed Israeli partnership in Indian manufacturing, pointing to the winning combination of an India that has "size and scale" and an Israel that has "sharpness and edge". Mr. Netanyahu's case, made at a speech inaugurating the Foreign Ministry's annual Raisina Dialogue, was that the two countries have a "natural partnership" and a "natural friendship" that also caters to their need for hard power.

With a relationship that is more open, India has also decided to have a more honest conversation with Israel on the peace process. While the Modi-Netanyahu meeting in July 2017 had practically brushed aside the Israel-Palestine peace process, the joint statement issued on Monday in New Delhi "reaffirmed their support for an early resumption of peace talks between Israelis and Palestinians". This indicates that the two Prime Ministers had a deeper conversation on the issue this time, including India's vote at the UN against the decision of the United States to recognise Jerusalem as Israel's capital. Mr. Modi is expected to visit Ramallah as well as meet Jordan's King Abdullah II, who as the custodian of the holy sites in Jerusalem is leading peace efforts in the Arab world, and is due in New Delhi shortly. This would take forward India's commitment to assisting in finding a just solution for the conflict. It will require using the leverage India has built over the decades among Israelis and Palestinians in order to join global and regional powers in pushing them back to the negotiating table. It will also involve challenging Mr. Netanyahu's contention that struck a jarring note in his otherwise successful visit. He said: "The weak don't survive. The strong survive. You make peace with the strong. You ally with the strong." India must stick to its strategy of strengthening ties with Israel without damaging its commitment to the West Asian peace process, and build its friendships and alignments in a way that goes beyond an appraisal of strengths and weaknesses.

## The away challenge

Virat Kohli's Test team is still to prove its credentials on difficult overseas tours

The familiar free-fall outside the Indian subcontinent has returned to haunt Virat Kohli's men. In the two Tests of the current three-match series in South Africa, India lost a closely-fought game by 72 runs at Cape Town and then collapsed to a 135-run defeat in the next clash in Centurion. Trailing 0-2 and helming a unit searching for batting cohesion, skipper Kohli has to cope with a tough challenge. He sparkled with a 153 in the second Test but, as it used to happen during Sachin Tendulkar's heyday in the 1990s, that proved to be a fine but futile effort in a lost cause. The stench of defeat is an unfamiliar odour for the national cricket team, with Kohli's troops performing splendidly over the last two years. Yet, it would be prudent to accept that the cloak of invincibility was donned at home where rivals ranging from Australia to Bangladesh were humbled, and when India travelled, it was to secure overwhelming triumphs against weak opposition teams such as Sri Lanka and the West Indies. There is no denying the strengths of this team but it is a fact that since the last tour of Australia in the 2014-15 season, India largely played in its backyard and was never tested.

The reputations of a player and team are tarnished by gritty performances abroad and against quality opposition. For instance, Rahul Dravid often conjures up visions of his mind-boggling batting in the 2003 Adelaide Test that India won. Kohli and company have an opportunity to script similar milestones in the next 12 months, in the Test series in England and Australia. Before that, the squad has to clean up the mess it finds itself within South Africa. The opening slots, often a merry-go-round between M. Vijay, Shikhar Dhawan and K.L. Rahul, need to be sorted out. There is also the tumult over omitting vice-captain Ajinkya Rahane, with the captain preferring Rohit Sharma. The latter may be exemplary in abridged versions, but in the longest format he has failed to ignite his luminous talent. It doesn't help that Kohli has had to constantly shuffle his squad over the last 34 Tests. Coach Ravi Shastri has proclaimed that his wards can collectively do things that no other Indian team has done in the past – a recognition perhaps of its inherent talent. But India can excel in England and Australia only if the threats posed by their fast bowlers are fended off. The number one Test side is set to be asked some tough questions, and the way it responds to them will shape assessments of Kohli's performance as a captain.

# Signs of a geopolitical whirlwind

As the U.S. recalibrates ties with Pakistan, India should maintain a cautious distance



HAPPYMON JACOB

With a New Year tweet from his handle accusing Pakistan of "lies & deceit" in return for "33 billion dollars in aid over the last 15 years", U.S. President Donald Trump 'appears' to be radically resetting his administration's Pakistan policy, with implications for the rest of South Asia. To be sure, this is unlikely to have the gravity or determination of the post-9/11 threat from the American administration which at the time made it clear to Pakistan that if it didn't cooperate with the U.S. in the war on terror, it would bomb Pakistan "back to the stone age". The threat did work for some time.

### A clever ploy?

A less worrisome interpretation of Mr. Trump's outrage would be that it is a clever ploy to gain more leverage in a region where the U.S. is seemingly losing ground. It is steadily losing its Afghan war, losing ground to China in the region, and China is increasingly interested in politically managing the potential outcomes of the Afghan war. And Islamabad so far is seen to have had the best of both worlds – being China's closest ally, while remaining a non-NATO ally of the U.S. In that interpretation, Mr. Trump decided to end the party for Pakistan on January 1, till of course Pakistan agrees to deliver on American concerns regarding China and Afghanistan. Yet, another way of reading this would be that it's an empty threat on which Mr. Trump's officials will eventually soft-pedal.

So how is Islamabad likely to deal with an apparently belligerent Trump administration? Will it fall in line or decline to act against the Taliban and the Haqqani network, widely considered to be Pa-



kistan's proxies in Afghanistan? Any tightening of the noose around the Taliban is likely to be viewed by the Pakistan army as a strategic blunder, the implications of which would outlast the irrefutable U.S. commitment in Afghanistan. So the reasoning likely to be, why not wait out Mr. Trump's occasional rage?

The U.S. may also have ill-timed its outrage. Caving into U.S. demands would have grave implications for the much-weakened civilian government in Islamabad, especially when all eyes are on the general elections later this year. The government, then, is likely to brave Mr. Trump's wrath, or smooth-talk its way out. The response from Islamabad has so far been verbal, with threats of suspending military and intelligence cooperation with Washington. However, it should be noted that American aid and reimbursements (for expenses incurred by Pakistan in the war on terror) have been declining over the past several years. If so, the impact of the U.S. withholding aid may not be exceptionally damaging for Pakistan. That said, it would be instructive to watch what role Beijing would play in this war of nerves between its strategic adversary and closest ally.

### Sharper fault-lines

Notwithstanding how Pakistan responds to the U.S., the latter's strong-arm policies have implications for South Asia. For one, this would considerably diminish Pa-

akistan's ability to run with the hare and hunt with the hounds: being China's closest strategic partner while remaining a key U.S. ally in the region even as China and the U.S. inch towards a Cold War of sorts. Pakistan has been steadily moving towards China from the American camp: this will now be a far quicker shift.

### Implications for India

Implications of the U.S.-Pakistan rift may not be as straightforward as they might seem. Even though the American rhetoric against Pakistan is viewed highly favourably in India, the freezing of U.S.-Pakistan relations could potentially have negative implications for the country, certainly in the medium to long term. For one, this will mean the end of the indirect influence (through the U.S.) that India has traditionally managed to exert on Pakistan, especially on terror-related issues. Second, the ever-strong China-Pakistan ties, without the balancing effect of the U.S. in the region, could push India further to the wall. Finally, what happens should there be an India-Pakistan crisis like the Kargil conflict of 1999? For one, American 'absence' would embolden Chinese manoeuvres against India, and more so, China will be a far less pro-India broker than Washington ever was.

Reluctant India will be prodded to make a choice: either to remain unallied and safeguard its strategic autonomy or walk with the U.S. While New Delhi's best bet would be to deal with Washington without closing its doors to Moscow or Beijing, such fine balancing would require a great deal of diplomatic acumen, strategic foresight and long-term thinking. Moreover, choosing sides while physically located in the middle of a geopolitical whirlwind is no easy task. Such

reluctant India will be prodded to make a choice: either to remain unallied and safeguard its strategic autonomy or walk with the U.S. While New Delhi's best bet would be to deal with Washington without closing its doors to Moscow or Beijing, such fine balancing would require a great deal of diplomatic acumen, strategic foresight and long-term thinking. Moreover, choosing sides while physically located in the middle of a geopolitical whirlwind is no easy task. Such

## A poor prognosis

The National Medical Commission Bill is unlikely to provide a dynamic new thrust to medical care in India



GEORGE THOMAS

There is no doubt that the Medical Council of India (MCI) has outlived its utility and should be reformed or replaced. The remit for the proposed new body, the National Medical Commission, should be clear, direct and workable. A regulatory body should be expected only to regulate and not to formulate policy, which is the function of Parliament and requires inputs from a number of sources, preferably with different points of view.

The fundamental flaw in the proposed Medical Commission is the lack of clarity on its function. Unfortunately, in the National Medical Commission Bill, 2017 in the chapter titled "powers and functions of the commission", the phrase "lay down policy" occurs repeatedly. The Commission is also expected to "assess the requirements in healthcare, including human resources..." Such complex tasks, which require inputs from

multiple agencies, will be done poorly, if at all, by the commission. The Commission should only be expected to monitor and regulate the training of health-care personnel and maintain professional standards.

### Point of integration

What type of medical practitioners should the country train? This is a matter that the government should decide. It is poor policy-making to smuggle in clauses about interdisciplinary meetings between different medical systems and bridge courses into this Bill, under the omnibus "miscellaneous" section (item number 49). The failure of successive governments to promote scientific medicine and integrate the best of indigenous systems into one unified system has led to unhealthy competition among the various streams of medicine in India. It must be emphasised that modern medicine is wrongly labelled "Western" or "Allopathy". Modern medicine takes all that is useful in therapy regardless of its source. It subjects every treatment protocol to the impartial tests of science. "Allopathy" is a term coined by Hahnemann, the founder of homeopathy, and is seldom used in



countries other than India. It would be great statesmanship to move to just one scientific system of medicine in India, combining all that is proven from different streams.

Who should the members of the Commission be? The present system of appointing members to the MCI has failed, resulting in rent-seekers repeatedly entering the Council. The present method of election, where potential candidates have to spend quite a large amount of money and time to get elected, has the unfortunate outcome of ensuring that mostly rent-seekers seek election. The election process should be reformed, not replaced. The proposal to have sections of society other than medical professionals in the commission is laudable. Having an almost entirely nominated commission, as the present Bill provides,

is unhealthy. It will lead to a collection of 'yes men and women' whose chief qualification will be proximity to the existing government.

### Medical education

Should private initiative be allowed in medical education? If the government is sincere in its objective of providing universal medical care, it is clear that high-cost private education will further exacerbate the problem of too many specialists in metropolitan areas chasing too few patients. Many ethical problems in India arise from this basic situation of too many doctors chasing too few paying patients. Issues such as unnecessary investigations and procedures, and too little time spent with each patient arise from the need to earn a reasonable amount and the need to do it from the small pool of paying patients. More importantly, such policy decisions should not be left to the Commission.

To start a medical college, State governments first issue a certificate of essentiality. The MCI then decides whether the proposed college has enough facilities to start the first year. Subsequently, inspections are done every year till

a crucial choice needs to factor in economic relations, defence partnerships, and most of all geographic realities.

In any case, New Delhi should also closely consider the real intent behind Washington's ire at Islamabad: it's the Pakistani Taliban and the Haqqani network the Americans are after, not so much India-centric terror groups. When put under intense international pressure and American ire, Pakistan has managed to weather the storm in the past. Whether it will be able to do so this time is anyone's guess. But one thing is clear; if Pakistan can deliver on these fronts, its relations with the U.S. will improve. It is also important to note that even though the relations between the two countries were deteriorating in the recent past, the out-of-the-blue statements from Mr. Trump may not be adequately thought-out; hence the possibility that the U.S. establishment, with long-term interests in Pakistan, might soft-peddle its President's angry outbursts. Put differently, New Delhi should view it as a clash between Pakistani and American geopolitical interests, and not get involved itself. To its credit, then, the response from New Delhi has been guided by 'cautious optimism'.

A sharper geopolitical competition in the region could also adversely impact the overall sub-systemic stability in the region: when hard-nosed geopolitics takes over, focus on infrastructure development, market access, development of regional organisations, and regional conflict resolution mechanisms is bound to suffer. And that's precisely what India needs to carefully consider; for unlike both China and the U.S., India is deeply invested in stability in South Asia.

Happymon Jacob is Associate Professor of Disarmament Studies, Centre for International Politics, Organization and Disarmament, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University

## 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.

### Screen it

States that are ruled by the BJP and which have made moves to please right-wing outfits are bound to be in a catch-22 situation after the stay order by the Supreme Court ("Supreme Court stays ban on screening Padmaavat", January 19). The obdurate stance of these outfits is unwarranted. State governments that have banned the film should also take into account that the film industry comprises workers at the grass-root level whose livelihood depends on the release of films. The solution lies in managing the two sides in a non-partisan manner. Film-makers too should remember this: We have freedom of speech, but you have to watch what you say.  
R. SRIDHARAN,  
Chennai

While it is happy news that the ban on *Padmaavat* has been stayed by the Supreme Court in order to let the freedom of expression prevail, one also has to take cognisance of the sentiments of those objecting to the film's release, and which cannot be totally crushed. For many, Padmaavati is revered and her valour and unblemished character are a part of history. One must also not forget that the fundamental rights enshrined in the Constitution are always subject to reasonable restrictions. I feel that the freedom of expression cannot permit the distortion of certain facts. I wish that film-makers acknowledge this.  
ANOO P. KUMAR SRIVASTAVA,  
New Delhi

### No room for doubt

With the election schedule

for the Assembly elections in three States, Tripura, Meghalaya and Nagaland, having been announced ("Three northeastern States go to polls in February", January 19), the time has also come to introduce voter-verifiable paper audit trail devices alongside electronic voting machines. The EVM blame game is still fresh in our minds and must not be encouraged. The VVPAT is the way out. (Editorial - "Three States", January 19).  
ASHFAQUE NADWI,  
Hyderabad

### State of the judiciary

Talking about the common man's faith in the judiciary, which has supposedly been "shattered" after the public dissent by four senior judges against the Chief Justice of India, one wonders whether anyone has thought about the huge backlog of cases in

the judiciary. Shouldn't this be the reason for loss of faith in the judiciary? One has to make a distinction between "contempt of court" and transparent functioning. The four dissenting judges are not novices and would have thought over their decision considerably. Hence their decision should be respected. Instead of accusing them of airing dissent, one must delve into the issue and focus on the festering problems in the judiciary (OpEd page - "Yes, No, It's Complicated" - "Should the four SC judges have dissented publicly?" January 19).  
MEDHA ANAND,  
New Delhi

While legal luminaries and retired judges appear to hold diametrically opposite views, with one side supporting the

four dissenting senior judges, and the other asserting the supremacy of the Chief Justice of India, the common man has understood that even the highest level of the judiciary in India may not be immune to partiality, discrimination and pliability. At the same time, the media could and should have avoided the use of strong words such as "revolt" and "mutiny".  
S. ARJUN PRASANNA,  
Bengaluru

### It's more practice

The Indian cricket captain questioning the commitment of the batsmen is unacceptable ("Sport" page - "Kohli has tough words for his team", January 18). It is the same batsman who scored tons of runs in the last year and helped India rise to the top rank in Test cricket. All of a sudden, how can

there be an accusation of a lack of sincerity in approach and technique?

The truth is that the team has had very little time to acclimatise itself to local conditions. There was no need for a Sri Lankan series before leaving for South Africa. It is apparent that the BCCI is more interested in filling its coffers by scheduling matches at will and refusing to visualise the repercussions. Finally, when India starts losing in 'alien' conditions, there is talk of neutral venues, which again is no solution. A true neutral venue does not exist in the cricketing world. The solution lies in more practice matches during an overseas tour.  
V. SUBRAMANIAN,  
Chennai

MORE LETTERS ONLINE:  
www.hindu.com/opinion/letters/