

Dateline UN | October 16, 2012

Back to books at parliament of nations.

We're staying at the Millennium Plaza Hotel, a short walk from the United Nations Organisation Headquarters, and known universally it would appear as "the UN Hotel". Coming to this part of town has been exciting and different. I've visited New York several times but have never come to the UN building or its neighbourhood. It's almost like you're entering another zone. This is an uber cosmopolitan precinct even within the world's most cosmopolitan city. It even has its own postage stamps! The UN complex is an imposing one, and one of its architects incidentally was Le Corbusier, the French urban planner who later gave us Chandigarh and Gandhinagar.

The business end of the visit begins on Monday. Depending on how you see it, I've been promised or warned I'll get more speaking duties than expected. Part of the reason for this is the parliamentary delegation is smaller than anticipated. One of my colleagues, S.C. Misra of the BSP, has dropped out. That means the MPs who are here for the General Assembly session — Ananth Kumar of the BJP and me — will get more opportunities to speak than expected. I'm not complaining.

Our speeches are prepared in consultation with the Indian Permanent Mission at the UN. Even so, the Mission and its able diplomats provide only talking points and overarching statements of national positions. MPs have the right and the flexibility to redraft the text, adding political or broader philosophical ideas and thoughts that they may want to put on record before the Legislature of the Planet. Of course, these cannot contravene national positions, as the MPs are representing India and not an individual party. Nevertheless I have some plans to bring a bit of West Bengal into my submission on behalf of India.

Before I arrived in New York, I had been primed to speak before the Third Committee of the General Assembly — the Social, Humanitarian and Cultural Affairs Committee. I felt this choice was appropriate,

especially given the Trinamool Congress' mandate and political charter. It now seems I may also have to give statements before the Second Committee (Economic and Financial Committee) and the Sixth Committee (Legal Committee).

The subjects before these committees range from challenges before the international financial system to the ambit of international jurisdictions on individual nation states. It is all very different from a TV debate back home, with its customary quota of one-liners. My weekend has been spent reading background papers and consulting a short manual on UN procedure. It's been harder work than I imagined, but extremely educative. Watching me pore over documents on a Sunday morning, my wife muttered I resembled a nervous student. Well, the anticipation of speaking at the UN does do things to you!

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

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