

The Anatomy of the Modi Phenomenon – How Should Pakistan Deal With It?

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Abstract

The 16th Lok Sabha elections in India resulted in Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), led by Narendra Modi, forming a strong Union government, thereby putting an end to three decades of coalition governments. This development resulted in enhanced interest around the world in Modi's personality. A massive publicity blitz portraying him as an iron man, who had risen from a humble background, and a hope for the future of India helped Modi win the confidence of Indian masses to the extent of even forgetting his role in Gujarat pogrom where thousands of Muslims lost their lives under his watch. For others, his rise to power would mean rise of religious extremism. Pakistan for its part has its own concerns. His repeated pronouncements during the election campaign that India would adopt a muscular policy towards Pakistan if he was elected to power did not present a rosy picture. It is, however, hoped that the realisation that dialogue is the only way forward would make Modi's India move in the right direction vis-à-vis its relations with Pakistan.

Key words: Modi, Bharatiya Janata Party, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, India, Pakistan

Introduction

Following the 16th Lok Sabha elections, Indian political landscape witnessed a drastic change as the Bharatiya Janta Party (BJP) emerged as the single largest party, winning 285 out of 543 seats. With this victory, the BJP was able to put an end not only to coalition politics, but also to a decade-long rule by the Indian National Congress (INC). The BJP's victory, many analysts feared, would also give rise to Hindutva and

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therefore endanger the secular nature of Indian society. The BJP's success is largely attributed to Narendra Modi. Yet, he is considered a highly polarising figure in India due to his association with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and 2002 riots in Gujarat. Hence, the debate on the wisdom of nominating him as prime ministerial candidate by the BJP has continued. For his critics, he is an extremist who has divided the society along religious lines. His supporters, on the other hand, believe that he is the only hope for India to become a major economic power.

While this debate goes on in India, Modi's rise and his strong rhetoric against Pakistan throughout the election campaign have raised concerns in Pakistan with regard to the future of India-Pakistan relations. In order to put these concerns in perspective, this paper will first trace the political career of Modi and his rise to power. It will then discuss India's relations with Pakistan under Modi and the prospects of better relations between the two neighbours.

Hindutva – The Ideological Connection between the BJP and RSS

Hindutva is the ideology of a group of militant anti-minority Hindu organisations that want to establish a Hindu Rashtra (Hindu State or Hindu Nation) in India. The origins of this ideology date back to the 19th century when many revivalist and nationalist movements had emerged in India. This concept was first propounded by Vinayak Damodar Savarkar. Some believe that Savarkar's ideas were actually a revolt against the Khilafat Movement and had stemmed from his strong hostility towards Islam. Savarkar believed that Hindus were the native people of India and the religious minorities were outsiders and hence they should adhere to Hindu symbols, which represented India's national culture. He insisted that minorities, particularly Muslims and Christians, should pay allegiance to the Hindu religion in public, though they may practice their own religion in private. Sikhs, Buddhists and Jains were excluded from these conditions as these, according to Sarvarkar, were sects closely related to Hinduism.¹

¹ Yasir Masood Khan, "The BJP's Track to Triumph: A Critical Analysis," *Focus*, vol. xxviii, no. 3 (2014): 6, <http://irs.org.pk/focus3-14.pdf>

Hindutva thus emerges as an exclusivist racial concept that accepts only those religious communities of India whose origins could be traced to the Indian soil. Today, groups like RSS, the BJP, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, Bajrang Dal, Shiv Sena and some smaller regional groups are following the concept of Hindutva.² These groups are collectively known as “Sangh Parivar.”

RSS was formed in 1925 at Nagpur by Keshav Baliram Hedgewar as a pro-Hindu social movement but with quasi-military undertones. It was the time when different communities in colonial India were trying to protect their religious and cultural identities. RSS was founded in imitation of European fascist movements. Its members were required to perform daily parades, drills and militaristic salutes. The practice was aimed at creating a corps of dedicated paramilitary zealots who were supposed to form “the basis of a revival of a golden age of national strength and racial purity.”³ Madhav Golwalkar drafted the RSS constitution, taking inspiration from the Nazism, especially Hitler’s treatment of religious minorities. In Golwalkar’s view:

the foreign races in Hindustan must either adopt the Hindu culture and language, must learn to respect and hold in reverence the Hindu religion, must entertain no ideas but those of glorification of the Hindu race and culture....or may stay in the country wholly subordinated to the Hindu nation, claiming nothing, deserving no privileges, far less any preferential treatment – not even citizen’s right.⁴

RSS is also believed to have committed the worst kind of atrocities against Muslims during the partition of the sub-continent in 1947. It was a former swayamsevak who assassinated Mohanlal Gandhi on January 30, 1948, accusing him of being too soft on Muslims.⁵ The assassination

² Ibid., 8.

³ William Dalrymple, “Narendra Modi: Man of the Masses,” *NewStatesman*, May 12, 2014, <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/2014/05/narendra-modi-man-masses>

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ “Narendra Modi and the New Face of India,” *Guardian*, May 16, 2014, <http://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/may/16/what-next-india-pankaj-mishra>

of Gandhi forced Prime Minister Nehru to ban the organisation on February 4, 1948. The ban was lifted after almost 15 months on July 11, 1949.⁶ RSS maintained a low political profile during the early decades of independence.

Subsequently, however, it started gaining strength. By the early 1990s, RSS had become a significant power in India. However, it was once again banned following the demolition of Babri Mosque in 1992. Today, RSS has around 40 million members, organised under 40,000 district centres across India.⁷ The growing strength of RSS has placed it in lead position in the Sangh Parivar. Repeated bans on the organisation forced its leaders to look for alternatives to ensure its political representation to advance its agenda. This first led to the creation of the Bharatiya Jana Sangh (BJS) and later the BJP under the leadership of Atal Bihari Vajpayee.

The BJP is political wing of RSS. The opponents of the BJP believe that the “BJP is a *rightist* party, which represents a wider political coalition called the *Sangh-Parivar*.”⁸ The BJP is controlled by RSS through organising secretaries who are nominated by RSS.⁹ Most of its cadres and top leadership have been RSS members. In fact, around 60 per cent of BJP’s office holders are either former *Pracharaks* or full time RSS workers or, at least, have close connections with RSS.¹⁰ Also, RSS provides support to BJP candidates during elections.

Unlike the BJS, which was a Hindu revivalist and ultra-right wing party, the BJP propounded the idea of “Gandhian Socialism” and

⁶ A.G. Noorani, “Into the sunset,” *FrontLine*, vol. 26, issue 19, September 12-25, 2009, <http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl2619/stories/20090925261912600.htm>

⁷ William Dalrymple, “Narendra Modi: Man of the Masses.”

⁸ Hilal Ahmad, “What is BJP’s Ideology?,” *Economic and Political Weekly*, February 3, 2014, <http://www.epw.in/blog/hilal-ahmed/what-bjp%E2%80%99s-ideology.html>

⁹ Ram Puniyani, “Modi, Advani and Sangh’s Agenda,” *Counter Currents. ORG*, June 27, 2013, <http://www.countercurrents.org/puniyani270613.htm>

¹⁰ Khan, “The BJP’s Track to Triumph: A Critical Analysis,” 55.

included both green and saffron colours, representing Muslims and Hindus respectively, on its flag.¹¹ This notwithstanding, BJP's close connections with RSS make it a Hindu nationalist party. Today, the BJP faces a dilemma: on one hand, being an offshoot of RSS, it has to cater to the agenda of RSS, but on the other hand, it has to be seen as a political party that follows inclusive policies, believes in equality of all citizens, and respects all religions. In the 1984 elections, the BJP could win only two seats. In the subsequent years, however, the party gradually became popular and was able to form a coalition government which was led by Janata Dal's V.P. Singh (1989-1990).

It was Singh government's decision to implement the recommendations of the Mandal Commission that provided the BJP with a golden opportunity to raise its profile. The commission had recommended to allocate 27 per cent of government jobs to a group of backward classes. This had put the BJP, an ally of the government, in a dilemma: on one hand, it had to address the concerns of upper caste Hindus and, on the other hand, it had to take into account the interests of the lower caste Hindus from whom it drew its electoral strength. This situation led L. K. Advani to launch a "rath yatra" (chariot pilgrimage) with the aim of uniting all Hindus. Cleverly, L. K. Advani took a route from North India to Ayodhya where the construction of Ram Temple was planned. This tactic of combining the Temple issue and Mandal recommendations helped the BJP increase its vote share from 7.5 per cent in 1984 elections to 21 per cent in 1991.¹²

Subsequently, the BJP was able to form a coalition government under Vajpayee after winning 161 seats in the Lok Sabha in 1996. Though this government lasted for only 13 days, this victory, came as it did after the unfortunate demolition of Babri Mosque and violence that followed, showed that the party was able to exploit communal polarisation to its advantage.

¹¹ Ibid., 12.

¹² Ibid.,18.

It is L. K. Advani who is credited with taking the party to the new heights and the formation of National Democratic Alliance (NDA) which took power in 1998 under the leadership of Vajpayee. The NDA government under Vajpayee introduced several measures as part of BJP's Hindutva agenda such as the decisions to introduce uniform civil code, build Ram Temple at Ayodhya and abrogate article 370 of the Indian Constitution, much to the displeasure of coalition partners.

The Vajpayee-led coalition government succeeded in attaining a highly impressive growth rate of 8 per cent despite facing economic sanctions by the international community following India's nuclear tests in 1998. The BJP went into 2004 Lok Sabha elections with the slogan "Shining India," aiming to highlight Vajpayee-era economic development to woo the voters. However, Congress claimed that this economic development did not benefit the common man. The Congress' message appeared to have struck a chord with the voter, and the party managed to form a coalition government under the leadership of Manmohan Singh which was to last for the next ten years.

Modi – A Ray of Hope for the BJP

Modi, who belonged to a low caste Hindu family, became a member of RSS at an early age and gradually rose to higher ranks, thanks to his unwavering commitment to, and hard work for, the party. By the late 1980s, he had become a prominent figure in RSS and was tasked with liaising with the Gujarat chapter of the BJP. This was the time when he decided to embark on a new political journey with the BJP.¹³ Having joined the BJP in 1985, Modi rose to become the party's General Secretary in May 1998.

In 1999, Modi was tasked with running the party's campaign for the Lok Sabha elections in Gujarat. Modi, using the RSS-VHP and BJP

¹³ William Dalrymple, "Narendra Modi: Man of the Masses."

network, was successful in wooing voters in large numbers.¹⁴ By that time, the then Gujarat Chief Minister Keshubhai Patel had lost his place in the party due to the charges of rampant corruption and abuse of power and the party leadership was looking for his alternative.¹⁵ The search finally ended on Modi.

Modi first came to power as Chief Minister of Gujarat in October 2001.¹⁶ Within few months of his assuming power, Gujarat saw one of its worst communal riots. Mobs of Hindu militants went on rampage, brutally killing Muslims and burning their properties to ashes with impunity to avenge the death of 58 Hindu devotees allegedly burned in a train by Muslims.¹⁷ Even worse, when the victims sought police protection or any other help, they were informed that there were “no orders to save you.”¹⁸ Many rioters were caught on camera claiming that “He (Modi) had given us three days to do whatever we could.”¹⁹ According to official figures, 850 people, mostly Muslims, lost their lives in these riots, whereas the unofficial figures put the death toll at around 2,000. In addition, some 150,000 people were forced to take refuge in camps in order to save their lives.²⁰

¹⁴ V. Venkatesan, “A Pracharak as Chief Minister,” *FrontLine*, vol.18, issue 21, October 13-26, 2001,

<http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl1821/18210310.htm>

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ “Modi: From Tea Boy to India’s Leader,” *Al Jazeera*, May 27, 2014, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/asia/2014/05/modi-from-tea-boy-india-pm-20145139742599119.html>

¹⁷ Raof Mir, “Decoding Modi of India’s Ambitious Desires,” *Foreign Policy Journal*, April 23, 2014, <http://www.foreignpolicyjournal.com/2014/04/23/decoding-modi-of-indias-ambitious-desires/>

¹⁸ “We have No Orders to Save You — State Participation and Complicity in Communal Violence in Gujarat,” *Human Rights Watch*, vol.14, no. 3 (C), (April 2002):5, <http://pantheon.hrw.org/reports/2002/india/gujarat.pdf>

¹⁹ “Ahead of Polls, Gujarat Riots Haunt Modi,” *Times of India*, October 26, 2007, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Ahead-of-polls-Gujarat-riots-haunt-Modi/articleshow/2491416.cms>

²⁰ Khan, “The BJP’s Track to Triumph: A Critical Analysis,” 25.

The massacre earned international infamy for Modi. Some western countries like the UK and the US had later even refused visa to him.

Internally, however, this episode increased his popularity which became evident when he won the next state assembly election with bigger majority. In fact, Modi had become so popular within the BJP that even Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee could not remove him, though he was said to have been contemplating such a move. Vajpayee found himself isolated on the issue as other party stalwarts, particularly L. K. Advani, stood by Modi.²¹

Modi got another opportunity to rise within the party hierarchy and further strengthen his position after unexpected resignation of L. K. Advani in 2005 as party president following his remarks that Pakistan's founder Mohammad Ali Jinnah was "secular" and that the demolition of the Babri mosque was the "saddest day" of his life.²² Modi was also successful in winning the third consecutive term as the Chief Minister of Gujarat in state elections of December 2012.²³

The decade-long rule of Modi is usually seen as a period of growth in the state of Gujarat. Gujarat enjoyed double-digit growth rate for several years under Modi government, which also brought about huge infrastructural improvements in the state. Modi successfully convinced big business tycoons like the Tatas, Ambanis and Mittals to invest in Gujarat.

His detractors, however, criticise him for his authoritarian style of government and maintain that his policies mostly benefitted the rich and

²¹ V. Venkatesan, "Alone at the Top", *FrontLine*, vol.21, issue 14, July 3-16, 2004,

<http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl2114/stories/20040716005901400.htm>

²² "Advani Regrets Babri Masjid Demolition," *Hindu*, June 2, 2005,

<http://www.thehindu.com/2005/06/02/stories/2005060205381200.htm>

²³ "Timeline: The Rise of Narendra Modi," *Reuters*, December 20, 2012,

<http://in.reuters.com/article/narendra-modi-timeline-gujarat-elections-idINDEE8BC06D20121219>

did little for the poor. Moreover, they argue, Gujarat's economy was already doing well before Modi came to power. Milan Vaishnav from Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, for example, argues that Modi's record of economic growth is indeed impressive but not exceptional. Gujarat enjoyed highest per capita income growth rate of any major Indian state prior to Modi. It did even better under Modi. But those were the years when the overall Indian economy was growing and almost all states were performing better than in the previous decade.²⁴

Modi – The Prime Minister of India

The year 2013 saw the beginning of election season in India. In February 2014, the BJP, with the support of RSS, nominated Modi as its candidate for premiership.²⁵ The decision was made despite the opposition from some of the BJP's coalition partners as well as some senior BJP leaders on account of Modi's past record and his lack of experience of working in a coalition.²⁶

Modi's nomination elicited strong criticism from a segment of Indian intelligentsia as well. Renowned commentator Praful Bidwai, for example, wrote:

Modi continues to be an abomination to conscientious citizens globally, as well as to millions of Hindus and non-Hindus in India, who treasure political decency and the values of secularism, tolerance and social inclusion. Internationally, he's the most hated Indian.²⁷

²⁴ Milan Vaishnav, "The Modi Debate Worth Having in India," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (October 9, 2013),

<http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/10/09/modi-debate-worth-having-in-india>,

²⁵ "It's Official: Modi is BJP's Choice," *Hindu*, February 14, 2014, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/its-official-modi-is-bjps-choice/article5124375.ece>

²⁶ Christophe Jaffrelot, "A Tale of Two BJPs," *Carnegie Endowment For International Peace* (June 25, 2013),

<http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/06/25/tale-of-two-bjps>

²⁷ Praful Bidwai, "Modi: Hype vs Reality," *News*, April 13, 2013.

Ram Puniyani believed that by “dumping Advani and selecting Modi, RSS has given a clear signal that it is going to orchestrate the aggressive Hindutva authoritarian leader with fascist agenda and try to impose Hindu rashtra on the secular democratic India.”²⁸

But for many in the BJP and RSS, Modi was the only hope who could not only reinvigorate the party but also take the country out of its economic problems.²⁹ Modi’s dictatorial attitude was projected as his being “powerful.” Modi’s rise from a humble beginning was seen by many as a huge plus that would enable him to relate to the lower segments of the society.

The BJP’s manifesto for 2014 elections reflected the growing ascendancy of RSS-linked elements within the party. The manifesto spoke about, inter alia, exploring the possibilities within the framework of the constitution to facilitate the construction of the Ram temple in Ayodhya, revising and updating India’s nuclear doctrine and abrogating Article 370 as well as introducing uniform civil code.³⁰ RSS along with its affiliates mobilised around thirty thousand of its workers to support Modi in his election campaign in the city of Varanasi alone.³¹ RSS’ student wing also declared Modi as “one of us”³² and hoped that once in power, Modi would pursue a tough policy with regard to Pakistan and China, build a temple at Ayodhya, revoke Article 370, introduce uniform civil code and rewrite school textbooks.³³

²⁸ Ram Puniyani, “Modi, Advani and Sangh’s Agenda,” June 26, 2013, <http://www.pluralindia.com/issues-in-secular-politics.php?id=408>

²⁹ Heba Al-Adawy, “The 16th Lok Sabha: India’s Lurch to the Right,” *Spotlight* (July 2014): 10, <http://irs.org.pk/spjuly14.pdf>

³⁰ “Election Manifesto 2014,” Bharatiya Janata Party, <http://www.bjp.org/manifesto2014>

³¹ Saba Naqvi, “Modi Metrics,” *Outlook*, April 21, 2014, <http://www.outlookindia.com/article/Modi-Metrics/290196>

³² “Men in Shorts,” *Economist*, May 17, 2014, <http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21602283-election-over-narendra-modi-may-drop-hindu-right-men-shorts>

³³ Ibid.

The massive election campaign that was run by Modi in a “Presidential” style also helped him in his image building. Projected as strong, decisive, visionary, disciplinarian and a strong speaker, Modi was able to rally people around himself. In fact, Modi became far more popular than his party, the BJP. He gave Indian people hope of a new dawn of good governance and prosperity. The corporate sector firmly stood behind Modi throughout his election campaign in the hope that his agenda would be beneficial for the economy. The media groups controlled by the corporate sector also helped Modi in building his image.

Modi’s First Year in Office

Prime Minister Modi took several important policy decisions during the first year of his role, which included “Swatchh Bharat Campaign”; liberalising coal mining; continuing Aadhar’s³⁴ use to combat corruption; introducing new attendance system for officers; and bringing bullet trains to India with first proposed route between Ahmadabad and Mumbai.³⁵

On the domestic front, Modi seems to have been caught between the competing pulls of the demands of his Hindu extremist RSS constituency and the imperative of building the image of India as a liberal and inclusive society. He has been emphasising that casteism, communalism and regionalism are obstacles to development and there should be a moratorium on these divisive issue for at least ten years.³⁶

³⁴ Aadhar is a biometrics-based unique identity system developed to stop leakages that result in over half of subsidised supplies getting lost to theft and pilferage by corrupt officials.

³⁵ “Half Empty or Half Full? Here Are All of Narendra Modi’s Decisions In His First 6 Months,” *Huffington Post*, December 12, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.in/2014/12/07/narendra-modi-decisions-r_n_6267432.html

³⁶ C. Raja Mohan, “Held Back by Hindutva,” *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (December 23, 2014), <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/12/23/held-back-by-hindutva> accessed on April 10, 2015.

But at the same time, Sangh Parivar seems inclined to extend its influence in the society. The events of Muzaffarnagar-Shamli, where a minor incident of a youth making lewd remarks to a girl was converted by RSS-VHP-BJP combine into a serious Jat-Muslim conflict in which 40 people lost their lives and 50,000 were displaced, are still fresh in people's minds.³⁷ It is feared that in future many such incidents are bound to take place because the Sangh Parivar "gains from it."³⁸ RSS introducing its "Ghar Wapsi" programme, whereby minorities are being converted to Hinduism with the promises of better health facilities and education is the other such example.³⁹

Modi's Foreign Policy

In an important policy statement made just before taking oath as Prime Minister, Modi said, "a strong economy is the driver of an effective foreign policy."⁴⁰ This clearly showed that Modi's foreign policy would focus primarily on the economy. Remaining true to his vision, Prime Minister Modi has prioritised economic development in his foreign policy.

In fact, well before becoming Prime Minister, Modi, as Chief Minister of Gujarat, made several visits to China and Japan with the aim of forging economic ties with these countries. Modi now appears to be

³⁷ Praful Bidwai, "Winning by Polarising the Gangetic Plains," *Praful Bidwai Blog*, September 19, 2013,

<http://www.prafulbidwai.org/index.php?post/2013/09/19/Winning-by-polarising-the-Gangetic-plains>

³⁸ Praful Bidwai, "RSS Anoints Modi as PM-Candidate: Stooping to a new communal low," *Praful Bidwai Blog*, September 20, 2013,

<http://www.prafulbidwai.org/index.php?post/2013/09/20/RSS-Anoints-Modi-As-PM-Candidate%3A-Stooping-to-a-new-communal-low>

³⁹ These mass conversions are being held in the presence of media and many observers fear that this programme is creating rifts between different religions of society.

⁴⁰ "Inviting the Neighbours," *Hindu*, May 24, 2014, <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/inviting-the-neighbours/article6041712.ece>

trying to build on those ties. Soon after assuming power, Modi visited Japan and succeeded in securing Japan's assurance of help in the construction of Mumbai-Ahmedabad bullet train link and upgradation of the ship-breaking yard at Alang. Japan also committed US\$35 billion of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in India.⁴¹

With regard to India-China relations, however, Modi appears to have sent mixed signals, maintaining a hawkish stance on security issues while trying to deepen economic engagement. Soon after assuming power, Modi government issued strong statements against China. It expressed its intention of building a road along the McMahon Line in Arunachal Pradesh – the area which is shown as South Tibet in Chinese maps, installing cameras along the border and opening 54 new posts along a section of the disputed border with China.

On the other hand, Modi did not lose sight of the economic imperative to build close economic ties with China, realising that China is interested in investing in India and that Chinese investment, particularly in physical infrastructure, is crucial for India. Since Modi's assuming power, economic interaction between the two states has strengthened. The Chinese President Xi Jinping visited India in September 2014. During the visit, he announced that Beijing would invest US\$200 billion in India over the next five years.⁴² In addition to it, both sides agreed to enhance cooperation in civil nuclear energy, space exploration and trade.

Modi paid a visit to China in May 2015. During his visit, the two countries signed agreements worth US\$22 bn. Some other important decisions were also taken during the visit including establishing a hotline between military headquarters for enhanced border defence cooperation and agreement on space cooperation for deep space exploration; and on

⁴¹ Christophe Jaffrelot, "A Modi Doctrine," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace* (November 20, 2014), <http://carnegieendowment.org/2014/11/20/modi-doctrine>

⁴² "China's Xi Jinping Signs Landmark Deals on India Visit," *BBC News*, September 18, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-29249268>

expanding economic relations in infrastructure, IT, pharma, agriculture and manufacturing.⁴³ This clearly shows that trade and economics will hold central place in Indo-China bilateral relationship.

Modi has given special attention to India's neighbourhood, partially with the aim of countering growing Chinese influence in the region. It was the small neighbouring country, Bhutan that Modi made his first destination after assuming power. His visit to Bhutan was followed by the visits to Nepal and Sri Lanka. It is also worth mentioning that this was the first visit by any Indian Prime Minister to Nepal in the last seventeen years.⁴⁴ The recent conclusion of Land Boundary Agreement (LBA) with Bangladesh would serve as a milestone in Indo-Bangladesh relations.

India – Pakistan Relations: The Way Forward

Since assuming power in 2013, Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has, on numerous occasions, expressed his desire to have friendly relations with India. As India was going to elect a new government, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif reiterated his government's resolve to work with whoever came to power in India. He even attended Modi's swearing-in ceremony and met Modi, the new Indian Prime Minister. This informal meeting, however, failed to break ice between India and Pakistan. However, the two leaders asked their foreign secretaries to explore opportunities for further engagements.⁴⁵

Unfortunately, the momentum thus generated suffered a setback when India called off a meeting between foreign secretaries on August 19, 2014, following a meeting between Pakistani High Commissioner and

⁴³ "Takeaways from Modi's China visit," *Hindu*, May 15, 2015, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/bilateral-agreements-signed-during-modis-china-visit/article7210595.ece>

⁴⁴ Khan, "The BJP's Track to Triumph: A Critical Analysis," 51.

⁴⁵ "India PM Narendra Modi Presses Pakistan's Sharif on Militants," *BBC News*, May 27, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-27583677>

Kashmiri leaders.⁴⁶ The Indian decision took Pakistan by surprise as such meetings have been a common practice in the past, usually before Pakistani officials' meeting with their Indian counterparts. Pakistan was disappointed by the Indian decision. At the same time, tensions between the two countries rose as skirmishes along the Line of Control (LoC) as well as working boundary became a routine matter.

The visit by the Indian Foreign Secretary to Islamabad on March 3, 2015, as part of his SAARC outreach also failed to break ice between the two countries. Both sides raised their concerns about the ceasefire violations along LoC and working boundary. However, no timeframe could be agreed upon regarding the start of the dialogue process.

Pakistan has repeatedly expressed its desire to start a meaningful and result-oriented dialogue on all the issues that bedevil the relationship between the two countries. Unfortunately, Pakistan's overtures have not been reciprocated. The general feeling in Pakistan is that India wants to resume dialogue with Pakistan on its own terms and conditions which primarily revolve around the issues of terrorism⁴⁷ and the Kashmir issue to be resolved bilaterally.

This was confirmed recently when India's External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj stipulated three conditions that Pakistan was supposed to fulfill before the talks could be resumed, which included Pakistan taking action against people who were allegedly involved in Mumbai attacks. She also criticised Pakistan for raising the Kashmir issue at the UN General Assembly.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ "India Cancels Talks with Pakistan over Kashmir Row," *BBC News*, August 19, 2014, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-28832477>

⁴⁷ Frederic Grare, "India-Pakistan Relations: Does Modi Matter?," *The Washington Quarterly*, 37 (2014):4,101-114, DOI:10.1080/0163660X.2014.1002158

⁴⁸ "No Talks Till Pakistan Takes Action Against Terrorist Like Lakhvi: Sushma Swaraj," *NDTV*, May 31, 2015, <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/no-talks-till-pakistan-takes-action-against-terrorists-like-zaki-ur-rehman-lakhvi-says-sushma-swaraj-767451>

It was in this backdrop that the two Prime Ministers met on the sidelines of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in the Russian city Ufa on July 10, 2015, where both leaders agreed to resume the stalled dialogue.⁴⁹ Following the Ufa meeting, the two Prime Ministers were seen sitting together for a brief interaction during the Climate Change conference in Paris. Few days later, Modi, on his way back to Delhi from Afghanistan, made a surprise stop-over in Lahore. This was the first visit to Pakistan by any Indian Prime Minister in 12 years. Both leaders expressed their desire to carry forward the dialogue process to improve the bilateral relationship. The visit by Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj to attend Heart of Asia Conference finally saw breaking of ice and on December 9, 2015, India and Pakistan agreed to resume the “Comprehensive Dialogue Process” where all issues including peace and security, Confidence Building Measures (CBMs), Jammu & Kashmir, Siachen, Sir Creek, Wullar Barrage/Tulbul Navigation Project, economic and commercial cooperation, counterterrorism, narcotics control and humanitarian issues and people to people exchanges would be discussed.⁵⁰

Unfortunately, before this “Comprehensive Dialogue” could take off, a terror attack at Pathankot airbase on January 2, 2016, once again vitiated the bilateral environment between India and Pakistan. India blamed Pakistan and called off the expected meeting between the two foreign secretaries. So far, no new dates have been announced which does not bode well for the dialogue process. Meanwhile, a serving officer of Indian Navy who was working for Indian Intelligence Agency RAW has been caught by Pakistani authorities. During interrogation, it was

⁴⁹ “Ufa meeting: Modi ready to visit Pakistan next year,” *Express Tribune*, July 11, 2015, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/918802/ufa-meeting-modi-ready-to-visit-pakistan-next-year/>

⁵⁰ “India, Pakistan Agree to Resume Comprehensives Dialogue,” *Express Tribune*, December 9, 2015, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/1006610/afghan-president-ashraf-ghani-arrives-in-islamabad-2/>

revealed that the officer was given the task of carrying out subversive activities in Pakistan's Balochistan province as well as in Karachi.⁵¹

Being a responsible member of the world community, Pakistan is committed to not allow anyone to use its soil against any other country. It was in this spirit that Pakistan not only extended every possible help to India in investigating the Pathankot incident but also shared information about eight to ten non-state actors crossing into India on March, 6, 2016.⁵² Moreover the individuals accused of hatching the Mumbai conspiracy⁵³ are being tried in Pakistani courts.

Given such Pakistani efforts, India should discard its policy of making the whole dialogue process hostage to one particular incident. Besides, it also needs to understand that Pakistan itself is a victim of terrorism and has suffered from several Mumbai-like incidents. In this regard, the statement by the Indian Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar that India would use "terrorists to kill terrorists" is most unfortunate.⁵⁴ India should also remember that it still has not been able to conclude the Samjhota Express case, which took place more than a year before the Mumbai incident. 68 Pakistanis had lost their lives in that incident.⁵⁵ Most importantly, India should realise the fact that unless the issue of

⁵¹ "RAW's serving Indian Navy Commander held in Balochistan," *News*, March 25, 2016, <http://www.thenews.com.pk/print/107858-RAWs-serving-Indian-Navy-commander-held-in-Balochistan>

⁵² "NSG Deployed in Somnath, Delhi Put on High Alert," *Hindu*, March 6, 2016, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/nsg-deployed-in-somnath-delhi-is-put-on-high-alert/article8321055.ece>

⁵³ On November 26, 2008, a group of militants simultaneously attacked multiple targets in Mumbai, killing around 183 people, including nine terrorists and 22 foreign nationals. Pakistani nationals were accused of hatching that conspiracy against India.

⁵⁴ "Pakistan Slams Minister's Statement," *Hindu*, May 24, 2015, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/parrikar-statement-on-terror-issues-pakistan-slams-ministers-statement/article7239580.ece>

⁵⁵ Anees Jilani, "The Frenzy Mongers," *OutLook India*, May 20, 2013, <http://www.outlookindia.com/article/The-Frenzy-Mongers/285327>

Kashmir is resolved according to the wishes of Kashmiri people, peace would continue to elude South Asia.

On its part, Pakistan should continue to insist on the resumption of the dialogue process in a way that this insistence is not seen as its weakness. The ball is now in India's court which has to reciprocate and come to the negotiating table with an open mind. The strong incumbent Indian government, unencumbered as it is by the compulsions faced by a coalition government, is in a much better position than its predecessor to take some bold steps with regard to improvement of relations with Pakistan. This perhaps makes it a historic opportunity for peace in the region. Think tanks, media and civil society from both sides of the border as well as more people to people contacts can play an important role in breaking this logjam between the two countries. Meanwhile, international community particularly China should play its due role in facilitating the two countries in removing the mistrust that has existed between them for more than six decades.

Conclusion

Modi is viewed by many as a polarising and controversial politician and a threat to the pluralism of the Indian society. On the other hand, Modi has been able to impress many by projecting himself as an “iron man”⁵⁶ who is capable of ridding India of problems like poverty, terrorism, corruption and bad governance. Only time will tell whether or not he would be able to live up to these expectations. The Modi government must understand that to realise its aim of economic development, it would have to ensure peace at home and at its borders. It will have to solve its problems with neighbouring countries. Otherwise, it would be difficult for India to continue its journey on the road to economic development. At the same time, the Modi government will have to make sure that minorities' rights are protected and they are not excluded from the fruits of growth and development.

⁵⁶ Raouf Mir, “Decoding Modi of India's Ambitious Desires.”

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With regard to Pakistan, Modi has adopted a “muscular policy,” as was being projected during his election campaign. However, such a policy is bound to prove counterproductive as being neighbours both India and Pakistan need each other’s support in order to overcome multiple challenges particularly the issue of terrorism. India and Pakistan should move from conflict management to conflict resolution. Only a sustained, uninterrupted, meaningful and result-oriented dialogue process, which addresses all the issues of mutual concern, would ensure a better future for the people of the South Asian region.