

If the only tool you have is a hammer, you tend to see every problem as a nail
— Abraham Lincoln

Nitish breaks ranks with Opposition

Bihar Chief Minister and Janata Dal (United) leader Nitish Kumar has broken ranks with the Opposition on the presidential election issue. He has extended his and his party's support for the BJP nominee for the presidency. His defence is that he has had excellent equations with Ram Nath Kovind as Bihar Governor who had always maintained neutrality. Not a very convincing argument because the functions of a governor and those of the Rashtrapati are very different. But then politicians are under no compulsion to advance convincing arguments only. They decide what will be in their political interest and their logic in defence of their decision is often a post-riori.

The next question that is bound to arise is whether he is now going to terminate his uneasy relationship with Lalu Prasad and go back to the NDA fold and run his government with BJP support. If he does so, there is nothing to be surprised at because in politics there are no permanent friends and enemies, only one's perceived interests.

If his perceived interests demand that he ditch the mahagathabandhan with Lalu and Congress which brought him to power just a year and a half ago, he will do so without any compunction. Whatever happens to him and his government, the people's faith in him as a politician committed to certain principles is certain to erode. The likely prospect of his being chosen as the Opposition's prime ministerial candidate in the 2019 general elections will also evaporate.

But it is not Nitish Kumar alone. The BJP has successfully widened the rift within the Opposition camp. Those that still stick together, mainly the Congress, the Trinamool Congress and the Left, have proposed former Speaker Meira Kumar's name for the top job. As the late Jagjivan Ram's daughter, she is a dalit leader in her own right.

But hers will only be a symbolic fight. The die has been cast and the NDA has won the battle even before it started. The Opposition cannot hope to give battle to the BJP even in 2019 unless it is able to cement its unity on the basis of a shared common understanding of the dangers — both internal and external — that the country faces today and the way to fight them.

The threat the democratic and secular polity of India is increasingly coming under should have brought all the Opposition parties together. Unfortunately, most Opposition parties either do not realize the threat or do not think it a cause strong enough to resist unitedly.

An economically sound and politically strong India is a perfect ally for the US to counter the growing hegemony of China in South Asia. India can claim to become economically sound and politically strong only by strengthening its bilateral relations with the US. It is really strange that friends of America and precisely the American caucus, which has been defining the Indian policy and approach of India towards USA, have been harping on these issues.

With Prime Minister Narendra Modi scheduled to visit America on June 25 to meet President Donald Trump, it is paradoxically being argued that, built on the foundation laid by President Barack Obama, these events have further strengthened the relationship between Trump and Modi. However, the ground reality is that ever since Trump got elected as the president, he has not sent any signal to reassure India of further increasing the existing strategic bilateral relations between the two countries. On the contrary, his gestures and stray remarks, like the one on H-1B visa, have simply scared Indians. Even the IT corporate giants are frightened.

It would be equally imprudent to compare Trump's stance against Islamic extremism (ISIS) with PM Modi's anti-terrorist operations. Modi's visit comes at a time of intense turmoil in Washington over a bunch of nonsensical issues. Trump's worldview seems diametrically opposite to established doctrines that transcended political opposition. Modi lands in Washington overshadowed by issues that threaten the durable Indo-US ties.

Though the White House cites fighting terrorism, promoting economic growth and reforms and expanding security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region as shared priorities, the fact remains these issues were explored when Obama was in office. It is significant to note that Trump did not invite Modi on his own; instead, according to the press secretary of the White House, "he invited Modi to Washington after the Indian leader rang him in January to congratulate the new President on his inauguration". What does this imply? Trump has not taken seriously the element of the strategic relationship between the two



Last minute shopping being completed before Eid — Arijit Ganguly/EOI

Importance of PM's US visit

REFLEX ACTION

Arun Srivastava

countries.

As Modi heads to the White House, he is confronted with one major challenge: to preserving the gains in bilateral relationship with the United States over the last two decades. During Obama, Modi put his best skill and energies to advance the partnership with the US. Modi virtually terminated India's neutral stance towards America. Now with Trump in command, Modi will have to put in place a new mechanism. One thing is absolutely clear that old relations and sensibilities are irrelevant in Trump's administration. The chances of Modi succeeding in building a personal rapport with Trump are quite uncertain.

Modi ought to keep in mind that world political order is gradually moving towards multi-polar roles and relations. American hegemony getting a rebuff, rapid rise of China and the assertion of Russia in global arena are the major developments. American is no more invincible. It is the multi-polar moment that triggered America's internal political churn which pushed a person like Trump into the White House.

Ever since World War II, India had to deal with US internationalism. Under Trump, Delhi must learn to cope with American nationalists, who are consistently asking "what's in it for me?" Significantly India has always craved for a multi-polar world. In the existing situation Modi's primary task would be to get Indian diplomacy adapt to the changes in America. In the past US defined the nature of the bilateral relationship, now Modi must make a move.

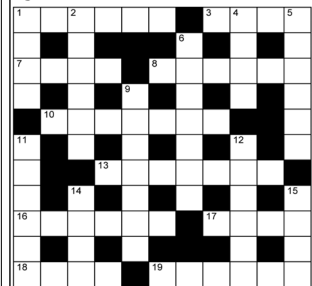
Modi must realize that Trump is not Obama; obviously the character of his relation would not remain the same. Obama is a lawyer and Trump a businessman. Naturally the priorities and approaches to policies would differ. Trump is every bit 'establishment' and corporate controlled. In a 1990 interview with Vanity Fair, Ivana Trump mentioned that, at least at one point, her husband used to keep a book filled with Hitler's speeches by his bedside. Trump is clearly more divisive because he seized on this opportunity to rile up the masses over fake news. He called out Muslims and Mexicans as less than American. He said immigrants are criminals. He said it was OK to treat women as meat.

Being a nuclear power and rising economic power of South Asia, the importance and relevance of India cannot be ignored by the world powers. US has increasingly been looking upon India and its growing influence as an alternative to Chinese supremacy in the region. Currently India tops the US priority list for its regional designs. Basically this is the reason that Trump extended support to India in its fight against terrorism. Otherwise too, the global pledge to fight terrorism is meaningless. It has miserably failed. Terrorists continue to strike willfully. The fact of the matter is the US administration as such has never been quite keen to eradicate terrorism.

Trump would prefer to rope in India in its war of wits against China. Modi should realize that the situation has changed. The world is no more what it was during Obama. Moreover, with Trump under investigation in the expanding inquiry into Russian influence in the election, there is no certainty what will happen tomorrow.

India must have a healthy relation with USA and Trump but it should strive to utilise Shanghai Cooperation Organisation to broaden its global support base. It is worth mentioning that the American caucus has been deriding the SCO. The time has come for India to assert its independent authority and status. It would be naive to expect too much from the Modi-Trump meet, but one thing is certain it would define the political course that India would take to. (IPA)

QUICK CROSSWORD



- Across**
1. Natural fabric (6)
3. Butt (4)
7. Double (4)
8. Covered with trees (6)
10. Liken (7)
13. Flanders flowers (7)
16. Young ferret (6)
17. Margin (4)
18. German river (4)
19. Coiffure (6)
- Down**
1. Reductions (4)
2. Camera support (6)
4. Make neat (4)
5. Financial plan (6)
6. Pulling-cable (7)
9. Was against (7)
11. Gaffer's obstacle (6)
12. Sex (6)
14. Hankering (4)
15. Reminder note (4)

Previous solution
Across: 1. Commuters, 6. Pairs, 7. Rival, 9. Cust, 10. Jigsaw, 12. Expire, 14. Weir, 17. Twice, 18. Hated, 19. Amsterdam.
Down: 2. Omits, 3. Miss, 4. Turnip, 5. Ravas, 6. Protest, 8. Lowered, 11. Urgent, 13. Prism, 15. Extra, 16. Thor.

Country's security strategy

The nature of India's security concerns is undergoing a rapid change. China's rise as a strong military and economic power, eager to spread its influence in countries of Asia and Africa, its implacable hostility to India, the veering away of Pakistan from the United States and its gravitating towards China, Russia's growing proximity to China — all these have changed the security perspective for India, demanding urgent attention and countervailing measures.

It is inexplicable why, after the 1962 Chinese aggression and India's humiliating military defeat, successive governments in New Delhi did not think it necessary to strengthen our northern defences along the Himalayas on an urgent basis. However, the Chinese logistic build-up in Tibet continued apace. In 2006, the first railway line linking Lhasa with the Chinese mainland was opened. The line was built on Tibetan highlands which passed through terrains as high as an altitude as 16,400 feet. Now China is building a second railway line which will connect Lhasa to Chengdu in south-west China. A Xinhua report claimed that once this is completed it will take just fifteen hours for trains to reach Lhasa from Chengdu.

Besides, thousands of kilometres of all-weather roads

and airfields at high altitudes have been built, railway lines are being extended to Shigatse opposite Sikkim and Nyingchi, just twenty kms from the Arunachal Pradesh border. The threat to India's north-east was increasing all the time but New Delhi seemed to downplay the danger. It is only recently that building of roads along the entire Arunachal border has been taken up on an urgent basis and high-altitude advance landing grounds (ALGs) are coming up one after the other which will be capable of handling heavy aircraft. In all, eight ALGs will be built at an estimated cost of over Rs. 1000 crore.

Now a new dimension is being added to India's threat perception in the north-west, in Pak Occupied Kashmir to be precise. The highly ambitious 46-billion dollar China-Pakistan Economic Corridor will pass through the Gilgit-Baltistan region of Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. Pakistan is reportedly mulling the idea of declaring this region as its fifth province.

Indecision or inordinately tardy decision has plagued India's defence establishment. During the second UPA regime, it was decided to raise a

FOCUS

Barun Das Gupta

Mountain Strike Corps (MSC) to counter China's growing military threat in the north-east. It was to have two infantry divisions, three independent armoured brigades, three artillery brigades and one brigade each of engineering, air defence and aviation. It was to be raised at a cost of 64,000 crores and based at Panagarh in West Bengal. To ferry troops and materiel to the borders in an emergency, several huge transport aircraft were acquired from the USA.

But when the NDA came to power in 2014, it developed cold feet to the project because of the high cost involved. There was a talk of reducing its strength. However, work already undertaken, continued. A recent report said a second division with a strength of 15,000 was being raised and it was expected to be operational in two to three years.

Significantly an important development is going on in Nepal. Nepal and China are in talks to build a 550 km long railway line that will connect

Kathmandu to western Tibet. The estimated cost of the project will be \$8 billion. It is expected to be completed in about eight years.

Nepal is a landlocked country which is solely dependent on India for all its essential supplies. Every time road traffic between the two countries is blocked due to disturbances on any side of the border, Nepal is caught in the grip of a crisis. Rail connection with China will open up an alternate route for Nepal and its dependence on India will be reduced considerably. The strategic implication of this project for India is that China will be able to send troops right up to Kathmandu in case of a conflict with India.

India is weaker than China militarily. Senior defence officials have admitted that there is a shortage of arms and ammunition also. The army is trying to make up for these deficiencies urgently and acquiring new military hardware. On the air front, IAF's fleet has been depleted from the authorized 42 fighter squadrons to just 32. Chief Air Marshal B. S. Dhanoo recently said that if India has to fight a two-front war with Pakistan and China, India's position will be like that of a cricket team having

to play with seven players instead of eleven. In the circumstances, Chief of Army Staff Bipin Rawat's recent statement that the army is ready to fight a war on 'two and a half fronts' (China, Pakistan and terrorism) came as a mild surprise to those familiar with the ground situation.

As for acquisition of new aircraft for the IAF, the French Rafale is out, the US F-16 is in. Government has dropped the idea of buying 126 Rafale fighter planes from France after prolonged negotiations over years. Now a new agreement has been signed with the Lockheed Martin of the US to make F-16 fighter planes in India in collaboration with the Tata Advanced Systems. The announcement has come on the eve of Prime Minister Modi's US visit. The aging fleet of Russian aircraft of the Soviets needs to be phased out and new ones with more 'teeth' will have to be added to the fleet. In view of the Chinese navy's (PLAN) rapid expansion, the Indian Navy is implementing its ambitious project of raising the fleet strength from the present 137 to 200 ships including six nuclear submarines by 2027. India is at last making up for its earlier underestimation of the threat from China. But it will take some more time. (IPA)

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Yesterday's Solution 1897

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