

Navigations in Bishkek

The regional aspirations of Central Asian countries contradict India's goals



P. STOB DAN

At the 19th Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, India will have to navigate between two contradictory imperatives. While on the one hand it must act as a willing partner of regional cooperation led by China and Russia, on the other it must avoid being seen as a part of the 'anti-American gang'. It could also be seen as a paradox that India wants to fight against terrorism through a body that includes states that pose the biggest threats to Indian security.

Trade and terrorism

In Bishkek, Russia and Central Asian countries are likely to express "broad support" for China in its escalating tariff fight against the U.S. India is equally concerned about this trade war, but it is unclear whether it will join the others in slamming U.S. protectionism. New Delhi is seemingly confident of dealing with the U.S. without necessarily supporting China. For Chinese President Xi Jinping, whipping up anti-Americanism serves to stave off mounting opposition against his anti-corruption campaign and concentration of power. It is also notable that all SCO members barring India are enthusiastic supporters of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

The summit is likely to have a muted agenda. SCO Secretary General Vladimir Norov has hinted at adopting documents to deepen multilateral cooperation and discussing non-conventional issues such as the fight against drug trafficking, cooperation in IT, environmental protection and healthcare. Terrorism is likely to be approached from the angle of improving the situation in Afghanistan and not necessarily of curbing the terrorist elements emanating from Pakistan. China is sure to offer its experiences of dealing with counter-terrorism, and the deradicalisation measures it has taken in Xinjiang. China's achievement in expanding its high-speed rail network to restate Xinjiang comes with enormous economic and security implications for Eurasia. China has also enhanced its military projection capabilities to meet any potential crises beyond its western frontiers. Kyrgyzstan is the latest to create an



PM Modi and President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the SCO in China in 2018. • AP

international near-border trade centre in Alai district bordering China. If the regional countries switch to adopting the Chinese railway track gauge of 1,435 mm, then China will be successful in uniting Eurasia to challenge a united Europe. As the situation unfolds, China and Russia are adopting a new era of global strategic partnership. Where India fits in is the question.

On the sidelines

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with President Xi on the sidelines of the summit will be critical, especially as Mr. Modi is now being guided by his new External Affairs Minister. This meeting also comes after China's decision to withdraw its technical hold on listing Jaish-e-Mohammad chief Masood Azhar as a global terrorist at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The key concern for the two leaders is the impact of the U.S.-China trade war, but judging from the trends, both sides seem to be gearing up for a big settlement of pending bilateral issues.

Mr. Modi's meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin is important to save the S-400 contract deal against Washington's mounting threat to act under CAATSA. India and Russia have an ambitious economic agenda drawn up for 2019, and Mr. Putin might reiterate his invitation to Mr. Modi to be the chief guest at the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok in September. It would be a good opportunity for India to explore Russia's Far East region not just for developing economic cooperation but also for exploring the prospects of transferring skilled labourers to offset Chinese demographic threats in the region. Russia is also keen that India joins the Arctic: Territory of Dialogue Forum.

India seems committed to work with in the SCO to develop a 'cooperative and sustainable security' framework, to

make the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure more effective, and participate in efforts to bring about stability in Afghanistan. Even though the regional aspirations of Central Asian countries contradict India's goals, these countries back India's proposal for a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism. Mr. Modi is certain to bring up India's resolve to fight terrorism by drawing the SCO's attention to the attacks in Pulwama and Sri Lanka. But China would not like India to use the SCO to name and shame Pakistan.

India may stick to its position on BRI, but accelerating progress on the International North-South Transport Corridor, the Chabahar Port, the Ashgabat Agreement and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway should be very much on the cards.

The Pakistan policy

The India-Pakistan stalemate endures but the environment has changed a little since India's air strikes in Balakot. Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan has been less belligerent, but whether the Pakistani military is taking tougher measures to curb anti-India terror groups is not known. Mr. Khan will have to demonstrate clearly if he wants Mr. Modi to give diplomacy a chance should they meet on the margins of the SCO meet. Mr. Modi might chart a new policy course in favour of normalising ties, especially since India has scored a point with Masood Azhar being designated as a global terrorist at the UNSC.

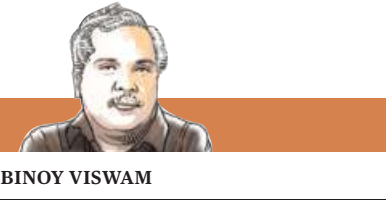
Pakistan places high hopes on the SCO to regulate key regional security issues (Afghanistan and Kashmir) even though the SCO discourages bilateral disputes to be raised. Its other agenda would be to sell the Gwadar Port as a potential passage to landlocked Central Asian states, besides promoting the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor for regional economic integration and security cooperation.

To be sure, none of the institutional-level measures including the joint SCO military exercises have so far entailed any satisfactory results in jointly fighting against terrorism. Nevertheless, the SCO is relevant for India to garner support for reforms of the UNSC to make the latter more representative and effective. India has been lending support to the member countries' candidatures for non-permanent membership of the UNSC for a long time.

Phunchok Stobdan served as India's Ambassador to the Republic of Kyrgyzstan

A mix of all shades of red

It is time for communist parties to start thinking seriously about reunification



BINOY VISWAM

The 2019 Lok Sabha election was undoubtedly a calculated rightist takeover of the country; a victory so massive that its magnitude was beyond the expectations of even some in the Sangh Parivar.

A well-oiled machine

It is important to acknowledge that this victory was no overnight incident. The Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and its various outfits were working assiduously towards this from 2014. About 6,00,000 well-trained *swayamsevak*s were deployed at the grass-roots level. Social media was used to effectively communicate the Sangh Parivar's message. Thousands of WhatsApp groups worked overtime. A section of the print and visual media aided the RSS, its organisations and the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). This well-thought-out strategy and well-oiled machine worked – sometimes visibly, sometimes invisibly – and carried the idea of majoritarian politics all over the country – to cities, towns and villages.

The Election Commission (EC) uses the words 'free and fair' to talk about elections, but these words have become meaningless today. The EC was brought to its knees during this election. Money and muscle power also played a very big role in the BJP's victory. Electoral bonds were seen as a way of bringing accountability and transparency in political funding. But the use of electoral bonds has opened the doors to corporate India to influence the political structure. It is estimated that the BJP was the biggest beneficiary of the electoral bond scheme this time; it reportedly bagged 95% of the funds.

Social engineering was the favourite theme in the 2014 election as well as in 2019. This time, this theme was applied at the micro level. Religion and caste factors were used in a very clever manner, while real issues like unemployment, price rise, the chaos caused by demonetisation, the problems in implementing the Goods and Services Tax, and atrocities against Dalits and minorities were not discussed. History has shown us that rulers who fail to fulfil their promises use war and pseudo-nationalism as their road to victory. This



S. JAMES

was true of this election too. The BJP focussed on the air strikes carried out by the Indian Air Force on Balakot as well as on the 2016 surgical strikes. Questions about the Rafale deal were papered over in the name of nationalism and defence preparedness of the country. Truth was the biggest causality in an enormous propaganda warfare.

Disunited Opposition

It was against all this that the Opposition had to fight. Ideologically, politically and organisationally, the BJP camp was well organised, whereas the Opposition camp was disunited. Even though almost all Opposition parties, including the Congress, talked about the necessity to defeat the BJP, none of them took the fight seriously on the battleground. Narrow partisan priorities and individual vanities overshadowed their electoral strategy. The Opposition parties were not concerned about securing the future of secularism in India. That the BJP increased its vote share from 2014 means that these Opposition parties need to seriously introspect. If these parties had been united, they could have won the battle. But due to lack of foresight, they missed the bus.

The Communist Party of India (CPI) had put forth the idea of a broad platform of secular, democratic forces and had campaigned for the same. But most of the secular and democratic political parties failed to understand the significance of such a platform. The experience in Tamil Nadu, where the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam took a commendable position to forge an alliance of like-minded parties, has lessons for the democratic forces.

The call of the CPI for the 'reunification of the Communist movement on a principled basis' has special significance now. Communists accept with humility that they are not such a big force to decide the destiny of the nation

single-handedly. They are aware of the serious setback faced in this election. The CPI and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) together have only five seats in the Lok Sabha, the lowest they have ever had in Parliament. Even in communist strongholds, both parties lost miserably. Naturally they are obliged to look deep into the causes of this shameful defeat. Communists are definitely not going to give up their struggles because of this electoral debacle. They have to be in the thick of things in the days to come – in all the mass struggles.

A glorious history

Communists have ample reason to be proud of their glorious history of struggle and sacrifice. It is the communists who put forth the agenda of complete independence before the freedom movement, for the first time. In free India, it is the communists who fought for the cause of the oppressed in all walks of life. It is the communists who first raised the slogan of bank nationalisation and called for the end of Privy Purse. It is the communists who fought against separatist forces in Jammu and Kashmir, and Punjab, for the unity of India. Hundreds of communists were martyred in those struggles. In Ayodhya, communists built the wall of love for communal harmony. Communists have championed the cause of secularism wherever and whenever communal forces have come out to undermine the Indian concept of unity in diversity. In the ideological fight against fascism, communists have always been in the forefront, even losing people like Govind Pansare. This great movement which was built on the blood, sweat and tears of the toiling masses cannot be brought down by an electoral defeat.

But the communist movement based on the science of Marxism has no right to close its eyes to the reasons for this setback. Ideologically, politically and organisationally it should introspect and it should do so keeping in mind a unified communist movement. More than five decades have passed since the Indian communist movement split. The communists have fought differently, the result of which is now before everyone to evaluate. At this juncture, the downtrodden who regard the red flag as the flag of hope urge all communist parties to think seriously about reunification.

Binoy Viswam is the secretary of the CPI National Council and Member of Parliament, Rajya Sabha

SINGLE FILE

Three stalwarts of a State

Karnataka is poorer without A.K. Ramanujan, U.R. Ananthamurthy and Girish Karnad

DEVAKI JAIN



We have lost all three of them: A.K. Ramanujan, U.R. Ananthamurthy and Girish Karnad. These were the three brilliant thinkers and writers of Karnataka. Now Karnad has joined Ramanujan and Ananthamurthy. They all acknowledged the influence

they had on another.

I wonder whether there are other such small groups of writers in other States who are famous all over the world for their brilliance but who are also rooted in their own culture and language. Even if there are, I haven't noticed it. I haven't come across, say, three Tamil or three Bengali literary giants who were known in both English and Tamil, or English and Bengali, and who lived in the same period.

I bring this up because I think Karnataka is special. Its cosmopolitan nature has been built into it for decades. The erstwhile princely State of Mysore encouraged cultural diversity. We had R.K. Narayan (who was born in Madras and brought up in Mysore) and R.K. Laxman (a Mysorean) sending waves across India and the world with their writing and cartoons, respectively, which were so expressive of 'native' India and yet so relatable in the wider world. This princely State also had a modern touch. It had pioneers in building industrial enterprises. M. Visvesvaraya, for example, is well known across India for entrepreneurship. I believe that Mysore had a civilisational sophistication and an open mind to be able to encourage its 'native' civilisation but also open its doors to modernity.

Karnad studied at Oxford University, which is where I first met him. His brilliance meant that he could live and work anywhere in the world. But he chose to come back to Bangalore where he continued to produce excellent plays that built on our own folk literature and had philosophical underpinnings. Not only did he excel in this field, he was equally outstanding in the films in which he acted. He was also an institution-builder, an activist who hated religious chauvinism, and a friend.

I last met Karnad at the memorial meeting for Gauri Lankesh. He had a placard hung around his neck that read in English and Kannada, 'Me Too Urban Naxal'. After the protest, he dropped me home, all the way wearing tubes and carrying his oxygen cylinder.

Karnad's plays always contained in them, without definition or too much underlining, the moral consciousness of Indians. Perhaps I belong to their generation, but I have not come across new geniuses in Karnataka of the kind that we had in these three stalwarts.

Devaki Jain is a feminist writer and economist



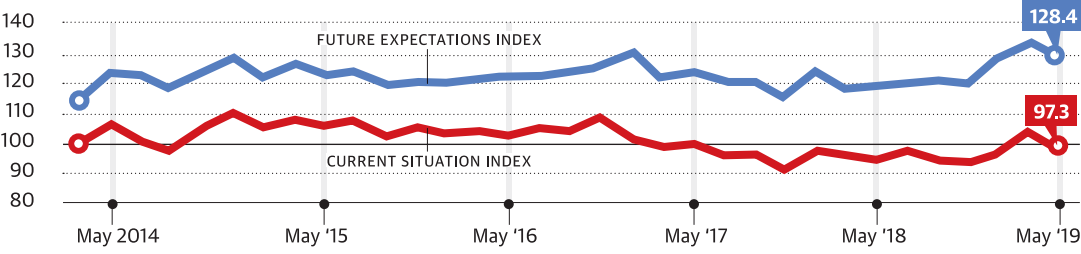
DATA POINT

Back to pessimism

Consumer confidence in various aspects of the economy – economic situation, employment, price levels, income and spending – registered a dip in last month's edition of the RBI's Consumer Confidence Survey*. Much of the decline occurred in segments which registered an uptick in positivity just before the election, in March 2019. By **The Hindu Data Team**

Up and down

The current situation index, which had shown a positive outlook in March 2019 after a gap of two years, relapsed in May to a score below 100 indicating "negative confidence". The future expectations index also slipped from its all-time high in March



Improvement ahead?

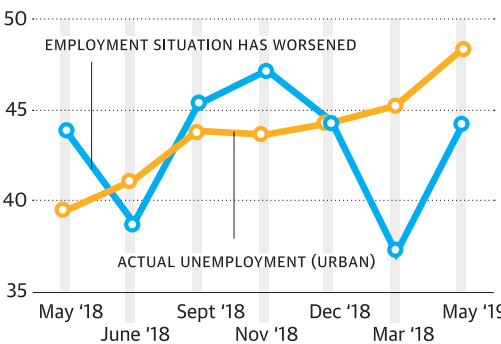
Consumers' perception of the general economic situation, income and spending remained optimistic. The outlook on employment and price levels was low in the past and has now worsened further

Variable	Current perception		
	Mar '19	May '19	Change
Economic situation	13.7	1.1	↓
Employment	3.9	-10.5	↓
Price level	-72	-77.3	↓
Income	10.2	8.2	↓
Spending	67	65.2	↓
Consumer Confidence Index	104.6	97.3	↓

↓ Positive sentiments with sign of deterioration
↓ Negative sentiments with sign of deterioration

Job outlook bleak

Deterioration in sentiments on employment contributed to the overall weakening of consumer confidence. This was in sync with the growth in the urban unemployment rate recorded by CMIE recently



* The survey took into account 5,245 responses across 13 major cities

FROM The Hindu. ARCHIVES

FIFTY YEARS AGO JUNE 13, 1969

Industrial security force for public sector plants

Arrangements are now being finalised for the formation of an industrial security force in the public sector industrial plants in the country. Details of the force - including its strength, service conditions and financial implications - are being worked out by the Home and Finance Ministries in consultation with Ministries such as Steel and Heavy Engineering and Industrial Development and Company Affairs which are in charge of the units concerned. It is expected that the force will start operating in the Durgapur steel plant in the first instance. Later it will extend its activities to cover other units. On a rough estimate installations in public sector units in the country excluding railways and defence are worth about Rs. 5,000 crores. The proposed force will be an all-India force.

A HUNDRED YEARS AGO JUNE 13, 1919.

Indian Reform Bill. Mr. Montagu's Speech.

The Maharajah of Bikanir, Lord Pentland and a number of Indians were present in the Gallery to-day [of the House of Commons in London on May 4] when [Secretary of State for India Mr. Edwin] Montagu moved the second reading of the Government of India Bill. Mr. Montagu said: In discharging the highly important task of which he fully realised the responsibility, he desired to avoid entering into details of, the necessarily complicated and technical measure the series of elaborate documents, with which he had provided the House and which he would assume the House had mastered, would obviate much technical disquisition. Recalling the origin of the Bill, Mr. Montagu remarked that it was suggested in some quarters that the Bill arose spontaneously in the minds of the Viceroy and himself, without previous enquiry or consideration under the influence of Mr. Lionel Curtis.

CONCEPTUAL

Condorcet's jury theorem

POLITICS

This refers to a theory which states that the wisdom of the crowds is usually better than that of experts in predicting the future. Decisions made through majority voting, for instance, are better than expert opinion. It is, however, important that a sufficient number of people are asked to participate in the vote to arrive at the right decision. Some believe that the accuracy of predictions can be further improved by limiting the size of the crowd. The theorem is named after French philosopher and mathematician Marquis de Condorcet who outlined it in his 1785 book *Essay on the Application of Analysis to the Probability of Majority Decisions*.

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