

NARENDRA MODI: A SOBER LEADER WILLING TO TAKE INITIATIVES



Style, substance, image, content, ideology and above all domestic power define a leader on the world stage. The reports from Brazil indicate that Modi has succeeded in conveying that he is a confident, thoughtful and forward looking leader in whom the people of India have reposed trust and with whom his international peers can do business.

Modi's interventions at the BRICS summit were forthright and crisp. It was noteworthy that he dwelt at substantial length on Afghanistan where the situation may develop dangerously for Indian interests. What was new was the clear desire to dovetail the BRICS agenda with the developmental agenda Modi has set before the nation. Thus the focus in his address to the plenary to BRICS cooperation on harnessing technology for e-education and e-health programmes, clean energy, tourism and the youth.

The BRICS Bank headquarters location issue which India was contesting with China could not have been resolved by Indian negotiators without Modi's decision.

The compromise reveals a pragmatic acceptance of the reality of China's economic clout but to a large extent India's interests have been safeguarded because the shareholding pattern provides equality to all BRICS countries and also because the Bank's first President will be an Indian. The significant global signal through the resolution of this issue is of Modi's capacity to take matters forward and not remain intransigent.

Modi's meetings with the Chinese and Russian Presidents were his first interactions with leaders with whom he will meet often in the years to come. They are undisputed leaders of their countries as is Modi today. Both bilateral relationships are of prime importance and clearly Mr Modi's messages to both leaders were to signal his desire to take them comprehensively further.

It is clear that Modi is not moving away from the approach adopted in the late 1980s when India decided to move ahead with China despite the border issue though Modi conveyed to Xi that the maintenance of peace along the border is essential to keep the relations on an

even keel. Notwithstanding Xi's stating that China would like to resolve the issue early it remains to be seen if it seriously wishes to address it. Xi's gesture of inviting India to the APEC meeting in Beijing is significant. The ambit of economic cooperation, including in the areas of investments, with China will increase under Modi's watch.

However, the realities of completion will remain and the Chinese - Pakistan nexus will not weaken. Modi wanted to assure Putin that he is not unmindful of Russia's support at critical times in the past and that India will not be fully influenced by Western approaches on issues such as Ukraine. Indian interests in the strategic areas of defence, space and nuclear technologies energy demand that the Russian relationship be nurtured.

Modi's handling of his BRICS visit, taken together with his invitation to SAARC leaders for his oath-taking, will assure the world that the first Indian Prime Minister, a clear departure from the Nehruvian tradition, is a sober leader willing to take initiatives. Modi will be taken seriously.