



Memories

Remembering Partition by involving Pakistan and Bangladesh would have been more apt

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's announcement, followed by a gazette notification, to mark August 14 as "Partition Horrors Remembrance Day" 74 years later has received mixed responses. With about two million killed in the most brutal ways, an estimated 1,00,000 women kidnapped and raped, and more than 15 million men, women and children displaced, Partition, the British Raj's parting shot to India, left an indelible mark in hearts and memories across the subcontinent. For India in particular, that lost its territory and its people to the west and the east, the decision was a painful cleaving that marred much of the joy felt in gaining Independence. The violence that was unleashed by the decision pitted Indians against Indians, Hindus and Sikhs against Muslims, with the worst of the horrors seen in Punjab and Bengal – States that were partitioned in the most mindless and thoughtless display of colonial insensitivity. These stories have remained in public memory, as India consciously chose to set aside its pain and greet Pakistan on its birth, and attempted to carve out a distinct secular identity as it sought to develop itself. The scars were not forgotten, but borne with fortitude and a desire to move on from them. Along the way, the two-nation theory based on religion alone – that Pakistan's founder Muhammad Ali Jinnah fought for so bitterly – disintegrated with the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. Other developments have also helped heal the wounds of Partition, not the least, India's successes over the past three-quarters of a century, including a growing economy, its technological prowess, and as a respected voice on the global stage.

There is no question that a nation cannot know itself without knowing its past, and that the horrors of Partition must be acknowledged, archived, mourned and commemorated. The concern over the naming of the day at this point, however, is that it forces the nation to look back on this traumatic time rather than looking ahead. Given that the trauma was felt not just in India but in three countries, an attempt to mark the day across the subcontinent might have been more inclusive. It is necessary too, to remember not just the violence of 1947 but also the colonial hand that wrought Partition, hold the British Empire to account, and educate successive generations on the perils of imperialism, arbitrary map-making and sowing religious divides in order to rule. The Prime Minister's reasoning, that the nation must be reminded of the "need to remove the poison of social divisions, disharmony and further strengthen the spirit of oneness, social harmony and human empowerment", is welcome, but this is an effort to be practised every day, not just one day in the year.

Black and white

TN needs to combine pragmatism, political vision while working on its financial health

By bringing out a White Paper on Tamil Nadu's finances, the DMK government has made a good start to right the loss of fiscal discipline. Subsequently, the government, in its maiden Budget, lowered the retail price of petrol by ₹3 a litre. Even though it only partly fulfils one of the DMK's important poll promises, it deserves praise for being implemented at a time of financial stress. That TN's fiscal indicators have not been in great shape, post 2013-14, is well known and even indicated in certain documents of the Union and State governments. The State's perennially loss-making power, water and transport utilities have only aggravated the situation. A serious financial crisis is waiting to unfold unless corrective steps are taken. This is what has been encapsulated in the White Paper, which has rightly identified the decline in the ratios of the State's Own Tax Revenue (SOTR) to Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) and overall tax-GSDP as two key areas of concern, in view of the SOTR constituting around two-thirds of the State's total revenue receipts. With ballooning revenue and fiscal deficits, the State has become overreliant on debt, estimated to be ₹2,63,976 per family. The White Paper has cited a lack of proper governance as the reason behind most of the problems.

By highlighting the crisis in the water, power and transport sectors, the document has already triggered a question on whether the government will hike taxes and user charges. As it also talks of "profound structural reforms" and "re-orientation of subsidies", it has signalled that the government favours a targeted approach in subsidy provision. The Budget echoes this by spelling out that the proposed scheme of ₹1,000 a month to women heads of families is for "the genuinely poor". But, in a set-up characterised by the tradition of competitive populism and a close relationship between economic decisions and considerations of electoral politics, it remains to be seen how far the new government can pursue such an approach. After having blamed the previous government for the fiscal situation, the government, through the Budget, could have made a beginning in fiscal consolidation. The explanation for not going for it is that the economy is still recovering from the impact of COVID-19. But an increase in a few taxes and expenditure reduction in some areas would have shown that the government means business. As and when the government chooses to increase utility tariffs, it should ensure that such measures are matched by an improvement in service quality and a simplified and reasonable tax structure. This is where Chief Minister M.K. Stalin's re-assurance, in a recent interview to *The Hindu*, assumes significance – of not going back on electoral promises for welfare. A rational approach with a human touch would help improve TN's financial health. The DMK government has time on its side to turn around the fortunes of the State.

India's fate is tied to the rest of the world

It was through its global interactions that the country defined itself across its history as an independent nation



DHRUVA JAISHANKAR

Ever since Independence, India's fate has been closely tied to the rest of the world. In some sense, it had no choice. A large, newly independent, impoverished, and impossibly diverse country required active engagement with a variety of partners for its survival, security, and development.

But a constantly evolving international environment presented India not just with opportunities but numerous challenges. Its frontiers were initially poorly demarcated and poorly integrated. India came to have two nuclear-armed neighbours with which it competed for territory. Several sources of domestic insecurity benefited from support from neighbouring countries. And India often found itself at odds with the great powers, ploughing a lonely furrow when it felt its greater interests were threatened, as on intervention in Bangladesh, nuclear non-proliferation, or trade.

An overview

Today, the troubles may seem plenty leading with the raging COVID-19 pandemic and its adverse effects on economic growth prospects, especially when coupled with intensifying competition with China and turmoil in Afghanistan. At the same time, India has greater means to tackle them: it is by some measures the sixth largest economy in the world, boasts a well-trained and professional military, and has a growing network of international strategic and economic partners. This brief overview suggests that India's future, too, will remain intertwined with global affairs.

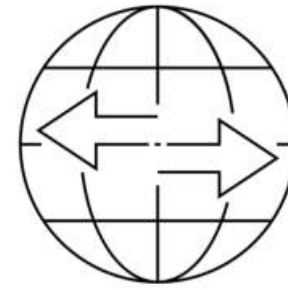
bal affairs.

The long and winding road

India had to adopt a foreign and security posture even before August 15, 1947. Independence and Partition left behind a messy territorial legacy. India's first leaders opted for flexible and friendly relations with both the U.S. and the Soviet Union and their respective allies. In fact, India initially received the bulk of development and military assistance from the West; it was only from the mid-1950s onwards that the Soviet Union extended support. India also played an activist role in the decolonising world, extending diplomatic and (in some cases) security assistance to independence movements in Asia and Africa and sending military missions to Korea and the Congo.

India's early efforts were arguably successful in consolidating territorial gains, in accelerating economic growth, and in positioning itself in a leadership role in the post-colonial world. But all these efforts suffered following the 1962 war with China. Despite that immense setback, the world came knocking at India's door throughout the 1960s. Pakistani military adventurism picked up, resulting in the 1965 war. The question of Indian nuclear weapons acquired greater urgency following China's test, even as Indian forces pushed back against China in Sikkim in 1967. There were also important economic strides made, including the Green Revolution, undertaken with considerable foreign technical and financial assistance.

The 1970s and the 1980s presented India with a more contained canvas. The Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation and the Bangladesh war altered India's relations with both superpowers and shifted the dynamics of the rivalry with Pakistan. The Indian economy remained relatively closed at a time



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when other Asian economies had begun to liberalise. This period saw security challenges come closer to home: the peaceful nuclear explosion, the annexation of Sikkim, competition with Pakistan over Siachen, a stand-off with China, an intervention in Sri Lanka, and a counter-coup in the Maldives. Domestic security challenges also assumed an external angle, whether in Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir, Tamil Nadu, or the North-east. Some efforts at resetting relations with the United States, liberalising the economy, and pursuing the nuclear option were made, but the outcomes were inconclusive.

After the Cold War

The post-Cold War era, therefore, presented India with a range of challenges. The 1991 Gulf war resulted in a balance of payments crisis and the liberalisation of the economy. India then adopted a range of reforms to liberalise the economy, but it faced more than just economic turmoil. The assassination of Rajiv Gandhi, the 1993 Mumbai bombings, and the insurgency in Jammu and Kashmir presented grave new security challenges. Yet, the period that followed witnessed some important developments under the prime ministership of P.V. Narasimha Rao: the advent of the Look East Policy and relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations; the establishment of diplomatic ties with Israel; the signing of a border peace and tranquility agreement with China; initial mili-

tary contacts with the U.S., and preparations for nuclear tests.

The Atal Bihari Vajpayee government built further upon these developments, conducting a series of tests in 1998, negotiating a return to normal relations with most major powers within two years, and concluding an important set of agreements with China in 2003. At the same time, efforts at normalising ties with Pakistan were frustrated by the Kargil war, the hijacking of Indian Airlines flight IC-814 to Kandahar (Afghanistan), and the 2001 attack on India's Parliament. These years also witnessed a rapid growth of the Indian economy, fuelled by a boom in information and communication technology companies, the services sector, and a rising consumer market.

After 2004, the Manmohan Singh government worked extensively to resolve the outstanding question of India's nuclear status. By eliminating barriers to 'dual use' technologies and equipment, as well as a host of associated export controls, India had the opportunity to establish robust defence relations with the U.S. and its allies. Yet, the global financial crisis in 2008-09 presaged a slight change in approach, whereby India sought to partner with China and other rising powers on institutional reform, financial lending, climate change, and sovereignty. Coupled with an economic deceleration after 2011, India's relations with the U.S. and Europe grew more contentious over the next three years.

Beginning in 2013, a more assertive China began to test India on the border and undermine Indian interests in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region. After the second such border crisis in late 2014, a more competitive India-China relationship emerged. With further stand-offs at Doklam and Ladakh between 2017 and 2021, India opted to boycott China's Belt

and Road Initiative, raise barriers to Chinese investment, ban some Chinese technology, and consult more closely with other balancing powers in the Indo-Pacific. Security relations and understandings with the U.S. and its allies (Japan, France, Australia) accelerated after 2014. A greater emphasis on neighbourhood connectivity was adopted. While efforts were made to engage with Pakistan between 2014 and 2016, a series of Pakistani provocations resulted in a deep freeze in India-Pakistan relations, further reinforced by the terrorist attacks at Uri and Pulwama and Indian reprisals. Meanwhile, India's relations with West Asian partners assumed greater importance.

An international India

India's objectives have been broadly consistent: development, regional security, a balance of power, and the shaping of international consensus to be more amenable to Indian interests. At the same time, India's means and the international landscape have changed, as have domestic political factors. This necessitated different approaches to international engagement between 1947 and 1962, between 1971 and 1991, and between 1991 and 2008.

As India enters its 75th year of independence, there are plenty of reasons for cautious optimism about its place in the world. Yet, the ravages of COVID-19 and growing international competition also underscore the difficulties that India will likely face as it attempts to transform into a prosperous middle-income country, a secure polity, and a proactive shaper of international norms. What is certain is that India will not have the luxury to turn inwards. In fact, it was through its global interactions that India defined itself throughout its history as an independent nation.

Dhruva Jaishankar is Executive Director of ORF America in Washington DC

Regional identity and being part of the mainstream

The country should be moving toward cooperative federalism, and not coercive federalism



SIDDARAMAIAH

I started my political-administrative career as Chairman of a Kannada watchdog committee after being elected, in 1983, from Chamundeshwari constituency. Fighting for the regional identity of Karnataka has always been a part of my political and personal agenda. The question of regional identity, in the realm of nationalism, has become prominent since 2014. A myopic view of "nationalism" by certain sections needs to be countered effectively to protect our dignity and identity. Modern India is conceptualised on the idea of unity in diversity, and all our actions should be sensitive to protecting this beautiful idea.

It is unfortunate that the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has derived its political ideology from Veer Savarkar's Hindutva instead of the supreme Constitution of India. Its politics focuses on centralisation, with special attention to undermining the interests of non-Hindi States. The BJP government is intruding into the economic, political, cultural and educational autonomy of States. Modern India has evolved to be more than just the Union of States. We should be moving toward cooperative federalism and not coercive federalism. The policies of the BJP government are inconsistent with the vision of the Constitution drafting committee with respect to Centre-

State relations.

Revenue deficit State

Karnataka is one of the States most harassed by the central government of the day. Karnataka has seen a drain of wealth due to the inconsistent policies of the BJP. From being a revenue surplus State, it is now a revenue deficit State. Karnataka's share of tax devolution has been reduced from 4.72% in the Fourteenth Finance Commission to 3.64% in the Fifteenth Finance Commission due to a skewed preference to the 2011 population. Unfortunately, States such as Karnataka which gave special attention to population control, were and have been penalised severely. Special grants of ₹5,495 crore which were recommended by the Fifteenth Finance Commission for 2020-21 were denied by the Union Finance Minister. In 2019-20, Karnataka got just ₹30,919 crore as its share of central taxes instead of ₹48,768 crore as recommended by the Fourteenth Finance Commission. In 2020-21, it got just ₹20,053 crore as share of central taxes instead of ₹31,180 crore as recommended by the Fifteenth Finance Commission. Karnataka contributes more than ₹2.2-lakh crore to central taxes but in return receives less than ₹30,000 crore. If the States get 41% share of the central taxes, Karnataka should have ideally got at least ₹70,000 crore ₹80,000 crore on a pro rata basis for its contribution.

It is a known fact that the South has been subsidising the north. Six States south of the Vindhyas contribute more taxes and get less. For example, for every one rupee



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of tax contributed by Uttar Pradesh, that State receives more than ₹1.79. For every one rupee of tax contributed by Karnataka, the State receives less than ₹0.47. Karnataka has also been hit by a denial of Goods and Services Tax compensation cess as promised by the central government through the Goods and Services Tax (Compensation to States) Act, 2017. Having presented 13 Budgets, my heart is saddened to see Karnataka deviating from the provisions of the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management Act – thanks to the step motherly treatment by the Narendra Modi-led BJP government.

Specific issues

The problems are more than just the finances of State governments. Many issues of federalism are affecting the identity, social structure and political economy of our State. Our government had requested the central government to include the Karnataka flag in the schedule of the Emblems and Names (Prevention of Improper Use) Act, 1950, based on the recommendations of the committee for the Karnataka flag. It is unfortunate that the central govern-

ment is still procrastinating over the recommendation without granting formal inclusion. Is the desire of the people of Karnataka to have a flag for their State, to give primacy to the Kannada language and to have greater say in the running of their own lives inconsistent with the objective of building a strong nation?

It is no more a secret that a conspiracy is being hatched by the leaders of certain regions to systematically prevent the selection of non-Hindi candidates to government posts and professional courses. A recent example of this can be seen in the Institute of Banking Personnel Selection notification where the examinations were notified to be conducted only in English and Hindi, thereby depriving lakhs of non-Hindi medium candidates an opportunity to apply. About 407 vacant posts in the notification were to be filled in banks located in Karnataka – this means 407 Kannada medium candidates will lose the chance to work in Karnataka.

Centralisation of education

The National Education Policy is another tool of the BJP to proliferate Hindi in non-Hindi States and to take away the rights of the States by promoting centralisation with respect to education. The policy negates the spirit of the Constitution and is inconsistent with Article 246 of Indian Constitution. Under the new three-language formula, it is consequential for the students from the south Indian States to choose Hindi as the third language. Schools will not have enough resources to arrange for faculty to teach more subjects

for third languages, which means Hindi will be the only choice.

It is important to recollect that in 1947, India was a young nation and we needed to be cautious of any divisive or secessionist tendencies. India, therefore, became a Union of States with a strong Centre. When Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel went about integrating the princely States into the Union, a strong Centre did make sense.

A perspective

Today, over 70 years down the line, we have done admirably well as a nation. The Constitution of India has stood the test of time. We have also learnt useful lessons from turmoil in Tamil Nadu over Hindi language imposition and demands of autonomy from certain States such as Punjab and Assam. From a Union of states, we are evolving into a federation of States.

Therefore, I do not think the demands for greater federal autonomy and recognition of regional identity are inconsistent with our nation. Karnataka prides itself in its Kannada identity. The oldest written document (in stone) in Kannada found at Halmidi, Hassan district, dates back to the Second century AD. The oldest Kannada Kingdom under the Kadambas of Banavasi ruled the State during the Fourth century AD. We have been using a red and yellow flag for decades. Yet, Karnataka, as our Poet Laureate Kuvempu said, is the daughter of Bharata, the Indian nation – *Jaya Bharatha Jananiya Tanujathe*.

Siddaramaiah is Former Chief Minister of Karnataka and Leader of the Opposition

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Partition trauma day

Contrary to the avowed objective of reminding us of the need to remove the poison of social divisions, disharmony, and further strengthening the spirit of oneness, the observance of a "Partition Horrors Remembrance Day", on August 14, henceforth coinciding with Pakistan's Independence Day, will do exactly the opposite – digging into the wounds of one of the greatest tragedies in human history, with potential to ignite communal passions and

mutual distrust (Page 1, "PM: Aug.14 will be day to recall Partition trauma", August 15). The agenda behind this assiduously thought of decision is not only political but is also dangerously communally divisive. While Mohammed Ali Jinnah and the Muslim League have to bear the major share of the blame for their uncompromising stand on Pakistan, others too in the negotiations cannot escape their responsibility in failing to avert the catastrophe. Should we not put such

tragic events behind us and move forward addressing other more pressing issues affecting the lives of millions, without undermining the sufferings caused by Partition? The Prime Minister needs to demonstrate a certain degree of statesmanship, rising above political instincts for winning elections.

S.K. CHOUDHURY,
Bengaluru

A breakdown

It is unfortunate that the Chairman of the Rajya

Sabha broke down in Parliament recently. This cannot be symptomatically analysed as institutional breakdowns, but as constitutional breakdowns which require an immediate remedial solution. Parliament is undoubtedly a constitutional instrument and the government of the day has to function within constitutional parameters whether within or outside Parliament. The situation today is such that people are wondering whether there is a Parliament at all,

let alone the issue of the new Parliament, as most of the Bills in Parliament are (being) rushed through and passed without any effective debate or discussion merely because there is a majoritarian party. Unless the institutions adhere to constitutional and

CORRECTIONS & CLARIFICATIONS:

In the story titled "PM's move diversionary, divisive, says Opposition" (August 15, 2021), a quote attributed to CPI(M) General Secretary Sitaram Yechury was erroneously reproduced as "... to relive the horrors of Pakistan to ... passions." It should have been "partition" and not Pakistan.

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