



## Deal breaker

The U.S. retreat from the Iran nuclear deal has undermined the rules-based global order

President Donald Trump's decision to unilaterally pull the U.S. out of the Iran nuclear deal is a huge setback to multilateral diplomacy and the rules-based international order. The agreement, signed in 2015 by Iran with the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, Germany and the EU, curtailed its nuclear programme in return for withdrawing economic sanctions. It was reached after 18 months of painful negotiations. Under the deal, most of Iran's enriched uranium was shipped out of the country, a heavy water facility was rendered inoperable and the operational nuclear facilities were brought under international inspection. In Iran, the moderate government of President Hassan Rouhani went ahead with the deal despite strong opposition from hardliners. Mr. Trump has just wrecked all these efforts, despite numerous reports, including from American intelligence agencies, that Iran is 100% compliant with the terms of the agreement. When the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, as the deal is formally called, was signed, many had raised doubts about whether Iran could be trusted to comply with the terms. Three years later, unfortunately, it's the U.S., which had initiated talks with Iran under the previous administration, that has acted in bad faith.

Mr. Trump's decision is not about nuclear weapons. If his administration was actually concerned about Iran acquiring them, it would have supported a deal that closes the path towards nuclear weapons for Iran. Instead, the bigger concern for Mr. Trump as well as Washington's closest allies in West Asia – Israel and Saudi Arabia – is Iran's re-accommodation in the global economic mainstream. They fear that if Iran's economic profile rises, it will embolden it to increase its regional presence, posing a strategic threat to the interests of the U.S.-Saudi-Israel axis. This crisis of trust could have been avoided had the Trump administration built on the goodwill created during the Obama years. Mr. Trump has always been a critic of the Iran deal, and the Islamic Republic in general. Now, by pulling out of the deal he has manufactured a crisis in an already tumultuous region. The U.S. action doesn't necessarily trigger an immediate collapse of the agreement. For now, Europe, Russia and China remain committed to it. Iran has responded cautiously, with the Foreign Minister saying he will engage diplomatically with the remaining signatories. But the challenges will emerge, not only for Europe but also for other nations with strong trade ties with Iran, including India, once American sanctions are in place. The U.S. stands isolated in its decision. But the question is whether Europe and other powers will stick together to respect the mandate of an international agreement, or buckle under American pressure. If they do cave in, West Asia will be a lot more dangerous.

## Drowning in dust

Better infrastructure and targeted forecasts are key to dealing with extreme weather

A wave of extreme weather over northern States in India has killed at least 124 people and caused much misery, mostly in Rajasthan and Uttar Pradesh. The residents of this 'weather hotspot' region are used to annual storms carrying natural dust clouds in the pre-monsoon season, from the Thar desert and further west. But they have been hit by a particularly destructive version this year, one that combined hot western winds and moisture from the east. Record April temperatures in parts of Pakistan, at one place exceeding 50°C, are thought to have added to the ferocity of the dust-laden winds. This could be a recurring feature, and there is a need to develop accurate forecasting methods and protocols to mitigate the impact. Many of the casualties in the recent storms were caused by collapsing infrastructure, such as electricity transmission lines that were not built to withstand such weather. Good housing could have saved many. India's vulnerability to such storms has always been underscored by scientific estimates of the flow of aerosols, or dust particles. Their presence in the country is three times the global average due to sheer abundance of mineral dust. There is also a body of research that points to altered climate patterns due to accumulation of dust particles, which affect even the Himalayan glaciers. Considering the large population in the Indo-Gangetic Plain, where the impact of weather on public health and agriculture is massive, the Central and State governments should do everything possible to cut loss of life and property.

Globally, the major dust-producing regions pump 1,000-3,000 teragrams of particles into the atmosphere annually, with the Sahara alone responsible for a third of this, according to the UN Environment Programme. India is at the receiving end of winds from West Asia, although some scientists reported recently an overall reduction in dust volumes in the pre-monsoon season due to a pattern of increased rainfall. Even if that were to be true, unexpected surges such as the recent one pose a challenge. The Centre has to raise its game in forecasting, and broadcast early warnings. In fact, as the World Meteorological Organisation points out, clarity and frequency of warnings are key to saving lives. In the wake of the storm on May 2, State governments have blamed the India Meteorological Department for not providing clear warnings, while the IMD claims to have conveyed the forecast of the coming storm to the Centre several days ahead. This clearly points to lack of coordination, that affects disaster-preparedness. Millions of people who are in the path of extreme weather each year expect better from official agencies. On the ground, strong public infrastructure and adequate capacity among administrators and personnel to handle rescue and rehabilitation must be ensured.

# Remembering and forgetting in Karnataka

During the electoral campaign, historical figures have been plucked out of rich and complex contexts



JANAKI NAIR

History has been weaponised afresh in the electoral war zone of Karnataka. What set the ball rolling was the first idiomatic reference by Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah to the historic face-off between Pulakeshin II (the great Chalukyan king) and Harshavardhana of Kanauj in the early seventh century, in which the former prevented the conquest from the north. Since then, we have been witness to a kind of deep mining of Karnataka history to serve two distinct purposes: reel in the votes of specific caste communities and construct a narrative of Hindutva unity.

### All about Tipu

In the last few weeks, historical figures have been plucked out of rich and complex contexts to be beaten into swords, flintlocks, arrows, or simply blunt objects with which to bludgeon the electoral opponent. Here, the favourite (and easiest) beating boy has, predictably, been Tipu Sultan (r. 1782-99). The inflationary career of Tipu Sultan's detractors over the last three decades and Mr. Siddaramaiah's decision to celebrate Tipu Jayanti has provided the ballast

for a campaign which is all too impatient with the historical method. Tipu the Tyrant has won over other equally well documented aspects of this modernising 18th century monarch, through the well-worn (though little substantiated or understood) criticism about his attempts at conversion, his 'destruction' of temples and his indifference to Kannada. To this arguable list of failings, some prominent news channels have now added the charge of 'mass rapist'.

Yet it was Tipu the Moderniser who also supported many temples and mathas and left the larger part of his domain undisturbed on matters of religion. Tipu the Indefatigable Fighter who died valiantly on the battlefield, making him, along with Lakshmbai of Jhansi, the 'figure of the epoch' in Nandlal Bose's enduring illustrations of the Indian Constitution. Tipu the Untiring Innovator, particularly of rocket technology, has been admired by leading Indian technologists (Roddam Narasimha and A.P.J. Abdul Kalam, for starters).

What has changed between the 1950s and the second decade of the new millennium in popular assessments of Tipu? Has 'the sense of the past' triumphed over the indisputable historical document? Does the insistence on making Tipu the Tyrant reflect either the discovery of new archives or new interpretations of the massive archival presence of this monarch? The answer is none of the above. Tipu's fall from grace has



been drawn, ironically, from the oldest and most prejudiced accounts of colonial historians, rather than the sophisticated late 20th century analyses of this 18th century monarch.

Hence the promise to honour the memory of Madakari Nayaka of Chitradurga, who was defeated by Hyder Ali in 1779. In order to do this, one would have to ignore the fact that Madakari Nayaka shrewdly weighed his options between the two powers that had made his independent continuance impossible: the Marathas and the Mysoreans under Hyder Ali. This war between rising regional powers and petty Poligars was not between Hindus and Muslims, but it will be made one. And Onake Obavva who purportedly clobbered the Hyderi soldiers entering the fort with her pestle, and has gained much affection over the years, will be deified.

### Inconvenient truths

Not since the 1920s and 1930s in the Hindi/Hindu heartland has there been such a determined

search for a Hinduised historical narrative. Historical heroes who had already been annexed by one or another caste group (Sangolli Rayanna and Kanakadasa by the Kurubas, Kempe Gowda and even Kuvempu by the Vokkaligas, Kofi and Chennaya by the Billavas) are now being woven into electoral speeches both to connect to the demand for a caste history and also to create a new Hindu narrative. So all the new historical research about what the Vijayanagar kings shared with the Bahmani sultans – administratively, militarily, economically – will be no more than an inconvenient truth.

Such selective memorialising also effaces the pasts of Karnataka: nothing has revealed this as much as the Right's 'ownership' of the Basavanna legacy. Similarly, quoting the poetry of Shishunala Sharif, that saint poet of the 19th century, has also defiled the memory of the rich commingling from which such poetry emerged.

### A past to plunder

That is why the real military pioneer, Tipu Sultan, calls for an act of forgetting: though the past is a place to be plundered only for pride and glory, it would disturb the singular narrative of Tipu the Tyrant to admit any complexities. At the same time, it would be too much to expect the newcomers to Karnataka to understand the deep beauty of one of Sharif's most popular songs set to music by C. Aswath: the hen has swallowed

the monkey, the goat consumed the elephant, the wall has eaten up the paint. The Right will no doubt use its unique historical training to detect some scientific miracle or another in this poem, because they have firmly jettisoned nuance or metaphor for a painfully literal reading of poetry and myth.

Truly, we can do no better than turn to Shishunala Sharif, when he said, 'The roof is leaking due to ignorance, the roof is leaking...' (*Sorithudu maneya maalige, agna-nadinda*), and there is no one to repair the beams, he said, in this darkness that surrounds me.

### Dispensable specialists

To argue in the face of this sustained onslaught, which a certain regional and even sectarian pride had kept at bay for some time, that 'history is too important for the likes of politicians' is a futile cry in the wilderness. There is today an explosion of lay interest in questions of history, and a demand for a past that stokes only pride, making the specialist a dispensable figure. She may even endanger the project of speaking in one historical voice. But, as Walter Benjamin had darkly warned, even the dead will no longer be safe if this mission of programmatic remembering and forgetting is allowed to triumph.

Janaki Nair is Professor, Centre for Historical Studies, School of Social Sciences, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi

# Between the Elephant and the Dragon

Why it makes sense for India and China to cooperate on Iran's Chabahar project



HARSH V. PANT & PARAS RATNA

After U.S. President Donald Trump decided to withdraw from the Iran nuclear deal, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has indicated that his government remains committed to that pact and that he would be negotiating with the deal's remaining signatories – the European countries, Russia and China – to salvage the deal if possible. For Tehran, a lot is riding on how these powers engage in the coming months. India too has a lot at stake in this regard. Iran's attempt to woo Chinese investment in Chabahar, often projected as India's pet project (and a response to Gwadar in Pakistan), has raised eyebrows in New Delhi. Inviting Chinese investment is perceived as an attempt to dilute Indian influence.

### The view from Tehran

The development of the Chabahar port, however, needs to be viewed as Iran's call for "engagement". The participation of Pakistan's Minister of Shipping at the inauguration ceremony made it clear that for Iran Chabahar means business. Post-sanctions, the development of the Chabahar port reflects Iranian quest for multilateralism, and China by default is an important player in the Iranian scheme of

things. Given the overt hostility of the Trump administration towards Iran, it is imperative for Tehran to maintain cordial relationship with a rising power like China.

China is one of the few countries which never severed its ties with Iran. In fact, it had played a crucial role in bringing Iran to the diplomatic table to negotiate the P5+1 nuclear deal. A recent World Bank report estimates substantial acceleration in Iran's GDP growth rate (6.4%) in the year 2016 due to lifting of sanctions. This rebound is poised, if all goes well after the U.S. action, to get further impetus from Iran's participation in China's connectivity projects. China was also one of the countries that maintained steady trade relations with Iran even during the sanctions era. In fact, trade figures rose from \$4 billion in 2003 to \$53 billion in 2013. A large chunk of China-Iran trade is petroleum-based products. China is the largest importer of Iranian oil.

As of August, 2017 crude and condensate export from Iran to China was approximately 733,000 bpd (barrels per day); a rise of 11% compared to previous year. Besides, China's iron-ore buyers see in Iran an alternative to Australia and Brazil. Over the years, China has emerged as Iran's leading trade partner.

Post-sanctions, Chinese President, Xi Jinping was the first head of state to visit Iran, in January 2016. On the sidelines of his visit, both countries decided to increase their bilateral trade to \$600 billion in the coming decade. Iran, with



its massive infrastructural needs, sees China as its most valued partner and Beijing has been investing in Iran in crucial sectors like railways. China International Trust and Investment Corporation (CITIC), a state owned investment wing has extended \$10 billion credit line to Tehran. Besides, China Development Bank has also signed a memorandum of understanding with the Iranian government worth around \$15 billion.

Chinese investments in Iran are part and parcel of its ambitious \$1 trillion Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Apart from their economic rationale, these investments are also a means to generate political confidence/acceptability for a China-centric world order. Iran perceives the BRI as a project that would make it an indispensable transit hub for countries like China, India and Russia and an effective antidote to the U.S. sanctions. Iran's premium geographical location (as a bridge between Persian Gulf and Central Asia) along with a relatively stable political architecture makes it a central player for China's BRI. This will give China

de-facto control over two of the three major routes to world markets.

In addition to their economic partnership, China and Iran share substantial defence cooperation with each other. After the 1979 revolution, Tehran has been dependent on Beijing for meeting its defence requirements. China has supplied Iran with surface-to-air missiles and has also trained Iranian nuclear scientists. The November 2016 agreement signed between defence ministers of both countries entails regular military-to-military exercises. In 2014, both countries held joint naval drill in the Gulf. There have been intermittent talks between China and Iran for the sale of J-10 multirole combat aircraft to Tehran.

China, being permanent member of the Security Council with veto power, could be of great strategic help for Iran when it comes to vetoing any proposal against Iran in the United Nations. A parallel, China-dominated global order suits Iran more than the U.S.-centric world order.

### India's policy options

This strong relationship between Tehran and Beijing makes it pertinent for New Delhi to navigate its interests in the region accordingly. To assume that Iran would help India counter Chinese influence in the region might be wishful thinking. India needs to resist the temptation of falling prey to "excessive securitisation" in the case of Chabahar agreement in particular and India-Iran relations in general. For

India, to be an influential player in the region, economics and politics should complement and not substitute each other. India will have to capitalise upon the existing synergies. It is imperative to complement geopolitical premises with robust commercial exchanges. In collaboration with countries like Japan, India should offer favourable terms of trade in the region vis-à-vis China. To consolidate its strategic depth in the region, India should focus on initiatives like frequent joint naval exercises in the Persian Gulf. Iran, on the other hand, would do well by maintaining a fine balance between the elephant and the dragon. Experiences of countries like Sri Lanka should encourage prudent thinking on the part of Iranian policy-makers.

New Delhi will have to adopt a nuanced approach towards Chinese investment in Iran, especially now that Tehran's reliance upon Beijing is only likely to grow after Mr. Trump's exit from the nuclear pact. Some form of Chinese participation in the Chabahar project would be helpful for the future of the project, especially if the terms and conditions are clearly specified. India and China are exploring joint economic projects in Afghanistan; they can surely also extend this engagement to the Chabahar.

Harsh V. Pant is Professor of International Relations at King's College London and Distinguished Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi. Paras Ratna is a postgraduate student in Development Studies at TISS, Mumbai

## 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.

### PM-ready

There is nothing wrong in Congress president Rahul Gandhi saying that he is ready to become the Prime Minister if his party, the Congress, wins a majority in the next general election ("Ready to become PM, says Rahul", May 9). It would have been hypocritical had he said so otherwise. It is an inviolable and unwritten law in the rule book of the Congress party to have someone from the Nehru-Gandhi family to lead the country. But reality shows that the grand old party is no longer what it was. Its standing today is a notch above a regional party, with electoral victories that are almost a flash in the pan. Mr. Gandhi would also be better off keeping a low profile and acting as a better team member than as a leader. Cultivating humility will give him an edge in the rough and tumble of contemporary politics.

DR. D.V.G. SANKARARAO, Nellimarla, Andhra Pradesh

■ Opposition to and ridicule for Rahul Gandhi largely stems from the upper crust of society; their unflattering comments about him create the false impression that he is not cut out to be the country's helmsman. Mr. Gandhi is a foil for the Prime Minister in every respect and has promise to be an alternative. Both are poles apart in their style of functioning, outlook on national life and understanding of democracy. It is no easy task for the Congress leader to take on the Prime Minister as he excels at sophistry, tapping religiosity and enlisting the support of corporate behemoths. Mr. Gandhi's first priority should be to pool secular votes which will be an important factor in Mr. Modi's re-election bid. As an as-yet-untested ruler, Mr. Gandhi has an advantage. Despite the BJP's presumptuous assertion that the young leader is daydreaming, he may well lead the country.

G. DAVID MILTON Maruthanhode, Tamil Nadu

### Face to face

It was amusing to read the exclusive interview with Congress chief Rahul Gandhi (Interview - "This is a battle of ideas; we are fighting hatred and anger", May 9). The interview was about the Karnataka elections but the correspondents did not even pose the most obvious question to him: What are the achievements of the Karnataka government? It looked as if *The Hindu* provided a platform for him to continue his repeated assertions of hatred and anger (whatever that means). He did not have to face a single tough question nor was there anything about the challenge thrown down to him by the Prime Minister.

S. SUDHIR KUMAR, Hyderabad

■ The Congress chief says that he is not a soothsayer to predict the number of seats that his party might win in Karnataka, but mysteriously sounds like an expert when he asserts, quite childishly and elsewhere in other reports, that the Prime

Minister will face defeat in 2019. His reply that he also visits places of worship is not convincing as he has been making it a point to visit only temples. The only point where his criticism is admissible is about the BJP's stand against corruption and the candidates it has selected for the Karnataka Assembly election. Mr. Gandhi's ambitions to lead the nation are now more transparent than before. He needs more exposure to the nitty-gritty of governance before even thinking about leading the nation.

SIVAMANI VASUDEVAN, Chennai

### Road to justice

The Supreme Court's order to transfer the Kathua rape case from Jammu and Kashmir to the neighbouring State of Punjab instils hopes of there being a fair trial and the family of the minor getting justice (Editorial - "For a fair trial", May 9). The judiciary is a last beacon of hope for all of us and there needs to be severe punishment for those who

carried out the crime. It will also send a signal to those who commit crimes against women and children.

P.K. VARADARAJAN, Chennai

### On the military

It is disturbing to read and hear about the way in which Indian military history is being invoked and distorted by political leaders (Editorial page, "Military history on the campaign trail", May 7). The current political dispensation appears to be more than willing to drag the Indian defence forces – an institution whose secular character should be inviolable – into its dirty politics. What is equally worrying is the fact that in recent times, statements of an overt political nature appear to be emanating from the top brass within our defence forces giving rise to the perception that there is a steady politicisation. One shudders to think about what would happen if our defence forces become polarised.

SWARAJ RAJ, Fatehgarh Sahib, Punjab

### Flawed structure

The rollout of the goods and services tax has been flawed right from the beginning (Editorial - "GST's complicated", May 7). What should have been a good and simple tax has only become a complicated affair. This is basically because a number of laws have been subsumed into the GST.

An extremely simple process without requiring any returns and automatically arriving at tax liability and input tax credit without any submission from tax payers could have been made possible had the Council concentrated on just one aspect – could invoices be generated through the GSTN by registrants? If this had been made possible, it would have clearly assigned tax credit and tax liability to the respective GSTN. At the end of the month, the liability could have been calculated and cleared.

N. CHANDRASEKARAN, Chennai

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