

PM raises Pakistan terror, India-US defence ties at talks with US V-P Pence



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with US Vice President Mike Pence in Singapore on Wednesday. *Reuters*

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NEW DELHI, NOVEMBER 14

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi shared India's "serious concern" at the "mainstreaming" of Mumbai terror attack mastermind Hafiz Saeed, who carries a \$10 million bounty, in Pakistan's recent elections, when he met US Vice President Mike Pence on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit in Singapore on Wednesday.

Stressing that there was some discussion on the issue of terrorism and Pence referred to the coming 10th anniversary of 26/11, Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale said the Prime Minister reminded him that "in one way or another, all the traces or all the

leads in global terror attacks ultimately lead to a single source, a single place of origin".

And, in that context, Modi pointed out that "the mainstreaming of the people involved in Mumbai terror attacks in a political process, which had taken place in a recent election in Pakistan, should be a matter of serious concern not just to the two countries, that is, India and the US, but to the international community," Gokhale said.

The banned Jamaat-ud-Dawa (JuD) led by Hafiz Saeed, a front for the Lashkar-e-Taiba, had fielded its candidates from the platform of Allaha-u-Akbar Tehreek (AAT), a little known political entity.

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Pence meeting

Gokhale said there was “some good understanding” on how the two countries should move forward in building cooperation on counter-terrorism, and both recognised that this is a challenge they will have to fight together, and with the rest of the international community.

Modi also urged Pence to consider India as a manufacturing base for defence equipment, and develop it as a hub for exports in the regional market.

While there has been substantial enhancement in the defence relationship and India’s import of equipment from the US, Modi

stressed that there was a great opportunity for the US for setting up defence industry in India. “Not only is India a substantial market, but because of the way we are placed regionally, we can become a hub for exports to the rest of the region,” Gokhale said in Singapore.

“So he conveyed to Vice President Pence that he hoped the Trump administration would recognise this as a new opportunity, as a new economic opportunity as well,” he said.

Concerned about the Trump administration’s intention to tighten H1B visa norms, Modi highlighted that Indians in the US not only bring economic value to the country, but also enrich the social and political fabric.

Making a case for the need to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific, Pence felt that India is a

positive factor in regional and international relations, and said the US looks forward to working with India on various issues — both political and economic — to ensure that “we have a fair rules-based international order”, he said.

The Indo-Pacific region also came up for discussion and Modi referred to his June speech in Singapore, in which he had outlined India’s vision on the issue. He conveyed to Pence that his vision of Indo-Pacific was gaining acceptability and “we should utilise the forthcoming East Asia Summit to further build on that,” Gokhale said, amid China flexing its muscles in the East and South China Seas.

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