

For Times of India

The forthcoming State visit of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh presents an opportunity for the Prime Minister to take the leadership on issues where the United States and India have common interests but also differences in approaches. Professor Jagdish Bhagwati, whose writings in the mid-1960s --- with Professor Padma Desai, he wrote the celebrated book, India: Planning for Industrialization which laid out the entire agenda of reforms which would be adopted twenty years later --- were instrumental in India's emergence from stagnation into its current status as a major economic powerhouse, and who has played a leading role in promoting India-US relations in the US through public advocacy in the leading print and TV media and through frequent testimonies since 1994 in the US House and Senate, suggests here what the Prime Minister ought to say.

President Obama and Distinguished Members of the Congress:

It is an honour for me, and for India, to be speaking to you today. Indian Prime Ministers have been invited to do so in earlier years. But this occasion is of unprecedented significance because President Obama, whom all Indians congratulate on his Nobel Peace Prize, has chosen me as India's Prime Minister to be his administration's first invitee for a State visit. He clearly attaches the utmost importance to relations between our two great democracies, seeking to follow in the footsteps of President Clinton who began and George W. Bush who elevated relations with India into a special bond; and we fully reciprocate his sentiments.

I would like to remind India's friends in the Congress that our two democracies have much in common. Indeed we have borrowed from each other over the years in how we manage our democracies and our shared values. You are doubtless aware that Rev. Martin Luther King followed in the footsteps of Mahatma Gandhi in practicing non-

violence. But you should also know that Mahatma Gandhi was inspired by Henry Thoreau on the merits of civil disobedience. Our leading jurists on the Indian Supreme Court have developed Public Interest Litigation, bringing legal standing to the poor of India, in ways that have influenced the liberals in your own Supreme Court. But the Indian Constitution itself was shaped by Dr. Ambedkar who studied with the philosopher John Dewey at Columbia University and was inspired by the US constitution.

Then again, while both our countries share the view that religious freedom must allow the free exercise of one's religion, India has led the way again for what our secular intellectuals have called "positive freedom" of religion as well, as distinct from the conventional "negative freedom of religion" that leaves everyone free to practice her own faith . All religions must be respected in the public space, at public ceremonies and in public displays. Thus, Mahatma Gandhi used to have prayers at his public meetings; and a verse or a passage was read from the Koran, the Old Testament, the New Testament, the sacred texts of the Hindus, who constitute as large a share of the Indian population as Christians do in the United States, and of the Sikhs, a small minority, and the Zoroastrians, a minuscule number whom we welcomed in our midst as they arrived on our shores as they fled persecution in Persia. The United States has started moving in that direction but the public space is still largely confined to what the enlightened Umayyads in Andalusian Spain, who ruled until the intolerant Catholics triumphed in 1492 in Granada, called the "people of the book": Christianity, Judaism and Islam. So the United States has still ways to go; and we are happy to see that some day soon you will surely converge to the great Mahatma's more universal precepts and practice.

But, in turn, we too have begun to appreciate how your great country uses civil society and the legal and political processes to guarantee effectively the rights of those marginalized by traditional cultural norms and practices. We have learnt from you that each individual matters: that every human being has dignity and inalienable rights. This is perhaps your greatest message to the world; and we admire, and increasingly learn from, your ways.

Again, we flatter ourselves that successive US administrations have selected some of your most accomplished citizens to represent you in New Delhi. These have included Professors John Kenneth Galbraith and Daniel Patrick Moynihan. You have also sent us the best in your Foreign Service: among them, Ambassadors Thomas Pickering and Frank Wisner. And you have had our own best over the years, leading up to the present Ambassador Meera Shankar, one of the many talented women in our Foreign Service.

Yet, I would like to address today the issues that can create divisions among us where we should stand together instead. I must confess that these differences have led to concern, widely shared and now spilling over into the public discourse in India, that the United States is pursuing agendas which are mindful of its own interests at the expense of India's legitimate concerns. In fact, many now believe that India is unfairly singled out by the United States spokesmen and negotiators as a "rejectionist" country on issues such as the Doha Round of multilateral trade negotiations and the prospective Copenhagen Treaty on Climate Change. Let me be frank and say that, unless this source of friction and hostility between our two countries is addressed and removed by the US, it will fester, putting unfortunate and gratuitous obstacles in the course of our future relationship. Good intentions cannot triumph over bad policies.

Let me begin with the twin challenges of fighting protectionism and of concluding the Doha Round of multilateral trade negotiations. We need stand still on protectionism; and we need to go forward on the latter. At the G-20 meetings, all leaders have raised their voices against letting the pressures from the current crisis from sliding their countries back into protectionism. But the world has been disappointed by many steps backwards in most of the G-20 countries; and the disappointment has been the greatest with the enactment by the United States of the Buy America provision in the Stimulus Package, since the US has long been at the forefront of the fight for freer trade that has brought unprecedented prosperity in the postwar period to both our nations and has also lifted over 200 million out of poverty in mine in the last two decades.

But the disappointment with is the greater in the case of the G-20 nations moving forward on the Doha Round of multilateral trade negotiations. The US has long put the blame for the inability to close the Round on India. But the fact is that both the US and India have failed to make the agricultural concessions that would have resolved the main elements of the deadlock. Today, further, the general sense is that, while the last election, has freed my government to move ahead on trade liberalization, the last US election has straitjacketed President Obama into only tepid endorsement of the Doha Round closure and little action. As the leader of a democratic nation, I recognize the constraints that politics places on our ability to exercise statesmanship. But, as President Obama doubtless knows from his remarkable odyssey to the White House, charismatic leaders can rise to a challenge. I therefore offer India's hand in friendship to President Obama on this issue, and urge him to join with me in offering energetic and effective leadership on

closing the Doha Round by the middle of next year: anything less than that would be an unforgivable failure of the statesmanship that the world demand of us today.

The Climate Change Treaty at Copenhagen has divided our nations in even more gratuitous ways and the accusatory finger has been unjustly levied against India. Let me remind the Congress that India's current carbon emissions are less than 4.5% of the total: a fact that is little appreciated. By contrast, China's already exceed yours and are close to one-fifth of the world emissions. Again, when a democratic country like India offers any commitments, our ability to deliver is different from that of an authoritarian country like China. For, governmental promises amount to little unless the four elements of a liberal democracy such as yours and mine are there to ensure that the commitments are kept: a robust civil society, an independent judiciary, opposition parties and an independent press. These are the constituent elements of our polities that provide the countervailing power which governments must contend with. India therefore is not a player big enough to matter; and whatever commitments it makes are more likely to be kept.

However, on both the question of providing funds for the past damage to the environment through carbon emissions, and for cutting slack to the developing countries including India for the current emissions, the US has taken positions that India cannot agree to. Permit me to explain as the matter has been obfuscated and once you realize how the differences between us can be resolved in a just and efficient fashion, I have little doubt that you will see how we can march together towards Copenhagen.

On putting up funds for the past damage, the US position is that this will not fly. But need I remind you that the US itself has had the Superfund, after the Love Canal incident, where strict liability, even for damage that was not recognized by science as

such at the time of the pollution, has been assigned to firms for clean-up of hazardous waste disposal in the last. This is based on the idea of tort payment and is therefore grounded in your own principles and practices. Other rich nations, which do not practice torts with the same zeal as you do, have agreed in principle to large sums such as Prime Minister Gordon Brown's endorsement of \$100 billion annually for ten years; this contrasts with zero commitment by the US as it enters the last lap of the Copenhagen Treaty.

What would this Superfund be used for? Largely for mitigation and less so for some adaptation as well. Each country can operate its own Superfund, just as aid flows are operated bilaterally by USAID here and by DFID in UK. But should each nation spend the moneys only on its own technology-developing firms, and then sell it to other nations? This is what the Green Lobbies want; and I am afraid that many Green investors would like a guaranteed outcome for themselves. But this would be inefficient, expensive and divisive. Instead we can surely use another US principle, used at the time of the earlier Green Revolution which created the new seeds with international participation and then let them be available worldwide as a free good. Let us use the Superfunds to develop new mitigation technologies, but have the tenders open to firms and scientists worldwide. Is there any doubt that US-based forms will not be able to compete successfully for many of these tenders? Then, once the mitigation technologies have been developed, let them be available as a public good: to India, to Brazil, to South Africa, to the European Union, indeed to all.

Once these publicly-funded technologies begin to come off the production line and are freely available to all users, the worry of India and other emerging nations that,

with existing technologies, the cost of mitigation would be prohibitive and would undermine their attack on poverty, would ease. There is little doubt that my country would be happy to accept firm commitments in regard to current carbon emissions down the line, after a grace period of 20 years, while the rich nations, which emit much more on a per capita basis, accept tougher immediate carbon-reduction targets on their own emissions. The asymmetry of obligations between the rich and the poor nations for current emissions has a sound basis in moral-philosophical argumentation; and ethically-informed Americans should have no problem with this asymmetry that would disappear down the line.

We can therefore join hands on the two great issues of Doha and Copenhagen before us today, both of which require immediate attention. Let us forget the unproductive, and often misdirected, “blame game”. Let our two great democracies unite in statesmanship instead of dividing in politics. I offer you India’s warm friendship and expect to get no less from you.