



Afghan overture

India's decision to expand security assistance to Kabul has a nuanced geopolitical message

President Donald Trump's policy announcement on Afghanistan has clearly set the stage for diverse moves on the geopolitical chessboard. India's plans to expand its security assistance to Afghanistan by training police officers in India as part of a UNDP project must be assessed in this light. A welcome step in itself and one that could have a significant impact on the security situation in Afghanistan, it also sends out a loud geopolitical signal. The main part of this message is meant for Afghanistan, as it indicates a continued commitment to its stability. By training police officers and hundreds of army cadets and officers, India is taking an important role in capacity building for Afghan security. The country saw the highest civilian casualties last year since the 2001 U.S.-led invasion. Increasingly, these casualties are coming not from Afghanistan's border areas but its cities and villages where only a professionally trained police force, and not armies, can maintain peace. India has also announced this month 116 smaller "new development projects" across Afghanistan, and police forces will be crucial in protecting irrigation, housing and school projects from the Taliban and other terror groups. The second message, to Pakistan and other countries in the region that deal with the Taliban, is that India will not be deterred from assisting Afghanistan for its security. This is a clear counter to Pakistan Prime Minister S.K. Abbasi's recent statement that India has "zero political and military role" in Afghanistan. This message is reinforced by New Delhi's decision to send Indian engineers to refurbish several non-functional Soviet-era planes and to repair the helicopters India donated to Afghanistan last year.

Third, there is a message to the U.S. and NATO forces, just ahead of an important visit by U.S. Defence Secretary James Mattis to Delhi, that could not be clearer: India will play a part in putting Afghanistan back on its feet in India's own way and not necessarily, as the U.S. may prefer, with 'boots on the ground' or by sending large numbers of trainers into Afghanistan, where they would become marked targets. The decision to enhance security training comes coupled with an India-Afghanistan trade fair sponsored by USAID, that will welcome Afghanistan's Chief Executive Abdullah Abdullah and other ministers to Delhi this week. Regardless of actual transactions made, the optics will be significant, demonstrating possibilities of India-Afghanistan business regardless of the obstacles in transit trade posed by Pakistan. An announcement by the government that the India-Afghanistan-Iran trilateral arrangement to circumvent the obstacles is on track was well-timed, and the commitment that the Chabahar port development project will be completed next year should reassure business on both sides about a sustainable trade route from South Asia to Central Asia. India and Afghanistan have lost too much time on each of these plans.

The faltering economy

The Centre should capitalise on stable macros to push through tough structural reforms

A set of weak economic numbers has left the Central government scrambling to do something to set things in order. Finance Minister Arun Jaitley last week promised appropriate action to revive the economy without going too much into the details of what could be in store. There is, however, talk that increased fiscal spending to the tune of ₹50,000 crore or more may be approved by the government to make up for lack of private investment. This comes after the expansion in gross domestic product slowed to a multi-year low of 5.7% in the first quarter of 2017-18, and industrial output growth dropped to 1.2% in July, compared to 4.5% a year earlier. In addition, retail price inflation jumped to a five-month high of 3.36% in August from 2.36% in July, further dimming the prospects of a monetary stimulus from the Reserve Bank of India to help boost the economy. The demonetisation of high-value rupee notes in November, and the implementation of the Goods and Services Tax this year seem to be the most proximate causes behind the lacklustre growth numbers released so far. But, as many have pointed out over the last few months, the economy has been decelerating for the last five quarters. In such a case, demonetisation and GST have merely brought to the fore a more fundamental weakness in the economy.

Increased fiscal spending is unlikely to provide more than short-term relief to this problem, as it will not address any of the production bottlenecks in the economy. In addition, any loosening of the fiscal deficit target will affect India's standing among global investors and project the image of a government resorting to fiscal stimulus to make up for the lack of more meaningful reforms. The real antidote to the current slowdown, on the other hand, is known all too well. The various rigidities in the market for land and labour have been holding back the economy for decades now, stopping investors from risking their capital on large-scale projects needed to boost growth. Further, the overall unease involved in doing business in the country and the even larger uncertainty looming around the rules that govern the conduct of business have seriously held back growth. It is no surprise then that, as reflected in the sluggish credit offtake numbers, private investment has failed to make sufficient use of the country's relatively high private savings rate. But successive governments have found it easier to kick the can down the road rather than enact politically uneasy reforms needed to address the problem facing the economy. India's major macroeconomic numbers, despite the recent worsening of the current account deficit, are still quite stable compared to a few years ago. The government must rise to the challenge and enact tough structural reforms, instead of finding an easy way out through the fiscal door.

The idea that used to be Bangalore

The city has to revive itself because it embodied a sense of hope of what India could be



SHIV VISVANATHAN

A city is more than a place to live, it embodies a dream and the possibilities of a dream. Sometimes a city acquires the status of a myth, becomes a character in a novel. Many great cities have been characters in novels. Moscow, Paris, London, Delhi have all shared the sense of being novel-esque, capturing in their character a sense of hope, a sense of the future. Their decay signals in a sense a death of a world, a paradise lost. Bombay and Calcutta have smelt of that slow decay, a period where the city grows like a cancer, explodes like an epidemic corroding the dreams of millions of its migrants. Yet if one city showed hope in India, expressed its cosmopolitan dreams and its intellectual inventiveness, it was Bangalore. Bangalore was myth and metaphor for modern India, a flag we could wave in the global world. Yet today one senses the myth is dying. There is a sense of loss, a silence of mourning which no amount of political bluster and brand bravura can conceal. One senses that the myth of Bangalore as the cutting edge Indian city is dying. Myths are like signs that have to be read like symptoms by the shamans of the city. Today Bangalore is a desiccated myth. This essay is written as an almost futuristic plea asking for the renewal of the myth. Myth has to be restored symbolically. One needs an event that creates a new grammar, a new vision of storytelling.

Back to Visvesvaraya

Modern Bangalore as a creation myth goes back to the iconicity of one man, the dewan of develop-

ment, the patriarch of Indian planning, M. Visvesvaraya. No technocrat is as much a part of folklore, subject to immediate recall and celebration as the ectomorphic Visvesvaraya. He conveyed a sense of hybridity, of being Indian and more, a man who believed that character building, dam building and nation building went together. His iconicity stands up to Gandhi. If one wrote, "industrialise and perish", the other replied, "industrialise or perish". Their contrasts were stark but each was home grown. Visvesvaraya was one of the great icons of modernity and his style, his integrity invoked the myth of Bangalore. His urge to create the motor car industry, his vision of planning, his ideas of dam building, his integrity were all the stuff of legend. He balanced in himself, the public and private, the national and vernacular, the scientific and the managerial. His life helped create the mythic Bangalore.

The institutions established in the fifties and sixties, the aircraft and space industries, the biotechnology labs, supplemented the legacy of the Indian Institute of Science (IISc) and Raman Research Institute. Bangalore was India's premier science city and the scientific leadership of Satish Dhawan, Sivaraj Ramaseshan, Am-

ulya Reddy, Roddam Narasimha nursed this image with care. They were outstanding scientists who had a wider vision of society. They were institution builders who conveyed the idea that this city worked and innovated, yet there was a complementarity we must recognise.

Bangalore was not only a modern city, a haven for science. It was also the seat of a great creative imagination, where a Bangalorean could be as proud of Kannada literature as of Bangalore's science. The vernacular and the cosmopolitan combined in a miraculous way in the lives of Shivaram Karanth, A.K. Ramanujan, U.R. Ananthamurthy and others. It was a world where 'Hindustan' aircraft and the literary world of Hegudu, with its visions of theatre, could combine creatively. There was no sense of dualism because dualism had become dialectic, a dizzy list of creative combinations. Anchoring all this were shrewd politicians like Devaraj Urs and Ramakrishna Hegde, who made electoral democracy a part of Bangalore's creativity. Bangalore was modern, hopeful, liveable, scientific, local, cosmopolitan, a retired person's dream and a professional's first choice. IT added to the lustre and created the myth of Bangalore as

A fight against prejudice

Britain may be one step closer to including measures against caste discrimination in equality law



VIDYA RAM

Last week the British government concluded a consultation on whether measures against caste discrimination should be included in equality law, to ensure there is "appropriate and proportionate legal protection" against unlawful discrimination because of a person's origins. The consultation has been inviting submissions from late March and attracted substantial interest from Britain's sizeable South Asian diaspora within which the debate on this issue has been raging for years.

Focussing on such practices

In June 2009, the first World Conference on Untouchability took place in London, to explore versions of untouchability in all its forms, bringing together experts and activists from across the globe – from India to Japan and Nigeria. At the conclusion of the conference, delegates issued what has come to be known as the Conway Hall Declaration on Untouchability, calling on all states where such practices were prevalent to introduce legislation to outlaw the prac-

tice and undertake programmes of education.

The initiative and also evidence of those who had suffered from abuse and discrimination attracted the attention of some legislators in Britain, particularly members of the House of Lords who were already debating issues around equality as the government sought to streamline and simplify Britain's legislation on equality into a single act of Parliament, now the Equality Act 2010. Following a tough battle with the House of Commons, members of the House of Lords succeeded in bringing in a provision that stated that secondary legislation on this could be passed by a ministerial order.

Following another heated political battle three years later, an amendment tabled by Lord Harries, a crossbench peer, required that the government "must by order... provide for caste to be an aspect of race". Since then, the government has dragged its heels on the issue, highly divisive within the Indian community in Britain, finally announcing late last year that they would consult on the issue. "This will be an open consultation," insisted Justine Greening, the Minister responsible, last year.

However, the consultation has done little to quell concern about the issue. Campaigners who are pushing for the legislative protections to be introduced are fearful



the consultation is a ploy to sweep the issue under the carpet amid heavy lobbying from religious groups. They point to the highly legalistic consultation document, which has made it opaque to many of those who want to contribute, and argue that the whole direction of the questioning is tilted in favour of pushing for a solution within existing legislation. A 2014 legal case, *Chandhok and Anor v Turkey*, had suggested that caste discrimination could be considered unlawful under existing legislation but only under very particular circumstances, which the government has repeatedly referred to.

Moreover they argue, there is already ample evidence of such discrimination taking place, dating back to a comprehensive study in 2010 by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research, which identified evidence of caste discrimination in the workplace, in the provision of services and in education.

They have also expressed con-

cern about some of the tactics used by the anti-legislation lobby, largely comprising religious organisations, which have sought to shift the focus of the debate away from questions around whether or not discrimination takes place to accusations that the efforts to bring the legislation itself were reflective of colonial ambitions and entrenched racism against South Asian communities.

Onward to IT

IT reassessed the dualism between science and technology and created a tension between playful freedom and technological productivity. A C.V. Raman in his heyday could assert that he was more interested in the properties of a diamond than worry about its industrial uses. But decades later, Mr. Narayana Murthy was challenging IISc to name one of its inventions that had made a difference. The technocrat, the manager and the entrepreneur were edging out a more cosmopolitan world of science. Earlier, the pursuit of science was seen as a public good, an attempt to create a public culture. Today scientific research without a technological catchment was seen as unproductive. What Narayana Murthy mounted as a challenge was read as obvious by the Modi government which wanted Big Science to be a money spinning enterprise, what in business folklore was called a paisa vasool regime. Worse, IT became cocky, overconfident about its powers convinced that what was good for IT should be good for Bangalore. It tried to substitute technocratic ideas for the creativity of politics. There was a managerial hubris at the centre of it, symptomised in the tragedy of the Aadhaar card, which not only created a split between technocracy and politics but a fissure between the formal and informal economy destroying a sense of the openness and availability of citizenship, confusing identity with identification. The halo around such half-thought-out projects ate

into the imagination of democracy, where those who battle for the Right to Information now struggled against the hubris of the Aadhaar card. Suddenly the wisdom of the whole seemed less than the creativity of the parts. IT lacked the wisdom of institutions like IISc which were nursed by leaders who had a sense of the state, the polity, the people.

Civic issues, civil society

Democratic politics too has suffered as the city faces a host of civic problems. But here one senses the sadness of civil society and the opening breach between the vernacular and cosmopolitan styles. The Karnataka of today is becoming more local and parochial in its manifestations. There is a desperate need for rethinking the imagination of Bangalore as a city. Today's protest movements are a gasp of survival than a creative attempt to heal the polity. One has to rework the alchemy, the grammar of the myth that made Bangalore, Bengaluru. The imagination of the city as diverse, open, wise to the ways of the world needs to be reworked and mere technocratic projects cannot be the quick fix for the problem. They, in fact, might be the source of the problem. Oddly, the death of Gauri Lankesh, and the responses, showed that a lot of civil society is sheer nostalgia. It triggered this essay and its list of questions. How does a city revive its dynamism which goes beyond the hype of start-ups? Bangalore has to come up with answers because it embodied a sense of hope of what India could be and should be. The city has to desperately reinvent itself because the idea of India needs an idea of a re-inventive Bengaluru.

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A political hue

"Hindu organisations' response to an international mobilisation of Dalits rights activism has brought the Indian Hindu nationalist agenda into U.K. politics including the frankly eccentric imagination of U.K. anti-caste discrimination as being all about driving Indian reservation policy and Christian religious conversion," noted David Mosse, a professor of social anthropology, in a lecture last year.

Indeed the message that protecting against caste discrimination could somehow do more harm than good and could be disrespectful of South Asian communities has impacted the tone of the government's approach. The consultation document insists it wants to ensure measures do not "create or entrench any notion of caste consciousness or caste-based practices into British society, which may prove counterproductive or divisive".

The issue has perhaps unsurprisingly played out in the political arena: in the build-up to the 2015 general election, one Hindu organisation sought to urge traditionally Labour voters to switch their allegiances to the Conservatives, arguing voting for Labour by Hindus, Sikhs and Jains was akin to "turkeys voting for Christmas". While the charitable organisation was forced to withdraw its statements, the fear that a party's stance on the issue could alienate it from certain sections of the influential South Asian community has persisted. It is notable that the issue of caste was entirely absent from the Labour party's election manifesto in June, with only the Liberal Democrats committing to supporting the introduction of legislation outright.

Where things will go remains to be seen. With the government focussed on Brexit-related legislation, both sides are eager for change. While those against the legislation want reference to obligations relating to it removed, those who believe such practices are endemic within South Asian society in Britain are equally determined to ensure the long-standing legislative mandate is finally acted upon, even if it could require legal action to ensure it.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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The Opposition

The article, "States of the Opposition" (September 21), can at best be called a piece written out of desperation. The erstwhile Congress system was all "okay" because it was "pluralistic and tolerant", but the truth is that between the 1950s and 1977, there were more than a 100 riots, corruption was high, and red tapism was at its peak. The UPA dispensation, from 2004 to 14 was no different. It was corrupt, inept in dealing with policy and we were stuck with a bureaucracy that was hell-bent on resisting change. The article is only a reflection of those who are in the anti-BJP camp and fan stories about so-called intolerance, threats to dissent and issues of privacy. The Congress and its allies would find it tough to fight the Modi government without presenting an alternative model of governance.

RAHUL NAIR H.,
Thiruvananthapuram

The factor of votes

The statement of Prime Minister Narendra Modi that the "BJP's work and priorities are not decided by votes but keeping in mind the interest and development of the nation" is amusing and far from the truth ("BJP's priorities go beyond votes: PM", September 24). At the outset, many of the electoral promises made by BJP, such as bringing back black money to India within 100 days and One Rank One Pension, were made in order to bag votes. They have not been implemented at all, let alone partially. Subsequently, many moves such as demonetisation, an increase in the creamy layer ceiling for OBCs, the stand on triple talaq, the role of Governors in Opposition-ruled States, the sudden emergence of nationalism, a silence on the murders of rationalists/journalists indicate that most of the decisions are influenced by votes and the quest for power. However, the BJP can

take comfort from the fact that people in general have stopped bothering because the priorities of any party in power, either at the Centre or in States, are anything except the interest and development of the nation.

B. HARISH,
Mangaluru

Comments on economy

After Subramanian Swamy, it is now the turn of Mr. Gurumurthy to point out the crisis the Indian economy is facing (Some editions, "Economy is sinking, says Gurumurthy", September 23). While Mr. Swamy said the economy was in a 'tailspin', Mr. Gurumurthy has used the word 'sinking'. Mr. Gurumurthy, an ardent supporter of the BJP, now feels compelled to point out the flaws in implementing demonetisation and the GST. But what is intriguing is his decision to blame the RBI, the media and the Supreme Court in one go. Demonetisation is a grand failure, but the reluctance of the Prime Minister and the

Finance Minister to acknowledge this is costing our country very dearly. Now that voices from within the party are talking about failure, it is time the government took some corrective measures to steady the economy.

V. VALAVAN SINGIAH,
Chennai

Reacting to Rahul

The BJP has been needlessly cut up with Rahul Gandhi's comments during his U.S. sojourn. The Congress is way down the BJP's list of political adversaries. The one that is top is general disillusionment over the disruptive macropolicies of the NDA. Demonetisation was an excellent if bold step, but basic concepts and subsequent poor implementation have robbed it of its halo. So it is with the GST. Attempts at polarisation of the electorate are rebounding. Frequent elections have forced the BJP to proffer promises that are becoming difficult to keep in a globally

moribund economy. When 2019 draws near, rapid job creation could well prove to be a far bigger worry than the Congress. The advantage could then go by default to the Congress.

R. NARAYANAN,
Ghaziabad

Web of lies

After failing the people at the critical moment when former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister Jayalalithaa was seriously ill, for some within the AIADMK to expect sympathy after crying hoarse now over how they apprehended trouble from the Sasikala camp is a bit too much ("We lied about Jayalalithaa's health, admits Minister", September 24). At

the dire moment in the State's legislative history, it was these same legislators who vouched for the credentials of Ms. Sasikala and did her bidding at every turn of events during Jayalalithaa's hospitalisation and after. Now, an attempt to show Ms. Sasikala in a poor light may not cut ice. These sordid U-turns of loyalties have few parallels. People are being taken for a ride with belated repentances and apologies. Have they forgotten that "conscience is dirt cheap for those who barter it for fame and riches"?

S. VASUDEVAN,
Chennai

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CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

In the Who-What-Why-When-Where page (Sept. 24, 2017), an article headlined "Why is it difficult to grant citizenship to Chakmas?" referred to the constitutional rights of indigenous tribes protected by Article 371H. It should have been Article 371(H).

In the Sports page story headlined "A paradigm-shifting achievement" (Sept. 24, 2017), a panel carried along with the story erroneously said that Yuvraj Singh was declared man of the match in a semifinal against South Africa. It was against Australia.

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