

Modi & Trump try to take ties to new level

When he had last visited the United States, when Barack Obama was still at the White House, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had confided to the US President that India was resolved to overcome “the hesitations of history” and embark on broadening and deepening ties with America in every conceivable arena — from the political to technological, from global to regional (close coordination in Afghanistan), from health to space. All that and more was to the fore when President Donald Trump, Mr Obama’s successor, widely viewed by almost everyone — including America’s closest allies — with circumspection and wariness, hosted Mr Modi at the White House on Monday.

Not only did the two call one another wonderful things but used uncommonly open language to speak of third countries — China, North Korea and Pakistan. North Korea was pulled up in the joint statement for its destabilising pursuit of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles, and “all parties” that support this ambition were also hauled up. Doubtless the finger was pointing at China and its surrogate Pakistan.

Pakistan was also told not to let its soil be used for launching terrorists in other countries and to speed up the trials over the 26/11 Mumbai attacks and the Pathankot attack. Indirectly, China’s OBOR was ticked off by expressing support to regional connectivity that was transparent and respected the sovereignty of other countries.

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Speaking to the media, standing beside Mr Trump, Mr Modi (who refused to take questions though) had no hesitation broadcasting that the US was India’s “primary partner” for its “social and economic transformation”. He also underlined that India and the US “were not partners by chance”.

The PM’s American visit started on a nervy basis. In off-the-record remarks, senior South Block officials made no secret of their uncertainty over how the Modi visit would unfold, given Mr Trump’s unpredictability. What was highlighted was the “getting-to-know-one-another-aspect. These officials must be so relieved now. India’s “Think West” policy has been expressly revealed in the joint statement.

This sums up the spirit of things. India has offered the US prime place in its defence, space, maritime, energy and technological development. In return, India has demanded that it be treated every inch with the same closeness as Washington’s nearest allies. The two will fight the “scourge” of terrorism everywhere together. Of course, Mr Modi had prepared well before the trip by announcing his government’s keenness to do massive defence shopping from the United States.