

Dateline UN | October 22, 2012

One week done at the UN... one more to go.

Day Six: This morning I walked into the Kuwaiti Permanent Mission to the United Nations by mistake. It had the same ornate door as the Indian Mission and was in the same neighbourhood. For a stranger, it was easy to get confused. I wonder who copied whom! It's a brisk, seven-minute walk from the Indian Mission to the UN Headquarters. About half the 193 permanent missions are situated within walking distance of the UN building. Diplomats from the 100 other countries have to drive down and negotiate the impossible New York traffic. In fact, UN diplomats have a reputation for parking illegally in the city and not paying fines, citing diplomatic immunity.

The annual trip to New York for the General Assembly session is normally popular among Indian MPs, no doubt for a variety of reasons. This year, however, domestic compulsions and the hot-house politics of New Delhi seem to have trumped the appeal of the UN. Congress MPs are missing entirely. The buzz is not one of them is willing to leave the capital, in case they get that call from Rashtrapati Bhawan on the eve of the expected ministerial reshuffle. Thankfully, I have no such fears, worries or expectations. Being in an opposition party can be blissful.

Being in opposition doesn't preclude you from representing India, of course. Minister of State for External Affairs Preneet Kaur read out a statement on behalf of India at the Security Council. I was sitting right behind her, with Ambassador Hardeep Singh Puri, India's permanent representative to the UN, next to me. We're not alliance partners in New Delhi anymore – the Trinamool Congress and the Congress are not – but when you're at the UN you're part of Team India. Nothing else matters.

My exploration of food options at the UN continued. R. Ravindra, counsellor at the Permanent Mission and my liaison officer, suggested I try a café called Vienna, located within the UN complex. It was an inspired recommendation. I had a splendid lunch comprising clam soup,

cod fish, rice and mashed potatoes. This was rounded off with cupcakes, making for a quintessentially American meal. It was light and filling, perfect for a working-day lunch.

Then it was back to work. I read a statement on universal jurisdiction before the Sixth Committee – the Legal Committee. My statement dealt with “procedural technicalities” in relation to international crimes where there may be confusion or conflict between the party offended by the crime and the national jurisdiction of the offending party (criminal). This is common in cases of piracy, for instance.

Shortly after I’d made the statement, I was told there was a chance I may get to address the General Assembly for 10 minutes in the coming few days. There’s no certainty yet, so I’m keeping my fingers crossed. If I do address the General Assembly, though, it would be worth the sacrifice of a Puja away from home.

Wherever She is, the Goddess is blessing me.

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

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