



Friends with benefits

Special status for A.P. is important, but Mr. Naidu is also looking at the next election

In politics, there is nothing such as friendship without benefits. Ever since it became clear that the Centre was unable to grant Andhra Pradesh “special category” status, the Telugu Desam Party was under pressure to break off ties with the Bharatiya Janata Party and make a public show of its protest. With the main opposition in the State, the YSR Congress Party, taking a belligerent stance on the issue, the TDP could not afford to give the impression that it continued to be a part of the government at the Centre without being able to wrest benefits for A.P. But even as he withdrew his ministers from the Central government, Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu stopped short of leading his party out of the National Democratic Alliance headed by the BJP. The exit, when it happens, will be after another display of disaffection with the Centre’s attitude towards A.P. Clearly, the TDP is keen to demonstrate that it did everything possible in the interest of this fledgling State before walking out of the NDA. Although Union Finance Minister Arun Jaitley clarified that it was no longer possible to confer “special category” status on States after the Centre accepted the recommendation of the 14th Finance Commission, Mr. Naidu appears to blame the Centre’s reluctance on its majority in the Lok Sabha and the resulting lack of dependence on allied parties. In short, in the eyes of the TDP, the denial of special status is a political decision, deserving of a political response. However, it is debatable whether A.P. qualifies for special status, which was earmarked for States on the basis of laid-down criteria such as difficult terrain, low population, strategic location, economic backwardness and non-viable finances.

While Mr. Jaitley promised to give A.P. the monetary equivalent of the special status, this was not good enough for the TDP, which wanted it institutionally recognised. Besides procedural hurdles, the Centre feared this would lead to other States such as Bihar making similar demands. But the TDP and Mr. Naidu apparently felt that the assurance of granting the monetary equivalent was not an enduring or long-term solution. The signs of strain had started becoming apparent soon after the Union Budget, which failed to meet A.P.’s expectations, and which led Mr. Naidu to start signalling that he was distancing himself from the BJP. There are political compulsions for making such a move as well, with simultaneous elections to the Lok Sabha and the State Assembly only a year away. Flagging a strong commitment to the State may be just the right signal to neutralise the TDP’s main rival, the YSR Congress. It may be enough for Mr. Naidu to retain Andhra Pradesh and win enough Lok Sabha seats to be an influential player in the new political order at the Centre, whatever the shape it takes.

Chance for peace

The U.S. should grab North Korea’s offer of talks, and enable an environment of trust

The visit by a South Korean delegation to Pyongyang and the subsequent North Korean offer to hold talks with the U.S. mark perhaps the most serious attempt in a decade to reduce tensions in the peninsula. South Korean officials who met the North’s leader, Kim Jong-un, said Pyongyang is willing to denuclearise if the military threat to the North is eliminated and its security guaranteed. The situation has been fraught since the election of Donald Trump as U.S. President, especially after he threatened the North with “fire and fury”. As Pyongyang continued its weapons programme, Washington kept up economic pressure with biting new sanctions. But even in the face of tensions and repeated war rhetoric from both North Korea and the U.S., South Korean President Moon Jae-in kept open the diplomatic channels after assuming office last summer. This strategy appears to have yielded the current breakthrough. The North first sent Kim Yo-jong, Mr. Kim’s influential sister, to the opening ceremony of the Winter Olympics in South Korea last month, which was followed by the meeting between the South Korean officials and Mr. Kim. Both Koreas have now agreed to hold a summit between Mr. Kim and Mr. Moon, while the North has promised to suspend nuclear and ballistic missile tests if talks with the U.S. are initiated.

This is a marked shift from the aggressive foreign policy that Mr. Kim has pursued since he succeeded his father in 2011. It also signals that his militaristic foreign policy is linked to perceptions about the survival of his regime, something for which he may be willing to reach a diplomatic settlement with the U.S. Raising hopes further, Mr. Trump has responded cautiously, calling the diplomatic outreach “a serious process... by all parties concerned”. Still, the path ahead will not be smooth, given the lack of trust between the U.S. and North Korea and the bitter experience of the past engagement. Even days after South Korea issued a statement about the North’s willingness to discuss denuclearisation and normalisation of ties with the U.S., Pyongyang is yet to confirm it. It could be waiting for a more concrete response from the U.S. Meanwhile, for Mr. Trump, who favours a muscular foreign policy and who even attacked his Secretary of State Rex Tillerson for pursuing talks with North Korea, Pyongyang’s offer poses both an opportunity and a challenge. He can embrace both if he is serious about defusing the nuclear tensions in the Korean peninsula. If a clear and realistic plan for negotiation comes directly from Pyongyang, the U.S. should enable a conducive environment for such talks by delaying the next military exercises with South Korea, scheduled to take place in April.



T.P. SREENIVASAN

From all accounts, the Cold War is breaking out again. The United States has identified both China and Russia as adversaries, whose leaders, Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin, are strong and determined to stand up to a faltering Donald Trump, who is desperately clinging on to doctrines of ultranationalism and nuclear hegemony.

The Russia dare

Mr. Putin has just announced that Russia has invincible doomsday machines like an underwater drone armed with a nuclear warhead powerful enough to sweep away coastal facilities, aircraft carriers and a hypersonic vehicle impossible to intercept as it flies in a cloud of plasma “like a meteorite”.

Cuba is in the dog house again and the “axis of evil” has emerged once again under Iran’s leadership. This time it is a three-cornered Cold War, without any corner having committed countries to act together as military allies. Potential allies are hedging, with no viable grouping to protect the interests of the weak and the poor. If the Cold War is here in a new form, can a reincarnation of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) be far behind?

NAM is anathema today even to those who helped shape it and revelled in it for years. India was one of its leaders, if not the leader. India had a stake in its integrity and India toiled tirelessly to keep it on the middle road, not to be hijacked by Cuba to the left or Singapore to the right. We fought to

keep Egypt within it when every Arab country wanted it to be ousted in 1979 after the Camp David agreements. Indira Gandhi risked a bear hug from Fidel Castro as she took the NAM gavel to save it from the uncertain leadership of Iraq. Had it not been for India, NAM would have been wound up at a ministerial meeting in Ghana in 1991 soon after the collapse of the Berlin Wall. It was characterised as the “last gasp of the old style radicals”.

India argued vehemently against those who felt that NAM had outlived its utility. Since the essence of nonalignment was freedom of thought and action, India insisted that it was valid whether there was one bloc or no bloc. Even while building alliances with others, we availed of the NAM umbrella to promote our national strategies when it suited us. The very lack of homogeneity and unity in NAM enhanced its utility for us. One forum where we effectively used the NAM constituency was the Working Group on UN Reform, where we blocked an effort by the U.S. and others to add Germany and Japan as permanent members and close the doors for further expansion.

Hit refresh

An effort was made in 2012 to craft a ‘Nonalignment 2.0’ in the context of the new global situation, India’s growing importance and the rivalry between the U.S. and China. The report moved the concept of nonalignment away from its origins. It reiterated that India needed to move quickly to extend its global role and influence. But the authors said India’s big challenge would be to aim at not just being powerful but to set new standards for what the powerful must do. India’s legitimacy in the world will come from its ability to stand for



■ (L-R) NEHRU, NEHRU AND TITO, THE HINDU ARCHIVES

the highest human and universal values and at the global level, “India must remain true to its aspiration of creating a new and alternative universality.”

In a situation where the world is no longer bifurcated between two dominant powers, nonalignment today will require managing complicated coalitions and opportunities in an environment that is not structurally settled, the report said. The policy of “strategic autonomy” recommended that India should not take sides in the rivalry between China and the U.S. The report emphasised that for its strategic and foreign policy to be successful, India must sustain domestic economic growth, social inclusion and democracy.

Coming as it did in the wake of a strategic partnership with the U.S., a revival of NAM, even with caveats of various kinds, did not seem to appeal either to the Manmohan Singh government or the opposition Bharatiya Janata Party. For Prime Minister Narendra Modi too, NAM was nothing but a relic of

the Nehruvian past and it did not form part of his vocabulary.

As he pursued his priorities of development, security, neighbourhood and the diaspora, maintaining a constituency of the poor nations of the world had no place. In his transactional foreign policy, it is easier to act alone rather than as the spokesperson of a group. It was no wonder, therefore, that he did not find it necessary to attend the NAM Summit in Venezuela in 2016. India, which conceived and nursed the concept, was ready to cast it into the dustbin of history. We began a journey from the leadership of the super poor to become a super power.

Where we stand today

Into the second half of his term, Mr. Modi’s balance sheet shows an altogether different scenario. As a close defence partner of the U.S. and a member of the “Quadrilateral”, India is right in the U.S. camp. As the baton of the orchestra passed into the hands of a wayward conductor, the new sympho-

ny in India-U.S. relations promised in 2016 has not quite materialised. Both China and Russia, which have been identified as adversaries in the U.S. world view, have their problems with India. Doklam and the Maldives have shown that China is in no mood for a compromise. In fact, China has attributed the increase of its defence budget to the formation of the Quadrilateral, which is being seen as a direct threat to China.

An obvious way is to revive NAM by breathing new life into it and making it fit to deal with the new norm. But it has baggage, which may be difficult to unload. A movement conceived in the context of a bipolar world may not suit a tripolar world, which could become a multipolar world. A partnership of near equals like IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa) with similar interests without any ideological conflict is probably the best model to follow. Something on the lines of the G-15 organised by India and like-minded countries some years ago could be put together with the objective of dealing with the kind of issues identified by Mr. Modi at Davos – climate change, terrorism and protectionism. The members may have links with the U.S., China and Russia, but should be able to work together without the undue influence of the three.

Mr. Modi is not someone who will hesitate to think out of the box to achieve his objectives. Given the present impasse in international relations with little leeway for game-changing initiatives, India will do well to move away from being a camp follower of one of the emerging poles to create our own fourth pole.

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D. SUBA CHANDRAN

Shahbaz Sharif’s recent appointment as interim president of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) was a landmark development that catapults the party into the campaign for the forthcoming parliamentary elections. The appointment of a new chief of the PML-N was necessitated last month when the Supreme Court of Pakistan ordered former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif’s removal as party chief. Irrespective of the question of judicial overreach, perhaps, with the benefit of hindsight, Nawaz Sharif should have effected the succession earlier after the court had disqualified him as Prime Minister.

Battleground Punjab

Going forward, the party is likely to gather strength under Shahbaz Sharif and face the forthcoming elections from a position of strength. He has been the face of



the PML-N in Punjab as the Chief Minister of the province, where the party has a greater presence than in the rest of Pakistan. For the PML-N, Pakistan is Punjab writ large; hence, Shahbaz Sharif is unlikely to face any challenges in running the party. He is acceptable to the rest of the PML-N leadership in the province.

Second, by nominating Shahbaz Sharif and not Maryam Nawaz, who is seen to be Nawaz Sharif’s political heir, the party has taken a positive step. He brings with him huge administrative experience as the Chief Minister of the largest province, and hence at the national level is likely to be able to carry the party forward better than his

niece.

Given the electoral arithmetic, demography and the distribution of seats in Pakistan, if the PML-N succeeds in holding Punjab province, in all likelihood it will be able to come back to power at the federal level as well, with or without a coalition. The recent success stories for the PML-N in the bye-elections in Lahore and Lodhran provide some indication. Of the 342 seats for the National Assembly of Pakistan (with direct elections for 272 NA constituencies), a party will need 172 seats to form the government. In the 2013 elections, PML-N could secure 189, including the reserved seats. The previous elections had 183 seats

from Punjab alone – 148 directly elected and 35 reserved seats for women. With delimitation after the latest census, the province has lost seven elected seats.

Given the level of opposition and the lack of possibility of a coalition amongst them, return of the PML-N seems likely. For instance, it is difficult to see the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) aligning with the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) at the national level, or with the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) in Sindh.

Known, unknown

That is, unless the Deep State decides to effect some political re-engineering. Given former cricketer and PTI leader Imran Khan’s single-minded objective to become the Prime Minister by any means, and the cards available with the military establishment ranging from Muhammad Tahir-ul-Qadri, the MQM and former President Pervez Musharraf, an attempt could be made. But, it is unlikely to succeed if the elections remain free and fair.

However, there are also indications within Pakistan that Shahbaz Sharif is acceptable to the Deep State. So any intervention by the

Deep State could remain limited to Karachi and perhaps Quetta.

For the military, there are serious global developments as the recent FATF (Financial Action Task Force) discussions in Paris indicate. Pakistan’s relations with India, Afghanistan and the U.S. too are at a critical juncture. So, political instability may be the last thing Rawalpindi would want.

Another theory that had been doing the rounds was about a split within the PML-N. There was speculation that the former Interior Minister, Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, would lead a revolt within the party, but the Sharif brothers appear to have succeeded in isolating him. He was not even invited for the latest meeting where the decision was taken to make Shahbaz Sharif the interim president of the party and Nawaz Sharif its Quaid (supreme leader).

In any case, Nawaz Sharif is likely to play the victim card to mop up sympathy votes for his party. Perhaps, the judiciary has done a big favour to the PML-N by being so harsh on its leader.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Attack on Lokayukta

It is absolutely shocking that Karnataka Lokayukta Justice P. Vishwanatha Shetty was stabbed in his office (“Lokayukta stabbed in Karnataka”, March 8). With Karnataka going to the polls, this has now become a political issue. If Union Ministers Ravi Shankar Prasad and Prakash Javadekar said that the attack was a “serious issue of law and order” and that “no one is safe in Congress-ruled Karnataka”, former Deputy Chief Minister R. Ashok went a step ahead and asked for President’s Rule to be imposed in the State. Instead of playing dirty politics at this point, would it not be better for these leaders to think of constructive ways to stop these kinds of attacks and strengthen the Lokayukta institution?

BIDYUT KUMAR CHATTERJEE, Faridabad

Defacing statues

The purpose of installing statues of leaders is to remember them and their influence on society. These recent acts of vandalism are once again a wake-up call for the Central and State governments to tackle rising intolerance in the country (“PM flays vandalism on statues”, March 8). The government has failed to tackle intolerant activities that have ranged from lynching to cow vigilantism. What is the progress in the investigation in these cases? These activities pose a serious threat to democracy. While it is good that the government has condemned these attacks, it needs to do more by taking serious action against these offenders.

VINOD KALAPALA, Nuzvid, Andhra Pradesh

If some of the leaders

whose statues are being destroyed were alive, they would have probably had a hearty laugh. These incidents remind me of ‘Andhra Kesari’, Tanguturi Prakasam Pantulu, whose statue was erected at Vijayawada when he was alive. In 1953, when he selected Kurnool as the capital of the newly formed Andhra State, there was a lot of unhappiness. He once received a telephone call saying that his statue would be demolished if he didn’t rethink his decision. Prakasam replied: “Who asked you to erect my statue? Break it if you so desire.” This silenced his critics. As Shakespeare said: “These violent delights have violent ends/ And in their triumph die, like fire and powder,/ Which, as they kiss, consume.”

K.C. KALKURA, Kurnool, Andhra Pradesh

Gopalkrishna Gandhi pointed out some good things about Lenin, especially how he has been an inspiration to many Indians, but he left out Lenin’s dark side (“Be alert to Operation Dhakka”, March 8). Lenin took away the fundamental rights of the citizens of the Soviet Union such as the right of the press and people’s right to protest. The Cheka (the secret police) made mass arrests and executed those who were the so-called “enemies of the people”. Every coin has two sides and we should consider both while assessing someone’s legacy. Communism has never been successful and has led to dictatorships in many countries.

PRANJAL SINGH, Faizabad

Strained relationship

Both the Congress and the

BJP are responsible for the present situation in Andhra Pradesh (“TDP decides to pull out 2 union Ministers,” March 8). While the Congress divided the State in haste, the BJP, which had promised to correct the mistakes of the Congress, has failed to keep its promises. It is a pity that a serious matter like bifurcation is being used for political gains rather than to provide welfare. Regional parties gain prominence because national parties fail to deliver on their promises.

KSHIRASAGARA BALAJI RAO, Hyderabad

Data on sexual assault

In “The power of numbers” (March 8), the writers say, “Collecting data about sexual violence is a crucial step towards breaking the culture of silence”. This is true but it is far from easy. Hillary Clinton once said

that the history of women has been a history of silence. This is true. Even economically empowered women today are reluctant to open up to researchers who collect data on sexual attacks. This is because those who have faced sexual violence are afraid of the stigma that society may attach to them, unable to articulate in words their shock and anger and worry that doing so would be a hurdle in their attempt to live a dignified life. It requires tremendous effort for researchers to get women to cooperate in collecting data on sexual violence. They need to display an empathetic attitude and speak to them about the utility of such data in controlling sexual violence.

NAMEEZA. A. RASHEED, Chennai

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