

# The privatisation of patronage

As the endgame begins for B.S. Yeddyurappa in the Karnataka BJP, a look at the political culture he created and was also nurtured by

NARENDAR PANI



AS B.S. Yeddyurappa moves into the endgame of his battle from within the BJP, the focus will be, among other things, on the damage he can cause his former colleagues in the party. While that will no doubt make for interesting reading, the more serious concern should be the damage his brand of politics has caused Karnataka. And high on this list would be the effects the political change he led has had on Bangalore.

Yeddyurappa's politics in recent years has been built around two longer-term trends in Karnataka: decentralisation and pri-

vatation of patronage. The state has been a pioneer in decentralisation, with the process gaining momentum in the 1980s, well before the constitutional amendments of 1992. This process created the platform for a number of aspiring, and often ruthlessly ambitious, local politicians.

In the early years of this decentralisation, these politicians grew under the umbrella of state-level leaders belonging to one national party or the other. They provided the grassroots network for state patronage provided by the ruling party. But as the competition among these grassroots politicians grew, it was not possible for any party to absorb all of them. Those who failed to get into the networks of state-level leaders had to find their own resources to provide patronage to their constituents.

With the Reddy brothers in Bellary showing the way, these aspiring local politicians chose to privatise state resources they came

into contact with, beginning with government transport and going up to the funds for state schemes. These methods were necessarily illegal, but that was not a deterrent. By the turn of the century, the number of corrupt local leaders was so large that they could not all be accommodated in the Congress and the Janata Dal.

At this time Yeddyurappa was the head of a still-ideological BJP. He had spent a lifetime trying to spread Hindutva with only occasional success. He then decided to merge the ideological BJP with the non-ideological needs of the local, allegedly corrupt politicians. In the process, he seemed willing to go further in wooing ethically ambivalent local leaders than any other politician. This was not only in terms of their financial dealings, but also their larger worldview. When two BJP ministers were caught viewing pornography in the state assembly, Yeddyurappa was not without sympathy for their cause.

**YEDDYURAPPA'S politics in recent years has been built around two longer-term trends in Karnataka: decentralisation and privatisation of patronage. It may not be fair to place the urban crisis entirely at Yeddyurappa's door, but he has emerged as the symbol of a political trend that could cripple Bangalore.**

The emergence of local politicians willing to generate resources for patronage through fair means or foul had its impact on Bangalore as well. As the city expanded rapidly after 1970, it took over the lands of a large number of villages. In the initial decades, this was a centralised process with the Bangalore Development Authority taking

over agricultural land and then selling sites at much higher prices. The spectacular spurt in land prices made the BDA an important point of state patronage.

The phenomenon of state-level politicians making economic and political gains by taking over the land owned by families in villages for generations was bound to generate resistance. And in a more decentralised polity this resistance could not be ignored. By the 1990s, the BDA began to lose much of its authority, to be replaced by farmers converting their land into layouts. This was originally meant to be a well-regulated process, with clearances needed at several stages.

But the landowners who created new layouts found that working within the political environment of 21st-century Bangalore made it quite unnecessary to scrupulously follow norms. Construction norms were ignored when building to meet the growing housing demand. They did not hesitate

to build on public land and even on what were meant to be drains.

The tendency to ignore norms proved to be quite contagious. One administrator even estimated that 95 per cent of buildings in Bangalore had broken one norm or the other. And the political solution has been to quite simply reduce this figure by regularising the irregular. Once the bill that has been prepared for this purpose is passed, it will consolidate the widespread belief in Bangalore that fools follow norms while the wise profit from breaking them.

In the midst of this growing acceptance of irregularity, the political class built an even more effective instrument of private resource generation from public projects. More land would be notified for major projects than was necessary. When the project took off, the value of that land would increase manifold. Selected plots within that land would then be de-notified for a price. Since the de-notified land would depend on the ability and

willingness of the original landowner to share the spoils, it added to the haphazard pattern of land acquired for infrastructure.

The problem with this polity is not just an ethical one. The irregularities in construction are having their impact on drainage in the city. Bangaloreans now floods at the first downpour. The larger ambience of irregularity also makes it impossible to get citizens to follow basic civic practices. As Bangaloreans refuse to segregate their waste and local politicians from nearby villages ensure there will be no landfills in their vicinity, garbage has been piling up on the city's streets, threatening an epidemic.

It may not be fair to place this urban crisis entirely at Yeddyurappa's door, but he has emerged as the symbol of a political trend that could cripple Bangalore.

*The writer is professor, National Institute of Advanced Studies, Bangalore*

GAUTAM BHATIA



THE idea to shift the capital out of Delhi to a faraway place strikes a chord with those who feel that the place is now so tainted by power and corruption that the only solution is its transfer to an inaccessible village. Every day is a grim reminder of the sheer ugliness of India's capital, the monumental scale of its nefarious operations — political backlash, class wars, battles for utilities — and all the expected clashes brought on by sheer numbers and densities of people, closely packed and defined by greed.

The dissolution of the capital is a serious idea whose time has come.

When the British set up Calcutta as India's first city, it was for mercantile reasons. The city's accessibility through a large port and across the sea allowed goods to be transported to consumers in England. The convenience of an urban centre to lend administrative credibility to a massive trade operation was both a necessity and a burden, but Calcutta performed the function admirably. Later, when the Empire altered its commercial roots to acquire a larger political stake in India, the shift of the capital to Delhi took on a different hue. The grand vision of the subjugation of a people was realised in monumentalism, domed and classical architecture and grand axial symmetries in planning layouts.

Almost a century after the Great Durbar and the grandiose colonial vision, the pantomime of greatness and excessive power has become a sad satirical reality. Except for Russia and its East European satellites, nowhere does government make its presence more physically felt than in the Indian capital. Rashtrapati Bhawan, the prime minister's cordoned residence, the diplomatic enclave, ministers' bungalows, bureaucrats flats, ministry offices, foreign service apartments, naval staff quarters, services headquarters, not to mention the mile-upon-mile of public housing, chipped, peeling and smudged — bureaucratic citadels, wasteful and degraded — that are the visible public face of India. Everything about the Delhi skyline is a reminder of the eternal presence of the government.

Throughout the world there are examples of capital cities that have remained only minor places of political culture and have let their larger metros develop into cultural and business centres. Look westward and you will see how little a city's urbanism is affected by bureaucratic presence. Canada's capital Ottawa has a small town feel, a minor European streetscape of horse carriages and cobblestones. The cultural component of Paris far overwhelms its political importance; in London, the prime minister's home is just another door on Downing Street.



CR SASIKUMAR

## A capital idea

Move government out of Delhi to disperse its political, business and cultural wealth

Even Washington DC — designed to axial symmetries similar to Delhi — has the urban atmosphere of a stretched fairground where politics survives along with museums and galleries. No special bungalows for congressmen, no housing for the services, no architectural privileges for bureaucrats, no party headquarters. Politics is just another presence in the ordinary scheme of the city.

Delhi, however, is a city of overlapping influences where industry, politics, business, finance, culture — are now all part of the same decision-making

**THE CAPITAL today has become an unfortunate handicap to a nation no longer governed by a Centre.**

process. Business heads influence economic policy decisions; bureaucrats are selected to head art museums and national science institutions; police officers are transferred for not towing unstated administrative directives. These are all the shadowy undercurrents of

excessive and uncomfortable proximities, where Indian political and economic culture today remains trapped in colonial clothes.

Moreover, the capital today has become an unfortunate handicap to a nation no longer governed by a Centre (and often not governed at all). As it stands, many states pay little heed to Delhi. Uttar Pradesh, Gujarat, West Bengal, Bihar and Tamil Nadu among others are serious individual players, with great veto powers, often rendering the Centre ineffective. The dissolution of the cap-

ital may be a first step towards an eventual devolution of power to these or other smaller entities.

Of course, the mere transfer of the capital from Delhi to another place would result in a re-congregation of the old guard in the new place. Separation of those who govern from those who run business and industry, from those that make policy and economic decisions, and those who administer art and culture, would return responsibility where it belongs — to individual and institutional choice. Such a separation would effectively break the deep nexus between politics, real estate, the bureaucracy and business.

How then do you disperse the political, business and cultural wealth of Delhi? Some in the art world favour a move to make Bhopal the cultural capital. For its central location, some suggest Nagpur for political administration. Yet others, Mumbai as fiscal capital and Cochin for the armed services. Whatever the new locations, a number of smaller capitals would be far preferable to one unwieldy one. And though it's hard to predict the precise character of a dissolved capital or indeed the spirit of its new smaller avatars, the mere wish for an altered perception of today's grim political life would be enough to make the experiment worthwhile.

*The writer is a Delhi-based architect*

DENG XIJUN



THE brief border conflict between China and India, which happened 50 years ago in October 1962, seems to be a hot topic again these days in some media of the two countries. It is a better idea to review the history of China-India relations in a broader perspective. If we only focus on the conflict of 1962, the whole picture of China-India relations will be neglected. That is missing the woods for the trees.

Relations between China and India date back to over two thousand years ago. It is a long and complicated relationship. But, in four sentences we can capture the headlines: the two great civilisations interacted frequently in ancient times; they supported each other in modern times; their relations experienced ups and downs in the contemporary era; and they are strategic and cooperative partners in the 21st century.

As two great, ancient civilisations, China and India communicated with and learned from each other throughout history. Economic and cultural exchanges between the two peoples can be traced back to the Qin (221-206BC) and Han (202BC-220AD) dynasties.

The famous Indian epics *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* contain numerous references to China. Buddhism acted as an important bridge for ancient China-India contact. More than 1,000 years ago, eminent Chinese monks Xuan Zang (Hsuan Tsang) and Fa Xian (Fa Hsien) travelled to India for Buddhist scriptures, while renowned Indian monks Kumarajiva and Bodhidharma spread Buddhist teachings in China. They greatly promoted cultural exchange and integration.

China and India supported and sympathised with each other in the fight against colonial rule and the struggle for national independence and liberation. In 1937, the Indian National Congress issued a statement condemning the Japanese invasion of China. Doctor Dwarkanath Kotnis travelled all the way to China as a member of an Indian medical aid team and devoted his life to the cause of the liberation of the Chinese people. India was the first non-socialist country to establish diplomatic relations with New China. In the 1950s, China-India relations developed smoothly and "Hindi-Chini bhai bhai" became a popular saying at that time. The two countries co-initiated the famous

**IN THE first decade of the new century, the bilateral trade volume increased nearly 20 times. China is India's largest trade partner, and India is China's largest trade partner in South Asia. Looking back at the long history of China-India relations, it is evident that the unpleasant experience is only a drop in the ocean.**

Panchsheel, the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, which are still recognised as the basic principles of international relations.

After the conflict of 1962, bilateral relations reached a low point. Thanks to their joint efforts, China and India exchanged ambassadors again and restored trade and people-to-people exchanges in the mid-1970s. The two countries also entered into negotiations for a solution to the boundary question. Then Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in 1988

made a breakthrough in bilateral relations. In the two 1990s, high-level visits between the two countries increased, and cooperation in various fields made steady progress. Two agreements were signed for the maintenance of peace and tranquillity and confidence-building measures in their border areas. In 1998, India tried to justify its nuclear tests with the so-called "threat from China", which led to a temporary setback in China-India relations. Fortunately, top leaders of the two countries handled this with foresight and rationality, and bilateral relations went back on track shortly.

Entering the 21st century, bilateral relations have witnessed an all-round and fast development. In 2005, China and India established a Strategic and Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity. In the first decade of the new century, the bilateral trade volume increased nearly 20 times. China is India's largest trade partner, and India is China's largest trade partner in South Asia. Closer exchanges and a stronger desire to learn from each other led to better understanding between the two peoples. China and India strengthened their cooperation in the framework of BRICS and the G-20,

which attracts worldwide attention. Special representatives on the boundary question have reached a consensus on the political guiding principles and have started negotiations on the framework for a solution.

Looking back at the long history of China-India relations, I think it is evident that the unpleasant experience is only a drop in the ocean. As Premier Wen Jiabao commented, the duration of time when China and India enjoyed a friendly relationship stretched 2,000 years, or 99.9 per cent of our interactions, and the conflict between our two countries only lasted less than 0.1 per cent. A famous Chinese poem flashed through my mind — one generation makes way for another, and what has been and what will be become past and present. As the successors and creators of history, we need to have a correct and comprehensive understanding of history. Only in this way can we obtain enlightenment and courage from the past, bury the ghosts of wars and conflicts, and start a new chapter in China-India relations.

*The writer is Chargé d' Affaires, Embassy of the People's Republic of China, New Delhi*

## Printline PAKISTAN

RUCHIKA TALWAR

*A register of reports and views from the Pakistan press*

### PAST IMPERFECT

PAKISTAN'S Supreme Court issued a verdict late last week said to have the potential to change the country's political history. It indicted an erstwhile chief of the country's most powerful institution, the army, along with some politicians and the election commission. The petition was moved by the chief of the erstwhile political formation Tehrik-i-Istiaqlal, Air Marshal (ret'd) Asghar Khan, who had accused the ISI of financing politicians in the 1990s. The petition was based on an affidavit filed by former ISI chief General Asad Durrani.

Dawn reported on October 20: "The Supreme Court ruled... that the 1990 general elections had been polluted by dishing out Rs 140 million to a particular group of politicians only to deprive the people of being represented by their chosen representatives. Thus the court threw the ball back to the government's court by directing it to take necessary action under the Constitution and law against former army chief Gen (ret'd) Aslam Beg and former director general of Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Lt-Gen (ret'd) Asad Durrani for their role in facilitating a group of politicians and political parties to ensure their success against their rivals in the 1990 elections."

Daily Times added: "The court observed that their acts have brought a bad name to Pakistan and its armed forces as well as secret agencies. It also declared that legal proceedings should be initiated against the politicians who allegedly received donations... For this purpose, it said, a transparent investigation should be initiated by the FIA against all of them and if sufficient evidence is collected, they should face trial, according to law."

Experts say the army and ISI chiefs could be reinstated into service and their court martials done. Durrani's affidavit alleges former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif was paid Rs 3.5 million, among others. The most significant objection raised by this order is against the "political cell" said to be active in the army. The order minced no words: "ISI or MI may perform their duties to safeguard the borders or to provide civil aid to the federal government, but they have no role to play in political activities/politics to form or destabilise political governments. Nor can they facilitate or favour a group of political parties or politicians individually... which may lead to his or their success." The army has expectedly denied the existence of any such political wing.

The PML-N has vehemently denied receiving any such money. Political mudslinging has been the most visible activity in Pakistan since the order.

### ROAD TO RECOVERY

MALALA YOUSAFZAI, the child activist from Swat who was shot in the head by the Taliban, is showing rapid progress in Birmingham's Queen Elizabeth Hospital. The News reported on October 23 that despite the tight-lipped approach of hospital authorities, it has learnt from "sources" that Malala's parents were staying close by and that has contributed to her recovery. Due to security reasons, their presence is not being disclosed. In an interview to The Huffington Post excerpted by The Express Tribune on October 25, her father laughed off a question about taking political asylum in the UK.

### RECORD TIME

THIS is a world record for setting eight Guinness records — the most number of records — in a day. The Express Tribune reported on October 22 that Pakistanis set records for: the largest group of people singing the national anthem together (42,813); a man making three chapatis in three minutes and 14 seconds; a 12-year-old arranging the pieces on a chessboard in 45 seconds using only one hand; landing 616 martial arts kicks on a punchbag in three minutes; a man using his moustache to pull a 1.7-tonne pick-up truck over a distance of 60.3 metres; a man wiring a household plug in 35 seconds; two men heading a football between them, managing 335 consecutive headers in three minutes and 45 seconds.