

Another successful visit

Modi-Netanyahu chemistry alchemises ties

JUDGING even by the high standards of personalised diplomacy set in place in the last three years, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's three-day visit to Israel has to be judged as an astounding success. The Prime Minister was serenaded in lavish terms; the reddest of red carpet was rolled out for him, just as stiff protocol niceties were rolled away to honour him; we are told that the standards and excellence of hospitality and courtesies extended to him were so far reserved only for the mightiest of global leaders. Narendra Modi had always had, reportedly, a special relationship with his Israeli counterpart, based on mutual respect and admiration that leaders reserve for strong, tough practitioners of hard politics. Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu naturally went out of his way to lionise our Prime Minister; and, it was only natural that the visit should have produced a 'strategic partnership'.

A 'strategic partnership', in many ways, has become a charming amulet, diplomats have devised to upgrade a relationship. We have, for example, a strategic partnership with the United States, but we have very many valid and legitimate reasons to feel disappointed at Washington's lack of appreciation of our strategic concerns and sensibilities. On the other hand, even without a strategic partnership, New Delhi has had a steadily growing, pragmatic, working relationship with Tel Aviv. Both countries have a shared sense of victimhood against global terror. This working arrangement already had in place all the ingredients of a strategic partnership. What the Modi visit has done is to put the *de jure* stamp on a *de facto* relationship.

Over the decades our relationship with Israel had got hyphenated with the knotty Palestine issues. There were both domestic and geostrategic reasons for a cultivated ambivalence; the India-Israel ties were overdue for an upgrade as most of these reasons for diffidence have melted away. Domestically, for the first time New Delhi has a ruling regime that believes that it does not need to get bogged down by the Muslim community's traditional sensitivities, at home or abroad. It is this substantive change in our internal political calculus that has lent a new substance to our ties with Israel.