

*Be not ashamed of thy
virtues, honor's a good
brooch to wear in a man's
hat at all times*

Ben Jonson

A Wholly Unnecessary Controversy

A wholly unnecessary controversy has been created over Navjot Singh Sidhu's visit to Pakistan, accepting the invitation of his former cricket buddy Imran Khan to attend the latter's swearing in ceremony. Sidhu is a minister in the Congress Government of Punjab. But his visit to Pakistan was purely private and personal; he did not go there as a representative of either the Congress party or the Punjab Government. But such is the atmosphere of intolerance prevailing in the country that a mountain has been made out of a molehill. His visit has been decried because Pakistan is continuing terror attacks on India. His embracing the Pak army chief has been condemned as an insult to our armed forces. Rahul Gandhi is being asked day in and day out to give an 'explanation' for Sidhu's visit.

Those who are raising this hue and cry over the Sidhu visit are conveniently forgetting that in December, 2015, Prime Minister Modi made a surprise trip to Lahore to attend the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's granddaughter's wedding. And he went there uninvited. Fulsome praise was showered on Modi by his party men and supporters for this gesture of goodwill and as an earnest of India's desire to have peace with Pakistan. Had the Pakistan then become less hostile to India? Or stopped terror attacks on India? Were Indo-Pak relations any different from what they are today? Did Modi visit Lahore in his personal capacity and not as the Prime Minister of India? Certainly not. Then why this hullabaloo over Sidhu's visit?

Obviously this whole controversy has been created with a view to the coming elections. The Congress being the main political adversary of the ruling party, it must be ruthlessly attacked, its patriotism questioned and it must be held responsible for the failure of the present government to keep its electoral promises to the people, for its failure to deliver practically on every front – from holding the price line to stopping the steady fall of the rupee against the dollar. The more the failures become obvious to the people, the shriller is the campaign of vituperation against the Congress. On one hand the BJP says the Congress is a down-and-out party, on the way to its extinction. Soon enough India will be Congress-mukt. On the other hand the same down-and-out party is being made out to be the biggest adversary. The people are amused by the Janus face of the ruling party.

Foreign policy comes of age under PM

REFLEX ACTION

Rapti Ray & Dr. Buddhadeb Ghosh

The Prime Minister stays in foreign countries and occasionally visits India. Such is the allegation of opposition parties against Narendra Modi. But they are not admitting the fact that India's foreign policy for the first time since 1947 has reached a youthful stage after 70 years of childhood.

The Modi government certainly has not altogether reversed the path of foreign policy followed in previous decades, as it is neither feasible, nor desirable. No country's foreign policy can be partisan, and there can never be a tectonic shift when governments change. It is a continuum, at best modifying the path followed by all previous regimes. However, despite this inevitable fact, Narendra Modi's ambition has imparted a new dimension to India's foreign policy since 2014. The very approach of Modi is 'India First'. That is, to draw the maximum out of foreign policy for the economic development of India as a whole and move towards the NDA government's goal 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas' – a Hindi slogan which Narendra Modi coined from his Lok Sabha Election campaign since 2013. Added to it is the great Sanskrit dictum from India's great historical past: "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam." It's a Sanskrit phrase, a philosophy that inculcates an understanding that the whole world is one family. This verse of Maha Upanishad is engraved at the entrance of parliament hall. This slogan became so popular that US Secretary of State John Kerry, prior to his India visit in 2014 (after the Modi government came to power), mentioned it and said America shared this goal and was willing to work in full cooperation with the new government to realize it. He arrived in New Delhi to prepare the ground for Modi's US visit, which was uncertain at that time. What a contrast to what was the reality some ten years back.

In 2005, Modi was denied a US visa by the then US President George W Bush. America's allegation against Modi was his violation of human rights when he was chief minister of Gujarat. But in the Lok Sabha elections Modi's landslide victory proved that he has to be given due importance at the international level. In fact, the next US President, Barack Obama, was the chief guest during

India's Republic Day celebrations in 2015. This could not be imagined earlier. After Obama, Modi also has met with Donald Trump and is engaging in talks with him on trade, purchase of airplanes, natural gas imports and combating terrorism among other issues. In addition to this, Modi's visit to Israel has created enormous possibilities for India's defence, which is causing high BP hatred for our neighbours. The main pillars of India's foreign policy under the Modi's government may be stated as follows:

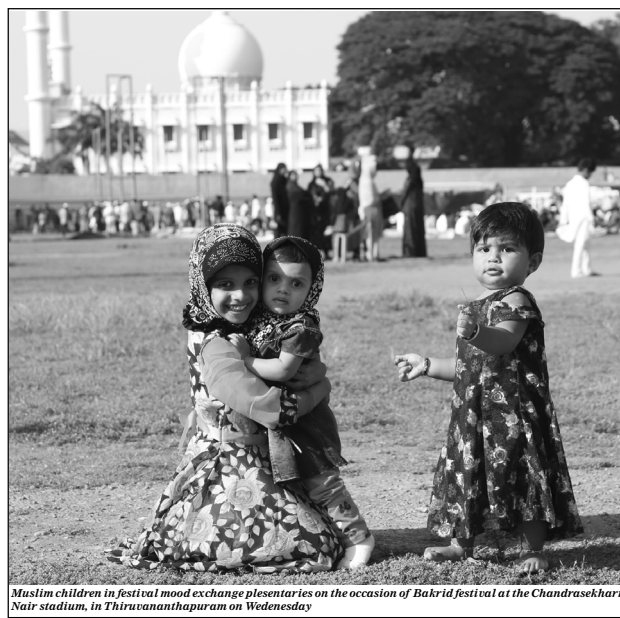
Firstly, there is the 'Act East Policy'. The 'Look East Policy' initiated during Atal Behari Vajpayee's time has been rebranded as Act East Policy. During the Look East Policy some strategic partnership initiatives and cooperation in the field of security had been started with South East Asian countries. But the Modi government wants a more dynamic policy, as external affairs minister Sushma Swaraaj has said, "India is not just looking east, but acting east as well." The Act East Policy is based on the Modi government's stress on 'Neighbourhood First' policy, which focuses on immediate neighbours in South and South East Asia and also Asia-Pacific regions. Secondly, India wants to counter China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) Policy, which is aimed at capturing the market along the entire traditional Silk Road.

However, New India is against it as the proposed roadway passes through Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (POK). Some other nations have also opposed it as it is alleged that their sovereignty is jeopardized. Many experts are of the opinion that China's main objective is to dump low quality goods in entire Asia and Europe by opening up the roadways and enhancing maritime connectivity.

However, many are unable to see through China's policy, as it is building up infrastructures in those cities and spending annually \$10,000 crore. In response to China's 'aggression' in trade and commerce, India is giving more importance to its maritime neighbours along the Indian Ocean Region.

With the same objective, that is, to counter China's OBOR project, the Narendra Modi government has introduced 'Project Mausam'. Historically, trade along Indian Ocean Region, stretching from South East Asia to East Africa proceeded through sea routes, which naturally depends on seasonal climatic conditions. The Government of India has strategically given the name 'Project Mausam' to stress that India is no less important than China in trade, commerce and also in enhancing security. Regarding Eurasia, Modi inked agreements on long term oil and gas cooperation between ONGC Videsh, Essar Oil of India and Russia's Rosneft and Gazprom. Russian President Vladimir Putin has promised to install ten more nuclear reactors in India in the next 20 years. Russia will also export raw diamond to India directly, not through mediators like Dubai and Belgium. In the area of defence too, the two countries have signed technical cooperation and investment agreements. There is also cooperation with France and between Indian Navy and Mauritius coast guard. Many Indians live in the African island of Mauritius and earn their living, and that is why the government is giving additional importance to this country.

The entire pinpoint of Modi government's foreign policy is to bring in economic development and advance its Make in India, Digital India, Soil India and Smart city programmes by pursuing diplomatic policies. This objective of linking India's foreign policy to domestic transformation so much exclusively is surely a paradigm shift in the Modi regime. However, a word of caution at this point is that increased insurgency may pose a threat to smooth operation of India's foreign policy. So greater importance should be given to combat terrorism and associated unrest for the sake of advancing 'India First Policy' in foreign relations (IPA)



Muslim children in festive mood exchange presentaries on the occasion of Bakrid festival at the Chandrasekhara Nair stadium, in Thiruvananthapuram on Wednesday

PSUs left in the lurch

FOCUS

Nitya Chakraborty

More and more details are coming out of the controversial deal concluded by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015 for the purchase of 36 Rafale fighter jet planes for the Indian defence forces and it is apparent that the Prime Minister has totally sacrificed the interests of the high performing public sector Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) to patronize a company of an industrialist which has no experience in the area and which set up the unit only ten days before the deal was concluded.

The most astonishing part of the developments is that the Prime Minister took unusual initiative in announcing the deal excluding the HAL and this was not known even to the highest ranking officials days before it was announced. Only two days before the Indian PM announced the deal, the then foreign secretary S. Jaishankar in his briefing to the press on Rafale on April 8, 2015, spoke about HAL's involvement and mentioned that the ongoing defence contracts were on a different track and Modi's visit to France was a leadership level one.

Yet, the deal was revised by the PM himself giving offset contract to the Reliance Defence Ltd, a subsidiary of Reliance group of Anil Ambani - who was formed only ten days before the new deal was signed. It was strange that the Prime Minister denied to work to

the government's own premier defence manufacturing company HAL with a record of 60 years to a private group which is down in debts and which has no experience in aerospace manufacturing and no factory unit.

On Wednesday, the three senior leaders former ministers Yashwant Sinha, Arun Shourie and the lawyer activist Prasant Bhushan told the media that when the new deal was announced by the PM in April 2015, it was not approved by the cabinet committee on security and it was clear, according to them that the defence ministry violated many regulations and procedures to get the deal approved all on a sudden at the instance of the PM.

The leaders pointed out that when PM Modi announced that India would purchase 36 Rafale aircraft in a "fly-away" condition in April 2015 during his visit to France, he not only violated many protocols, but also overlooked the previous, cheaper deal struck by the UPA government. They said the UPA government had negotiated a deal with Dassault after an official bidding process, following which Dassault Aviation was given the contract to hand over 18 Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircrafts (MMRCA) in a fly-away condition to India and assist the Indian public sector company Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) to manufacture

another 108 aircraft by transferring its technology. The request for proposal that the UPA issued included cost of initial purchase, transfer of technology and licensed production among others. The deal would have cost India Rs 42,000 crore, the leaders said. However, Modi overlooked the earlier deal and negotiated the purchase of 36 aircraft at a cost of Rs 60,000 crore (according to documents released by Dassault and Reliance).

The trio said this figure is "embarrassing" for the government" as each aircraft would cost Rs 1,660 crore. The leaders said this is an even bigger figure than the one estimated by then defence minister Manohar Parrikar in an interview to Doordarshan.

Parrikar had pegged the amount as Rs 50,000 crore for 126 planes, which works out to Rs 715 crore per plane. They pointed out Parrikar's interview was only a few days ahead of Modi's announcement of the purchase of 36 aircraft from Paris, indicating that the defence minister may not have been in the loop before the

final deal was struck. The leaders said this figure is "embarrassing for the government" as each aircraft would cost Rs 1,660 crore. Additionally, the new deal did not figure HAL in the picture and did not mention transfer of technology clause, causing further damage to the country's exchequer. Shourie, Bhushan and Sinha also hinted at the possibility of the government deliberately denying information regarding the contract, highlighting several examples.

Parrikar did not know about the new agreement with Dassault. Or else, why would he talk about buying 126 planes only a week before the final agreement, they asked. Even as the allegations on the government piled up, the Modi government has not revealed either the cost of the plane or why HAL was denied the offset contract. Defence minister Nirmala Sitharaman has said that since these are issues of national security, the details could not be divulged because of a secrecy clause. However, Bhushan, Sinha and Shourie pointed out several contradictions in this explanation.

They said the same government had disclosed the details of the deal on the floor of the government and questioned why the secrecy clause was not adhered to them.

In fact, on November 18, 2016, in response to a question asked in the Lok Sabha on the acquisition of fighter aircraft, the MoS, Defence stated that, Inter-Governmental Agreement with the government of French Republic has been signed on September 23, 2016 for purchase of 36 Rafale aircraft along with requisite equipments, services and weapons. Cost of each Rafale aircraft is approximately Rs 670 crore and all the aircraft will be delivered by April 2022.

They claimed the government was "definitely trying to hide something" when suspicions have emerged around the deal. They also cited examples of cost of defence contracts made public on several occasions by different governments. "Even more conclusive is the fact that the secrecy clause in the agreement binds India not to disclose the technical specifications and operational capabilities of the aircraft. It does not bind India to keep the price secret. In fact, French President Emmanuel Macron himself stated explicitly in March in an interview to India Today that how much is to be disclosed in this regard is entirely up to the Indian government," the leaders added. (IPA)

Conventional Crossword

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9				
10	11			
12	13		14	15
16		18	19	20
		21		22
23	24			25
26			27	
				28

ACROSS
1 Self-satisfied
6 Today
7 Tumblie
9 Destroy utterly
10 Jury
11 Singer
12 Angle
14 Food lever
17 Prescribed amounts
20 Beverage
21 Added clause
23 Buffalo
25 Dwarf buffalo
26 Buran
27 Employ
28 Otherwise

DOWN
1 Squared
2 Combines
3 Departed
4 Pale
5 Old cloth measure
7 Mild explosion
8 Within the law
9 Bird
10 Grain field weed
15 Papal ambassador
16 Bullfight
19 Wrongdoing
22 Comfort
23 Container
24 Prosecut

SUDOKU : 2291

2		4		1	
9	7		1		2
	3				
6	9		3		8
		2	6		
8	7			6	3
1			3		
				7	6
	6		7		1

Yesterday's Solution 2290

7	5	8	9	3	6	2	4	1
2	9	4	7	5	1	3	6	8
6	3	1	8	4	2	7	5	9
9	1	5	6	8	7	4	3	2
8	4	2	3	1	5	6	9	7
3	6	7	2	9	4	1	8	5
4	2	9	1	6	8	5	7	3
5	7	3	4	2	9	8	1	6
1	8	6	5	7	3	9	2	4

Yesterday's Cross Word Solution 2299

P	R	O	P	E	R	A	R	M
E	W	E	D					O
T	E	N	N	I	S	P	O	D
T	V	I	S	T	A	G	E	R
T	I	K	I	S	T	A	G	E
A	L	I	V	E		N	E	A
L	S	E	R	G	E	Z		
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