**[Lessons for the global professor](https://www.dawn.com/news/1795192/lessons-for-the-global-professor)**

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THE global professor, the Vishwaguru, the sobriquet the Modi regime sees India as being entitled to, has been reminded, it seems, to imbibe lessons it had apparently deleted from the syllabus of truer wisdom. The lapse stems from the country’s attempt at slow-marching from the Nehruvian soft power projection of India as a cultured and trustworthy comrade of postcolonial nations to its misplaced aspiration to become Rambo à la Israel. ‘Ghar mein ghus ke maarenge.’ The common refrain in new India is not easy to translate. ‘I’ll come home to fix you’ conveys a rough idea, borrowed from a common line in masala movie scripts inserted to exaggerate the prowess of the hero.

To conflate it with diplomacy or domestic policy is to lean on a brawler’s muscle rather than professorial cogitation to make the point. Had any other government pursued the policy and found its ace pilot captured in the process by the perceived quarry, Prime Minister Narendra Modi would have raised Cain.

I recently saw scores of well-heeled Pakistanis at a popular Manchester restaurant, all without exception posing with their families before larger-than-life portraits of Dev Anand and Rekha, of Amitabh Bachchan and Meena Kumari, and other movie stars of India’s bygone era.

In the intellectual realm, writers like Geetanjali Shree or academics like Romila Thapar are respected beyond India’s neighbourhood. Cricket stars have always had their own cross-border fan following. Gandhiji, for the world, is still a lodestar of peace and reconciliation and is seen as more than a bespectacled municipal official in charge of civic cleanliness, which he has been reduced to in government hoardings in India.

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Peaceniks in Pakistan holding hands with Sri Lankans, Bangladeshis, Nepalis were as regular in visiting India as those celebrating their visas to Ajmer or Bodh Gaya or Agra. They offered the best security and most reassuring promise of goodwill, until Rambo burst on the scene.

A reality check reveals that the Vishwaguru is out of touch with the world despite claims to unparalleled adulation from everyone. In the neighbourhood alone, the tiny atoll of the Maldives has told India’s troops stationed there to leave. Sri Lanka, which looked up to India for all manner of friendly support, has allowed a Chinese ‘research’ ship to dock at its port to severe unease in New Delhi. Landlocked Bhutan, otherwise committed to follow Indian advice on foreign affairs, is engaged in a discomforting powwow with China. Further away in the Gulf, the usually friendly emirate of Qatar has not taken kindly to former Indian military officers it trusted as residents. It accuses them of espionage, a charge India hitherto experienced with arch-foe Pakistan.

On the bigger stage, the foreign media, which hailed India as a resolute star on the democratic firmament and as an economic powerhouse, accuses Indian businesses of underhand methods of making money and the government of violating human rights as its preferred domestic policy. Amid the global battle against Covid-19, the UN secretary general ticked off India for liberalising coal mining as the wrong policy to deal with the scourge.

But coal is the bread and butter of the tycoon considered close to the prime minister. The businessman also reportedly has interests in the expansion of the Israeli port of Haifa. It has left the world pondering why India broke ranks with the Global South, instead of supporting a ceasefire to stop the horrors being perpetrated by Israel in Gaza.

Some bad news has come from Unesco’s board membership, where Pakistan has reportedly defeated India’s nominee by a large margin of votes with the support of countries of the Global South. The let-down may not make the grade in news value as do other embarrassments for the Vishwaguru but it should make the foreign ministry netizens sit up.

In possibly the most disturbing turn of events for Indian diplomacy in recent memory, it is public knowledge now that when Prime Minister Narendra Modi was patting himself on the back for the G20 summit he hosted in New Delhi with self-proclaimed flourish, he was being pressed, discreetly at the time, by President Joe Biden and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau to explain the shadowy link of assassins and would-be assassins of Sikh activists in their countries with Indian intelligence.

There was a robust denial and comments verging on reprimand came from New Delhi when Mr Trudeau subsequently made the allegation public in his parliament. He spoke of the killing of a pro-Khalistan Sikh in Surrey in Canada by gunmen allegedly at the behest of Indian officials. A bulk of Canadian diplomats in India were expelled to make Delhi’s point and visa regimes were frozen. Canada on its part expelled the station chief of India’s spy agency from the Indian embassy. The reaction to the US demarche was more tempered, even respectful. Delhi, however, has not commented on the veracity of the charges.

Last week’s indictment of an Indian citizen in a New York court in a plot to kill a Sikh Khalistani activist, a US citizen, has only made it trickier for the Indian government. The plot is seen as linked with the assassination of the Sikh activist in Canada and potentially also with the death in a hospital in the UK. Consequently, as was the case with Canada, senior officials of India’s external spy agency, the Research and Analysis Wing, or RAW, were expelled from the UK and the US for the first time since Indira Gandhi created the agency in 1968.

Arguably, India is a close ally in a US-led coalition to counter China. And, therefore, no serious harm could be expected in that realm. But equally so, the crown prince of Saudi Arabia is a crucial sheet anchor for Western interests in the Middle East. He got away with murder as we all know. Except that he never claimed the mantle of the Vishwaguru.

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*Published in Dawn, December 5th, 2023*