

# 'Contemporary India: Its foreign policy, security and development strategy'



INDIA'S foreign and security policy imperatives are underpinned by the desire to achieve sustained and inclusive economic growth. The focus is on creating an enabling environment for national growth and development by maintaining peace and stability; securing access to resources and playing a constructive role in shaping the agenda and debate on issues of global interest.

Under the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, our foreign policy has become more proactive and has acquired a renewed energy, vigour, and planning in the ways India engages with the rest of the world.

One of the most important aspects of our foreign policy has been the adoption of a "Neighbourhood First" approach. This is reflected in frequent high-level exchanges; heightened focus on connectivity and economic integration to facilitate the movement of goods and people; and commencement of cooperation in previously uncharted areas.

Deepening our global engagement is an important prerequisite for economic development and consensus building on issues of global importance. Recognising this, our diplomatic outreach in the last four years to our international partners has been unprecedented. High level visits have taken place to more countries revitalising India's diplomatic engagements across continents, including first-ever visits to Palestine, Mongolia, Portugal, and most recently, Rwanda. Other firsts, include participation of leaders of all 54 African countries in the third India-Africa Forum Summit; all 10 ASEAN heads at India's Republic Day;



Narendra Modi, the first Indian PM to visit Palestine, reviews the honour guard with Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah.

PHOTO: MOHAMAD TOROKMAN/REUTERS

upgradation of the "Look East" Policy to "Act East"; enhancement of economic and strategic ties with West Asia; convening the "Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation" (FIPIC) Summit; visit of PM Narendra Modi to all five Central Asian Countries in one tour; and the India-Nordic Summit.

India is also seriously committed to taking regional cooperation forward through the BBIN and BIMSTEC. The successful trial run of a passenger bus service from Dhaka to Kathmandu via Siliguri last April was a significant step towards operationalising the BBIN Motor Vehicles Agreement. We attach high importance to BIMSTEC as it touches upon two major aspects of our foreign policy—"Neighbourhood First" and "Act East" and look forward to the BIMSTEC Summit that will take place in Kathmandu later this month.

Perhaps the most significant trend in Indian foreign policy has been the realignment of our diplomatic efforts

in the last four years to meet the needs of the development agenda of the government. By way of background, the government has embarked upon a mission to transform India and launched several flagship schemes such as *Make in India*, *Smart Cities*, *Skill India*, *Digital India*, etc. The government has also embarked on several liberalisation and reform measures to improve the ease of doing business in India. Last year, India rolled out the Goods and Services Tax—the biggest tax reform since its independence.

Our international outreach, led by the PM himself, has been carefully tailored and directed to create the most propitious climate for domestic growth, including by working towards a regional security environment that allows us to focus on our economic goals. This unprecedented outreach to our international partners has contributed to an increase in investments, access to new technology, securing resources for

India, development of modern infrastructure and bringing foreign expertise for flagship schemes. As a result, "Diplomacy for Development" has become one of the defining features of India's foreign policy.

India also continues its policy of sharing its developmental experience with other developing countries. This was seen most remarkably in several different initiatives in the neighbourhood, which included the largest ever Line of Credit (of USD 5 billion) extended by India to Bangladesh or to any other country during the visit of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to India last year. India also announced a USD 10 billion Line of Credit for Africa during the third India Africa Forum Summit; and is implementing significant developmental projects in countries such as Mauritius, Seychelles, Jordan, Palestine and Mongolia.

In his keynote address at the Shangri-La dialogue recently, Prime Minister Narendra Modi remarked

that we are living on the "edge of uncertainty, of unsettled questions and unresolved disputes; contests and claims; and clashing visions and competing models." He also talked about cross-border challenges, including the threat of terrorism and extremism and called for rising above divisions and competition to work together.

In this context, India has been a proactive and constructive contributor to shaping of the global agenda and debate on issues such as terrorism, climate change, nuclear proliferation and global governance reform. There has been increased support for India's efforts to isolate terrorists and their sponsors, manifest in the universal support for Prime Minister Modi's 11-point action plan on combating terrorism at the G-20 Summit in Hamburg. Bangladesh has also faced some serious challenges from terrorism and is an invaluable partner in our fight against terrorism. In recognition of India's impeccable non-proliferation record and its rise as a responsible global actor, India gained entry into three key global export control regimes (MTCR, Wassenaar Arrangement, Australia Group).

We are committed to the ethos of environmental protection and conservation and are well on the way to fulfilling our commitment of meeting 40 percent of our electricity capacity from renewable energy sources by 2030. India, together with France, led the successful launch of the International Solar Alliance (ISA), which has created a platform of 121 partner countries to promote development of solar energy projects worldwide. The ISA will help mobilise investments of over USD 1 trillion that will help it install over 1,000 GW of solar generation capacity worldwide by 2030.

At the Shangri-La dialogue, Prime Minister Modi also talked about the inclusive nature of our approach to engagement in the Indo-Pacific region—from the shores of Africa to

that of the Americas. He outlined our vision for the Indo-Pacific region which we do not see as a grouping of limited members that seeks to dominate or that is directed against any country. Our vision for the Indo-Pacific includes a free, open and inclusive region; centrality of Southeast Asia; a common rules-based order through dialogue; freedom of navigation, unhindered commerce and peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law; an open, rules-based and stable trade regime; and improved connectivity. However, connectivity initiatives must be based on respect for "sovereignty and territorial integrity, consultation, good governance, transparency, viability and sustainability", and should not place countries under any debt burden. He further outlined the five basic principles on which India's engagement with the world will be based. These are five Ss in Hindi: "samman (respect)"; "samvad (dialogue)"; "sahyog (cooperation)"; "shanti (peace)"; "samridhhi (prosperity)".

India and Bangladesh have made huge strides forward in our respective efforts at achieving economic development and growth. Our initiatives to take the bilateral relationship forward in recent years has proven that cooperation can yield the results that our people desire—a win-win dividend for countries as proximate as ours. India, Bangladesh and other countries in the region, which share common values and developmental goals, can ensure that the *GenNext*, which accounts for a major part of our populations, can expect to see a more just, equitable and accessible global order. One we can work together to achieve.

Harsh Vardhan Shringla is High Commissioner of India to Bangladesh.

This article is based on an address yesterday by the High Commissioner to the National Defence College, Mirpur.

**BETWEEN THE LINES**

**I**T was August 12, 1947, three days before India became free. My father, a practicing doctor, summoned us, the three brothers, and asked what our plans were. I told him that I wanted to stay in Pakistan just as the Muslims would in India. My elder brother, who was studying medicine at Amritsar, intervened to say that Muslims would ask the Hindus to vacate the house in West Punjab just as the Muslims living in East Punjab would be asked to leave. I asked how that could be possible if the Hindus did not agree to quit. He replied that we would be forcibly ousted.

This was precisely what happened. On August 17, two days after the independence of India, some Muslim gentlemen came to us and requested us to leave the house. I asked one of them, "Where will we go?" He gave the keys of his house at Jalandhar and said we would not have to do anything because his house was already well-furnished and ready for occupation. We declined the offer.

Showing rigidity in issuing visas. There is practically no contact, official or even non-official.

Pakistan's new Prime Minister-designate Imran Khan has said in an interview that he would ensure trade and business. My only worry is that his proximity to the army may not allow him to carry out his promises. But maybe, the army angle is being exaggerated. It also wants to have peace because it's their men who have to fight the war and all that it entails.

The sticking point is that the decision in India is taken by the elected members of parliament unlike in Pakistan, where the army has the last word. That's where the problem comes. Whether or not Imran Khan will be able to convince the army top brass is difficult to imagine.

New Delhi should make an effort—but it has adopted a harsh stand not to negotiate with Islamabad until Pakistan stopped providing shelters to the terrorists and punished those who were instrumental in the Mumbai blasts. Imran Khan should take the initiative, keeping in view India's demands for any cordial relations between the two countries.

Kulip Nayar is an eminent Indian columnist.

## 71 years on, frosty relations continue



Peaceniks from India and Pakistan gathered at the Wagah Attari land border to take part in a candle light vigil, as both nations observed their respective Independence Day anniversaries.

Pakistan, though in limited number, have joined the cause.

Peoples' enthusiasm knows no bounds. But the governments are in the way. There is curfew in the entire area and one has to take permit to reach the border. I have written to Home Minister Rajnath Singh to instruct the authorities, both Border Security Force and Central Reserve Police Force, to allow us to reach the zero point, where the steel gates check the movement into either side, for lighting candles.

This exercise is confined to a few individuals. I wish that the border could be made soft and the situation became calm so that the enmity between the two countries is banished. I was on the bus that Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee rode to Lahore. There was bonhomie on both sides and I thought that the trip would resume a regular exchange of trade, joint ventures and people-to-people contact between the two nations.

But I feel disappointed when the barbed wires on either side of the border prevent people's passage into each other's country with so much of visa restrictions. In the past, intellectuals, musicians and artists could meet and hold joint programmes. But today, even that has stopped, with the governments

stopped. An old Sikh stood on the way and begged us to take his grandson to India. I told him politely that I was still studying and would not be able to carry his grandson, however fair his request was.

The old man said that he had lost all his family members and the only survivor was his grandson. And he wanted him to live. I still recall his tearful face but I had told him the facts. How would I bring up the child when I myself was not sure about my future? Then we moved on. And, as

we travelled, we could see luggage scattered all over but the dead bodies had been removed by the time. The stench, however, was very much in the air.

At that time, I promised myself that I would try to foster good relations between the two countries. That was the main reason why I started lighting candles on the Wagah border, a process that began some 20 years ago. It was a small movement with just 15-20 people to begin with. Now roughly one lakh people on this side and the people of

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

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- 27 Architect I.M.
- 28 Office honchos
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- 32 Clutter-clearing event
- 36 Comparative phrase
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