

Editorial appearing in *People's Democracy* dated October 5, 2014

Indian Prime Minister's Visit to New York and Washington

Lack of Substance: A Dangerous Portend

Prime Minister Modi's visit to New York and Washington on the occasion of addressing the annual United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) turned out to be, as the PTI reported, of the nature of a "rock star celebrity". His speeches at the Madison Square Garden and the annual rock star ritual that takes place every year on the occasion of the UNGA at New York's Central Park confirmed once again that the mindset of a continuing Indian election campaign has not yet been discarded by Prime Minister Modi. Commenting on his first address to the Nation from the ramparts of the Red Fort, this column had noted that the election hangover appears to continue. We had suggested that the PM should be politely told that the elections are over and people expect him to start "walking the talk". But the talk continues and after Tokyo has now reached New York. 'Walking' has yet to begin as far as we, Indians, are concerned.

It has by now become a habit to regularly comment on the Prime Minister's global interactions in this column. After his visit to Tokyo and his interactions with the Chinese President in India, it is now the turn of his visit to the US. The PM's global itinerary has been so crowded that we could not squeeze in comments on his visits to Nepal, Bhutan and interactions with the Australian Prime Minister in New Delhi. The irony of all this lies in the fact that he is scrupulously following the global interactions whose pace was set by former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. Yet we are being told *ad nasuem* that PM Modi has set himself the task to "liberate" India from the "paralysis" of the government under former PM Manmohan Singh!

Lest the PM is accused of ignoring the travails of the Indian people, we are now being bombarded by official advertisements informing that the Prime Minister will address the nation on October 3. The official propaganda is that this address is on the occasion of Gandhi Jayanti that falls on October 2. But October 3 is *Vijaya Dashami* – Dussera. Recollect that the RSS, since its foundation, always hoisted the saffron flag on *Vijaya Dashami* accompanied by the ritual of the RSS Sarsanghchalak addressing the Swayamsevaks (read the Nation in today's context) annually. By choosing to address the Nation through the Doordarshan and the All India Radio (who

have *graciously* announced that the `electronic feed' of this address will be available freely to all other media outlets to broadcast), is PM Modi seeking also simultaneously to don the mantle of the RSS chief and, thus, remove the hairline distinction between the RSS and the BJP – the latter functioning as the political arm of the former?

As we go to press, the much awaited Indo-US Joint Statement has been released. Apart from a general reassertion of the continuing strategic relationship between India and USA, eight separate statements on – health cooperation; continuing strategic consultations; development cooperation; deepening security partnership; civil space and technological cooperation; promoting women's empowerment; on energy and climate change; and on deepening cultural ties between India and USA have been released.

While there has been nothing substantial in terms of any advance from the agreements already reached between India and the USA on all these aspects, the running thread appears the increasing pressures by the USA to draw India more into its loop of advancing US strategic interests in all these spheres. The objective of this was clearly articulated by Nicholas Burns in the *Washington Post* (September 28, 2014), "In strategic terms, there are few countries more important to Washington than India, the dominant power in the Indian Ocean region and, with Japan, the most important US partner in Asia seeking to limit Chinese assertiveness in the region". The US strategic objective since the end of the Cold War, articulated officially in its documents, has been the "containment of China". President Obama is pursuing this objective, aggressively, on the basis of the assessment of the *Washington Post*, "One of his (PM Modi's) primary ambitions is to renew relations with Washington".

This appears to have been endorsed by the so-called Joint Vision Statement that appeared as a joint editorial by President Obama and PM Modi in the *Washington Post* titled `*Chalein Saath Saath: Forward together we go*'. Ominously, *Chaleinge Saath Saath* is the Hindi translation of a line from the famous anthem of African Americans popularized by Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. `we shall overcome'. It is ominous because this Hindi translation which was popularized by the Left was hijacked and elevated to the level of an anthem in India by Sanjay Gandhi during the period of internal emergency, the abrogation of democracy, democratic rights and civil liberties.

During his various speeches, the Indian PM highlighted India's commitment in fighting terrorism and that India makes no distinction between "bad terrorism" and "good terrorism". Soon after came his one to one meeting with the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu! The criminal anti-human Israeli attacks on the Palestinians and the killing of innocent people, women and children, are all justified by such definitions of fighting "terrorism" that continues to deny the Palestinians their basic fundamental right to a homeland for over six decades. Once again, an ominous signal.

Those expecting the Indo-US Joint Statement to be a significant advance from the past were forewarned by the spokesman of India's Ministry of External Affairs who said that the Indo-US Summit interaction "had three major components – connecting with each other, vision for the ties and cooperation in various areas".

Clearly, therefore, what was envisioned is the deepening of the Indo-US strategic partnership where India would be drawn deeper as a strategic subordinate ally in implementing the US global vision. The vision statement says that India and USA shall "together seek a reliable and enduring friendship that bolsters security and stability, contributes to the global economy, and advances peace and prosperity for our citizens and throughout the world".

As far as the main objective of this visit – attending and addressing the UNGA – is concerned, Indian PM's speech marked no significant advance or contribution. Media reports, "the first ever UN address of Mr. Modi was in danger of being marred by a possible 'hot mic' moment in which the President and Co-Chair of the General Assembly, apparently unaware that they could be heard over the PA system, appeared to allude to a lack of courtesy by the Indian delegation as it departed from the podium perhaps too abruptly for the accompanying protocol personnel to keep up with them. ...The relevant segment of the audio, which *The Hindu* has obtained (reported on September 29), was not particularly clear, yet in it UNGA President Sam Kutesa of Uganda could be heard saying what sounded like, "Let them settle a bit," then adding, "Making a racket," and "You have to have a little courtesy to wait over there" and finally "But I think...India consider itself...." (unprintable, we presume).

Similar Indian media commentaries have suggested that the discussions between PM Modi and President Obama were an exhaustive "laundry list"

of all agreements between both sides from knowledge partnerships and renewable energies to nuclear issues. “However, it lack significant progress, or breakthrough in various issues the two nation’s face”.

Significantly, defence cooperation is slated to increase further with the Indian government already approving the purchase of US attack and heavy lift helicopters. US has, thus, become India’s largest supplier of arms in the past five years, overtaking Russia. India is also the largest purchaser of Israeli armaments amongst all countries in the world, thus, the largest financier of Israeli military attacks on the Palestinians!

The highlight of this visit was the subtle but an important change that the Indian PM made in his formulations. In the Red Fort speech, he spoke of making India an industrial hub by advancing the slogan of “Made in India”. In the US, he spoke repeatedly of “Make in India”. The former should have meant the strengthening of India’s domestic industrial production base while the latter is an open invitation for foreign investments, particularly US investments, whose main objective is profit maximization and not augmenting India’s productive capacities. For this purpose, India appears ready, much to the glee of India Inc., to further liberalise its economy to foreign capital both speculative (FII) and FDI. Such an opening up of Indian market, resources and cheap labour for foreign profit maximization is the surest recipe for imposing further hardships on the Indian people.

In sum, therefore, this visit of PM Modi to the US may well result in deepening the status of India as a subordinate ally of US imperialism and its global strategic concerns. This does not auger well for India’s independent foreign policy which marked its special place in international relations and amongst the comity of Nations in the world. It is not in India’s interests to sacrifice good neighbourly relations to advance US strategic interests. Of course, the concerns of India’s sovereignty and security will always remain non-negotiable. While maintaining this, India’s independent relations with all countries in the world is an important element in the creation of a world of multi-polarity following the end of the bipolar Cold War era. By this visit and its outcome, the danger is of India cementing itself as a subordinate strategic ally of US designs for a Uni-polar world under its hegemony. In India’s interests, this drift to disaster must not be allowed.

October 1, 2014