

Modi, Trump can go together a long way

Both are nationalists who believe in taking a hard line against terrorism and radicalism



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Appearing regal, Prime Minister Modi stood shoulder to shoulder with President Trump and declared that when it comes to the development of the world's two largest democracies, he remains a "driven, determined, and decisive partner". Their handshake on the White House lawns - and indeed the hug - was genuine, one built on mutual respect and admiration.

This meeting was such a contrast to the first time when Modi visited the White House, to meet Obama. The 44th president had pre-judged Modi guilty of religious intolerance and lifted America's visa ban on him only after Modi assumed office as India's PM in a nod to long-standing protocol to permit heads of state to visit the US.

Finding common ground

On this 2017 trip, Modi needed to have no fear that Trump, the con-

summate businessman, was judging him through any righteous lens. This was an effective, efficient meeting between two extraordinarily strong leaders united by a common goal: How to advance his own country's interests first.

Remarkably, they found a lot to agree on. In statecraft, a rival's rival is a friend. China's geopolitical ambitions from One Belt One Road to dominating the South China Sea, not to mention its failed efforts to contain North Korea, all drove Trump closer to Modi who additionally offered Trump what the latter has been seeking from every world leader: Solid cooperation in fighting terrorism, extremism, and radicalisation. These assurances for Trump have not been forthcoming from traditional American allies in Europe, a region where Trump continues to be unpopular.

Contrary to the dismissive comments of London mayor Sadiq Khan who suggested that Trump should not visit London, or when French president Macron openly expressed appreciation for the out-of-office Obama, Modi was graciousness personified, burying any disappointments about Trump's withdrawal from the Paris accord or the proposed tightening of tech visas. This



Meeting of minds Modi and Trump

was traditional Indian culture at its best, reciprocating the warm welcome he received, and inviting Trump and his family to India hoping "that you will give me the opportunity to welcome you and host you in India". Trump has had to scour the globe to find such warm invitations.

The meeting earned good coverage both on TV and in the print media, although the PMO should have known that the last week of June is

crucial because the US Supreme Court releases its most awaited decisions of its term this week. The liberal media, which for months had been celebrating the overturning of Trump's travel ban on citizens of six majority Muslim countries, woke up today to find a 9-0 decision from the Supreme Court allowing Trump to continue with the ban and giving him an important victory.

This was such a major news story that it sucked all the oxygen from covering the Modi-Trump meeting. Other news stories - including the release of the US Senate's health bill to repeal and replace Obamacare and the never-ending Russia story - also continued to blanket the airwaves.

Still, both *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post* had identical pieces leading to today's meetings describing how India's storied outsourcing industry has come under pressure because of Trump administration policies and automation. Both articles focused on Nasscom's "forced resignations" and how skill re-development is vital to India's middle class.

No benefit for trade, jobs

On matters of trade, climate change and high-tech visas, the meeting

will likely result in few successes for Modi. Trump's slogan, "Make America Great Again" is directly at odds with Modi's vision of "Make in India" because both nationalist leaders are actively attempting to increase manufacturing in their respective countries as a pathway to lift their respective middle classes.

In a way, Trump is already winning this battle. Companies such as Infosys have already done the unthinkable and announced massive plans to hire Americans in the US and scale back hiring in India.

Trump knows that Modi is a consummate deal-maker too and has fundamentally helped change India through infrastructure development, FDI and tax reform - goals Trump has clearly outlined for the US.

Given how few friends Trump has on the world stage, he may reach out to Modi for advice. The potential friendship between these two men could yet turn out to be more consequential than any other PM-President relationship in the past. And this is the best news for both countries.

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