

Dateline UN | October 15, 2012

A boy from Calcutta bats for India!

Day One: This past fortnight's been hectic. It began with an emphatic rally at Jantar Mantar in Delhi and moved on to quiz shows in Singapore and Doha. Then, I bought my ticket to New York for the United Nations General Assembly session. I'm one of two parliamentary representatives from India who will be at the UN beginning on Monday. My colleague will be Ananth Kumar of the BJP. We will succeed L.K. Advani (BJP) and Dharmendra Yadav (Samajwadi Party).

As a young boy, I often dreamt of playing for India – at cricket but more at football. Of course, that remained a boyhood fantasy. I simply wasn't good enough. As such, it is more than a little humbling to contemplate I will be batting for India this coming fortnight, in the parliament of nations, the UN – and be reading statements on behalf of our country. I have represented my party and my state at political and legislative forums. It is my privilege that I have been allowed to make the leap to representing our country. These are not empty words. For an ordinary middle-class boy from Calcutta, this is a huge, huge honour.

The practice of an all-party delegation of MPs visiting New York during the first few months of the General Assembly session is believed to have been initiated by Jawaharlal Nehru, our first Prime Minister and a fervent advocate of internationalism. It says something about India that a practice begun by a Congress PM has been furthered in recent days by MPs from the BJP, the Samajwadi Party and the Trinamul Congress. For all our bickering and argument at home, there must be something our democracy has got right.

Indeed, the Indian tradition of sending MPs to the first few meetings of each session is unique. No other country does it. No other country sees a similar need for capacity building and education of its MPs or making them engage with the UN. As an idea it is a noble one. There is also a utilitarian purpose to it. During their visit, MPs attend deliberations of

the General Assembly and its committees and get an insider view of multilateral diplomacy as it is undertaken.

We live in an era of diffused sovereignties, when the ambit of international legal and normative regimes has expanded enormously. This process ‘ the globalisation of a domestic polity, if I could coin an expression ‘ is here to stay. That is why an osmotic interaction between an ordinary MP, belonging to a party with its base in Bengal, and an institutional process that tempers national jurisdictions can be just so useful and educative. It brings the local and the global a little closer to each other.

As you may expect, I’m looking forward to my apprenticeship at the UN. I hope to come back wiser and intellectually richer.

Do wish me luck.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Arun Jaitley', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

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