

Azim Premji University

From the Selected Works of Vikas Kumar

May 23, 2017

Strengthen ties with Iran

Vikas Kumar



Available at: https://works.bepress.com/vikas_kumar/274/



DECCAN HERALD

ESTABLISHED 1948

Move to set up 10 N plants welcome

The Union Cabinet's decision to set up 10 new nuclear plants to produce 7,000 MW of nuclear power will give a major boost for the country's power sector. The sites for the plants, which include Kaiga in Karnataka, had already been decided and the preliminary work had started, but with the fleet mode clearance now given to the plan, work will be fast-tracked. This is in line with the plan to triple the country's nuclear power capacity by 2025. It is also part of the efforts to meet the fast-rising demand for power which is estimated to quadruple in the next two decades. The government has been focussing on the production of more clean power by increasing the share of non-fossil and renewable sources like solar, wind and nuclear sectors in the energy basket. Nuclear power contributes only a small percentage of the country's power production now while in most industrialised major countries the share is much more.

India had lagged in the nuclear power sector because of sanctions and exclusion from the international nuclear business. The scenario has changed with the Indo-US civil nuclear agreement of 2005, a subsequent treaty with the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), bilateral agreements with other countries and the sorting out of liability issues which had dissuaded foreign companies from setting up plants in the country. With many legal and other issues out of the way, the availability of fuel and even funding may not pose problems now. But the government's plan is based on indigenous capacities which have developed steadily in the last few decades. The present plan is to set up reactors of 700 MW capacity, to be built by the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCL). Most of the existing plants are of 220 MW capacity but the NPCL has now acquired the expertise to set up bigger units which are more efficient and economical.

The new plan will be dovetailed into the Make in India programme and will involve an investment of Rs 70,000 crore. It will create thousands of jobs and give an impetus to a number of industries which will have different roles in

it. The enhanced production of clean power will help the country to better meet its commitments under the 2015 Paris climate change agreement. Concerns related to safety and environment have been voiced over nuclear plants. They are still being articulated. While elimination of nuclear power may remain as a long-term aim, it will be difficult to do without it in the near future. It should also be noted that modern nuclear plants have systems and processes which are considered to be 100% safe.



Bowlers called the shots in IPL

The 10th edition of the Indian Premier League couldn't have ended in a better fashion. After 44 days and 59 matches across 10 venues, the tournament saw a befitting finale, with a resilient Mumbai Indians emerging champions for the third time, the most by any side in the brief history of the tournament. This was only the second time in the tournament that a team finishing on top of the points table in the league phase has gone on to win the title, after Rajasthan Royals did so in the inaugural season. In a format where batsmen rule the roost, it was the bowlers who had the final say in a low-scoring summit clash that had everyone watching on the edge of their seats with both teams in with a chance to win till the last ball of the match. Rising Pune Supergiant, in only their second and most probably their last year, gave a good account of themselves by reaching the final but lack of big-match experience seemed to work against them. While there was no shame in Pune bowing out in this manner after a stuttering start, IPL-10 will be remembered for the no-show from the tournament's biggest showstoppers — Royal Challengers Bangalore.

The dynamic trio of Virat Kohli, Chris Gayle and A B de Villiers was expected to take the tournament by storm once again but its failures saw last year's finalists finish at the bottom of the league. Equally disastrous was the campaign by last season's league table-toppers Gujarat Lions who finished just one spot above RCB even as Kings XI Punjab and Delhi Daredevils maintained their middling performances. This season also saw some brilliant Indian young talent stamp its class. Rishabh Pant was most impressive with his swashbuckling batting but

there were quite a few to give him the company — Mumbai's Nitish Rana and Krunal Pandya, Pune's not-so-young Rahul Tripathi and Washington Sundar and RCB's Pawan Negi caught the attention. Though David Warner led the batting charts, Indians dominated the bowling with the top three slots being occupied by Bhuvneshwar Kumar, Jaydev Unadkat and Jasprit Bumrah. Kolkata's Sunil Narine made more news for his batting than his bowling while M S Dhoni showed that his batting prowess and fan following were still intact.

On the flip side, there were rumours of match-fixing while the 1.27 am finish to the Eliminator in Bengaluru raised debates about the IPL playing conditions and the suitability of the D/L method in the T20 format. Overall, it was another successful edition and IPL XI is pregnant with uncertainties with regard to player retention and the future of Pune and Gujarat. The show, however, must go on.



Comment

A YEAR AFTER PM'S VISIT

Strengthen ties with Iran

By slowing down work on ongoing projects in Iran, Delhi seems to be allowing third countries to influence its relationship with Tehran.

By Vikas Kumar

After Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Tehran last year (May 22-23), it was hoped that India and Iran would expedite work on long-pending infrastructure projects and make up for the lost decade. It was also hoped that they would insulate their ties from the state of their relationships with other countries.

The progress on infrastructure projects centred on the Chabahar port has been sluggish while the relationship in the energy sector is far from stable. India has reportedly decided to reduce its oil purchases to convey its disappointment at the delay in award of rights to develop the Farzad-B gas field to ONGC Videsh Ltd. Iran retaliated by withdrawing concessions to Indian refiners. Unfortunately, despite shared interests, India and Iran have allowed their relationship to drift.

The drift can possibly be explained, among other things, by political uncertainty in Iran in the run-up to the presidential election, Iran's preoccupation with West Asian conflicts, and India's sensitivity to rising US-Iran tensions. While the first two are beyond our control, the government should have been better prepared to deal with the last.

Amidst the United States' rebalancing in favour of Saudi Arabia and hardening stance against Iran, India has reportedly slowed down work on the proposed and ongoing projects in Iran. If true, India once again seems to be allowing third countries to influence its relationship with Iran.

The two years following the nuclear deal between Iran and P5+1 should have been used to ensure that India's fresh initiatives in Iran would not be vulnerable to outside pressures. The failure in this regard might be explained by the political leadership's inability to provide Iran the attention it deserves and bureaucratic apathy in the absence of a clear political mandate.

In fact, India's Iran policy is surprisingly devoid of imagination. The bilateral cooperation on developing ports, transport corridors and energy resources is important, but this is something that should/could have been done a decade

ago. Work on these projects will make up for the delay after, say, 2003. But, where is the vision and foundation for a 21st century partnership with Iran?

Prime Minister Modi has tried to leverage India's strengths in new economy sectors such as information technology and space technology in foreign policy. He has also tried to harness cultural and religious ties to strengthen relations with other countries. His visit to an all-women BPO centre operated by the TCS in Saudi Arabia, the recently launched South Asia Satellite, and the proposed Varanasi-Colombo flight are cases in point.



So, it is intriguing that the prime minister stuck to brick-and-mortar projects to bond with Iran and did not explore the potential for building bonds in the new economy or leveraging the existing in fields such as education. Moreover, he only superficially touched upon the older cultural/religious bonds.

India should promote ties in high-skills sectors such as information technology, pharmaceuticals, biotechnology and space technology. Iran should not be viewed as a passive consumer but rather as a partner because Iran has a very large and well-trained workforce by the West Asian standards.

Moreover, Iran has experimented with different technologies under the sanctions regime. The diversification of the economic relationship will also partly shield the overall bilateral relationship from occasional disappointments due to "delays" in brick-and-mortar projects.

However, the US is a key obstacle in this regard. India's new economy is dominated by private companies that are deeply interconnected with the US economy, which is both the biggest market as well as a major source for finance,

technology, and ideas (in fact, even government organisations such as Isro are to some extent vulnerable to potential US sanctions against Iran and the same holds for financial institutions).

Volatile ties

Given the volatile US-Iranian relationship, private companies cannot risk investing in Iran. Post-sanctions, the private sector's interest in Iran has been limited to purchasing more oil. Otherwise, the private sector has shown interest wherever (and to the extent) the Indian government is itself directly involved such as in the Chabahar port.

The Trump administration is pursuing 'America First' approach and has not shown willingness to accommodate India's economic and strategic interests. India needs to find means of independently pursuing its interests in Iran without deferring to the US. I am reminded of a suggestion of Iran's Ambassador to India Gholamreza Ansari in the context of India's growing ties with Israel. He said, "If they [Israel] are your friends, don't let them choose your enemies." This applies to India's relationship with the US as well.

It needs no emphasising that close and stable political and economic relations with Iran have to be an integral part of any 'India First' policy. Iran is one of the biggest suppliers of oil and gas in the world and among the major suppliers located closest to India. Also, Iran shares a direct border with Central Asia that lies on both sides of the Caspian Sea.

So, Iran is indispensable not only for India's energy security, but also for providing resource rich Central Asia with an alternative access to the sea bypassing China, Pakistan, and Russia. Moreover, Iran can reduce Afghanistan's dependence upon Pakistan by providing it with an alternative access to the sea.

The stability of India's relationship with Iran will depend on the speedy completion of infrastructure projects, a partnership in the new economy, and greater people-to-people contacts. At the moment, the bilateral relationship is standing on just one wobbling leg. Given the understandable reluctance of the private sector to invest in Iran, the onus is on the Indian government to find ways of leveraging the country's strengths in, say, the new economy to build a strong partnership with Iran. The government also needs to encourage tourism and educational exchanges to promote people-to-people contacts.

(The writer teaches at Azim Premji University, Bengaluru)

RIGHT IN THE MIDDLE

To the dear departed

The WhatsApp messages were no longer reassuring. I simply had to go see him.

By Mallika Krishnaswami

I had just stepped out of the room, all set to go to work, when the dreaded news came. He was no more! I stopped short. My head began to spin. I walked dizzily and sank into the sofa. I stared into space not wanting to believe it. But how? He seemed to be recovering when I saw him last. And that was just less than two weeks ago. He had been in and out of hospital a couple of times but had always returned strong, for wasn't his a toned martial arts body? My mind went back to the events of the past few weeks...

I was informed about his hospitalisation yet again, after being found gasping for breath and almost in convulsions. Wheeled into the Intensive Care Unit, he had remained there, intubated and

fed liquids through the Ryle's tube. The two months of prior dialysis had left him weak. While the rest of the family scuttled between home, hospital and work, I stayed back, praying to all the Gods for his recovery. But after two weeks it was just too much. The WhatsApp messages were not reassuring. I was at the end of my tethers and could not calm my frayed nerves. I simply had to go.

Waiting my turn outside the ICU was no fun. After what seemed like ages, I was let in. One look at him and my knees went weak. Instead of the familiar strong physique, what lay in bed was half a form with hands and legs strapped to the bed, tubes connecting him to machines monitoring his vital signs and his mouth open to let the tube through. He was sedated and sleeping, though now and then his face contorted as if in pain.

The days that followed were a little better as he was extubated and could speak, though the voice that came forth sounded hoarse due to the prolonged intubation. Come visiting hours and we

were there. Seeing a ray of hope, we prepared him for the tracheostomy and arranged for post-operative care with a hospice whose nurses seemed warm and welcoming. The best thing was that it was just several hundred metres away from the dialysis centre.

The day before I left, I went to see him again and can still feel his strong grip on my wrist as he tried to turn over. The tracheostomy was done and he seemed to be recuperating. Shifted out a couple of days later, he was rushed back breathless to the ICU, alas a moment too late! He had succumbed to a cardiac arrest!

Was it negligence on the part of the doctors? Was it pneumonia worsened by cross infection? Was it our prayers that had him clinging on to dear life for more than 40 days? Had he given up, knowing that he was fighting a losing battle? God only knew. All I knew was that the image of our beloved brother would continue to haunt our memories and pluck at our heart strings for a long, long time to come...

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Compete over better planning, not miseries

Sir, Apropos "Mayor says Bengaluru better off than Chennai and Mumbai" (DH, 22 May), it is a matter of surprise and great concern to all Bengaleureans that the first citizen of our city has made such a profound statement as far as being prepared for the monsoons is concerned. That this comes close on the heels of the tragedy where a young man was swept away in an overflowing stormwater drain is even more disconcerting. If what the Mayor said is credible, one wonders how it is that as soon as there is a moderate shower, many parts of the city come to a standstill, with traffic gridlocked,

several areas flooded and power disrupted for hours on end.

The nexus between the contractors and the authorities is obvious — why else would all the silt be taken out of the stormwater drains and left on the side for days on end until the first rains arrive and deposit the muck right back into the drain? Perhaps, the Mayor should reflect on the problems faced year after year, instead of comparing our city with others. It certainly should not become a competition as to who faces more misery than the other during each monsoon!

WG CDR JT NAYAHAM (rtd), Bengaluru

Tax revolution

Sir, Apropos "GST, a good step with mixed results" (DH, May 22), with the finalisation of rates ranging from 5% to 28%, India is almost ready to implement a tax code that unified more than a dozen separate levies. It is a tax revolution because the indirect tax structure in India was hopelessly chaotic. The sweeping tax reform will reshape India's business landscape, making the country an easier place to do business and may raise government revenue by widening the tax net in a largely informal \$2 trillion economy.

N SADHASIVA REDDY, Bengaluru

Thrilling victory

Sir, Apropos "Never-say-die Mumbai Indians lift IPL title" (DH, May 22), the

MI team is on Cloud 9 after turning the tables on Rising Pune Supergiant (RPS) and emerging victorious in the IPL 10 final. Having lost their last three matches to RPS and only a paltry 129 to defend (lowest first innings in an IPL final), history was clearly not on the side of MI. But the team fought back to snatch a thrilling solitary run victory and send their fans into raptures.

N J RAVI CHANDER, Bengaluru

Total tobacco ban

Sir, Apropos "Only high tax can check tobacco ills," a total ban on tobacco products, as in the case of opium poppy, is what is needed. A smoker may shift to a cheaper brand but not quit smoking. While a tax may increase revenue, public health will remain as bad as ever.

R KRISHNAN, Via email

SPEAK OUT



"Kashmir (issue) needs to be resolved on first priority. The Centre is playing vote bank politics... state govt is only concerned to save its chair... (sic)"

Farooq Abdullah, NC President

It is easier to criticise than to correct our past errors.

Livy

IN PERSPECTIVE

Privatisation of PSUs threat to sovereignty

The strategy behind the sale of BEML is questionable as the GoI loses control over its policy, production.

By S G Vombatkere

The Government of India (GoI) has decided to go ahead with the "strategic sale" to a "strategic partner" of 26% of its present 54% share in the Bharat Earth Movers Ltd (BEML), which produces critical hardware for India's armed forces (military, for short).

Disinvestment of the GoI shares in public assets originated in during the Congress' times, but disinvestment of a defence-sector PSU is a first which the BJP-led NDA II government can claim. The strategy behind the sale is questionable, especially since the GoI loses control over policy and production in BEML.

It is a moot question whether India's sovereignty and security were considered before the decision was taken, despite objections from within the establishment, supported with facts and figures from government sources. But the matter is questionable also from a public angle.

India is a sovereign, democratic Republic. Its sovereignty — territorial, political and economic — is not negotiable and cannot be compromised. If the coin of national strategy is tossed, the Republic can survive only if "sovereignty" and "security" are its two sides. "Security" is provided by the military, which can ensure sovereignty only if both the soldier and his "gun" (military hardware) are Indian.

This is not to suggest that every bit of military hardware has to be Indian, but that policy and production of critical hardware like weapons, weapon systems, equipment and vehicles, and critical expendables like ammunition ("critical items," hereinafter, to include critical components) should be under the control of the GoI.

Of course, in emergent circumstances or the short-term, imports of critical items may have to be resorted to, but for the middle-term, indigenous production must be geared-up and imports reduced, while for the long-term, 100% indigenous production of critical items should be achieved.

National strategy in consultation with the military should spell out which are critical items, the timeline or targets, and the policy for sovereignty and security through indigenous production of critical items.

Public money was used to build PSUs as public assets for the purpose of indigenous production. It can and has been argued that if Indian corporations produce critical military items in India, it should satisfy the sovereignty issue. Noting that corporations are not under control of governments, this argument is fraught with consequences.

In present times, a corporation may be registered in a particular country (like say an Indian corporation), but acquisitions

and mergers are the order of the day, and what started out as an Indian corporation could well be taken over by a foreign business entity, and become subject to its business interests. Thus, whatever little say, if any, that the GoI had in its policy and production would be lost. Such a corporation, if engaged in production of critical items for India's defence, can hold the country to ransom, thus setting a price on sovereignty and security.

Indigenisation crucial

Indigenisation of production of critical military items with the GoI's control over policy and production is thus an integral part of non-negotiable sovereignty and security, and gearing-up defence PSUs and ordnance factories (OFs) is an inescapable part of national strategy. If PSUs are deemed "inefficient" (which is not across the board), the onus of making them "efficient" lies on the GoI. Selling them off, strategically or otherwise, is no solution.

This does not imply that manufacture in India by the private sector is to be abjured. Private sector manufacturing capacity needs to be used to produce sub-critical items which are used by PSUs to produce critical systems, with control over policy and secrecy with the GoI.

At least, insofar as India's sovereignty and security are linked with its critical military hardware, "Make in India" has to be extended to "Make by India, for India." Therefore, defence PSUs and OFs which produce the gun are as much a part of India's defence of sovereignty and security as the soldier.

Loss of government control over policy and production of critical military hardware and expendables by privatisation of PSUs and OFs can't be anything other than faulty national strategy. Even if it makes business sense to go for "strategic sale" of these public assets to a "strategic partner," it needs to be emphasised that national strategy is about sovereignty and security and not business profits.

BEML is the first defence PSU up for "strategic sale," but other PSUs like HAL, BEL, BHEL, BDL, GRSE and MIDHANI, some of them "navratnas," and some OFs are also in the process of disinvestment or sale.

Sale of defence PSUs will entail enormous and unacceptable loss of infrastructure and land, and more importantly, irreparable loss of trained human resource working for the cause of national pride through self-reliance and indigenisation. It will also create dependence on foreign entities, and amount to a self-goal obviously not in the national interest.

Especially since India is the world's largest importer of military goods, the GoI would do well to review its national strategy concerning critical items for its military so that India's sovereignty and security are assured, and drop "strategic sale" of defence PSUs, which will only benefit corporations.

(The writer, a retired Major General, is with People's Union for Civil Liberties)

OUR PAGES  OF HISTORY

50 years ago: May 23, 1967

Govt supersedes City Corporation again

The Mysore Government has by a fresh order of May 22, superseded the Bangalore Municipal Corporation for a three year period and has appointed K Balasubramanyam, senior

IAS officer, as Administrator.

In superseding the Corporation, the government has taken recourse to the first of the three alternatives suggested by the Division Bench, by confining itself to three of the 14 charges in the original show-cause notice.

25 years ago: May 23, 1992

PM hints at revamp of public sector units

New Delhi, May 22. Prime Minister P V Narasimha Rao announced that restructuring of central public sector units was "under active consideration" and favoured "sharper

targeting" of public distribution system while asserting the crucial role of planning despite market-led economic growth.

He said public sector restructuring was essential for internal resource generation needed to finance public sector plan investment.