

SATISH ACHARYA



# MODI'S MAGIC STILL WORKS

**P**RIME Minister Narendra Modi has just finished his much successful Israel visit. His trip to Tel Aviv can be described in a single line: He came, he saw, he conquered! This, however, was expected, given his good rapport with the Israeli counterpart, Benjamin Netanyahu. In contrast, his US visit was a tough one, and what he achieved there was momentous.

## Sceptics

Silencing doomsday sayers and disproving sceptics, PM Modi struck an instant rapport with US President Donald Trump who has earned the reputation of being disruptive at home and disconcerting abroad and about whom the only predictable thing is his unpredictability. The comfort level between the two leaders was for everyone to see at the joint press statement.

On June 25 at a leading TV channel, I told the anchor that judging the success of Modi's visit was simple: watch out if he hugs his host or not! And, I bet, he would. She was aghast! "What! No way! Trump was not going to hug Modi." She lost the bet. She wasn't alone, though.

Modi has developed his own unique technique to charm his counterparts: Japanese PM Shinzo Abe, former Canadian PM Stephen Harper, former Australian PM Tony Abbot, former British PM David Cameron, Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina, German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron. Three years in his first term, Modi's magic hasn't dimmed; it has become headier and irresistible, as his US and Israeli visits show.

The joint statement issued after Modi's latest visit to the US is crisp and covers all areas of mutual concerns. The menace of terrorism has been flagged and also the pledge to dismantle the terror infrastructure and safe havens. Commitment of cooperation to fight outfits like al-Qaeda and ISIS has been reiterated. Pakistan has, again, been asked to bring the perpetrators of 26/11 and other attacks to book. The



by Surendra Kumar

Trump Administration's decision to designate Hizbul Mujahideen chief Syed Salahuddin as a global terrorist is a welcome move which exposes Pakistan's links with terrorism. But these statements will change nothing on the ground unless these are backed by concrete deterrent action. Only punitive pressure against Pakistan will work. But with Afghanistan still on the boil, the US enjoys only limited leverage against Pakistan. India will have to fight its own battles, though intelligence sharing about terrorists and cyber crimes will be crucial.

Much was made out about the lavish hospitality extended to Chinese President Xi Jinping at Trump's Mar a Lago resort in Florida last month. It appeared a U-turn in favour of China by Trump after his vicious anti-Chinese poll rhetoric. Logically, it was a tactical step to pressure China to address the North Korean missile madness and bilateral trade issues.

## Statement

The joint statement retains much of the Modi-Obama joint strategic vision but lays out more clearly expectations of China's adherence to "a set of common principles for the region, according to which sovereignty and international laws are respected". Two leaders "agreed that a close partnership between the US and India is central to the peace and stability in the region." The two leaders have alluded to possible negative pitfalls of China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) launched last month. While supporting regional economic connectivity, they expect "transparent development of infrastructure and use of responsible debt financing, while ensuring respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, the rule of law, and the environment." It vindicates the *raison d'être* for India's absence.

Trump favours expansion and growth of

bilateral trade, but it has to be free, fair and balanced, and must create jobs. The joint statement talks of "comprehensive review of trade relations with the goal of expediting regulatory processes; ensuring that technology and innovation are appropriately fostered, valued and protected and increasing market access in areas such as agriculture, IT and manufactured goods and services". The decisions to sell 22 Sea Guardian unmanned drones to India, SpiceJet's decision to buy 100 aircraft and announcements by Indian IT giants to hire more Americans seem to have temporarily doused Trump's criticism against India.

## Sector

The energy sector offers prospects of closer cooperation and more jobs for the US if the export of "natural gas, clean coal and renewable resources and technologies" do materialise. The US can benefit further if it provides technologies for efficient use of fossil fuel, smart grids and energy storage. The possibility of financing of clean coal projects by multilateral development banks will spare Trump from talking about the aid of billions of dollars to India (factually incorrect). So, even after withdrawing from the Paris climate agreement, the US can contribute towards environment protection.

India is slipping into a tighter American embrace as it agrees to work together on "advanced defence equipment and technologies at a level commensurate with that of the closest allies and partners of the US". Maritime security cooperation and "white shipping" data sharing arrangements are welcome developments. The much-hyped H1B visa issue doesn't find a mention. It has been flagged through diplomatic, government and NASSCOM channels.

Last week, I had suggested that "cultivating Kushner and Ivanka was the shortest short-cut to Oval Office". The invitation to Ivanka to lead the US delegation at Global Entrepreneurs Conference in India and her acceptance suggest that I wasn't the only one thinking on those lines. Inviting the US President to be the chief guest at the next Republic Day parade will be the true Trump card for Modi.

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