



India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj with Bill and Hillary Clinton in New York, September 29, 2014.

PRESS INFORMATION BUREAU

# Modi needs to meet Hillary and Trump

‘INDIANS GENERALLY ARE COMFORTABLE WITH CLINTON, BUT SHE HAS NOT DONE ANYTHING TO DESERVE THEIR TRUST. TRUMP, ON THE OTHER HAND, MAY BE HELPFUL TO INDIA BECAUSE OF HIS DISTRUST OF CHINA, PAKISTAN,’ SAYS T P SREENIVASAN.

**N**arendra Modi has come a long way since the days in 1999, when he walked the long corridors of Capitol Hill with a white cotton bag on his shoulder to lobby Congressmen and Senators to ensure that the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund did not impose sanctions against India, following the nuclear tests.

He was credited with a letter signed by some Congressmen, urging the World Bank and the IMF not to heed the US advice to impose sanctions. He also held consultations with senior officials of the Bretton Woods institutions who I invited to meet him at the residence of the Deputy Chief of Mission in Bethesda in Maryland.

Modi's fourth visit in two years to Washington as the Indian prime minister, a record in itself, is primarily to address Congress. His trend-setting clothes and familiar oratorical skills will be on display in Congress for the first time.

The Indian-American community had lobbied hard to get him invited to address Congress in September 2014, but it could not be arranged because the schedules of the House of Representatives and the Senate could not be adjusted to arrange a Joint Session of Congress.

The invitation this time is indeed a gesture on the part of Congress though it is also the result of the persistent efforts of the powerful Indian-American community through the India Caucus in the House of Representatives and the Friends of India in the Senate, once led by Hillary Clinton.

Modi's reputation has reached the shores of the United States — he is now considered one of the world's leaders and, therefore, there is great curiosity about him. President Obama is particularly keen to introduce Modi to Congress as he sees the Indian prime minister as a partner in US initiatives in the Asia Pacific.

The invitation to Modi is the final initiative Obama will be taking with regard to India during his Presidency. Apart

from the address, Modi will be called upon to deal with the unfinished agenda in India-US relations.

Judging from the experience at the time of PM Atal Bihari Vajpayee's address to Congress in 2000, such addresses by foreign dignitaries do not cause much excitement among Congressmen and Senators.

At best, lawmakers make a brief appearance at the beginning or the end as they have legislative business to attend to. The hall is filled generally by invitees, mostly from the Indian-American community. If there are vacant seats still, they are filled by Congress staffers, including pages or messengers. The significance of the address is basically symbolic, though the text of the address will be analyzed as the visiting dignitaries speak with a sense of history.

Congressmen and Senators in the United States are more important than their counterparts in India, because they are not expected to toe the line of the President even if they belong to the same party as the President. They have elaborate offices with a number of staff members who follow internal and external developments for them and also remain in touch with their constituents. They have the authority to initiate legislation and thus give directives to the President.

Lobbying of Congressmen and Senators, therefore, is a highly developed industry, in which people, including former legislators, engage in. Apart from various industrial and business interests, foreign governments also hire lobbyists to wield influence on Capitol Hill.

India began hiring lobbyists when PM P V Narasimha Rao and Ambassador Siddhartha Shankar Ray were in office, basically to counter Pakistan-sponsored lobbying for Kashmir and Khalistan. The lobbying by Pakistan and India was so effective that many Congressmen used to say they were prevented from moving an inch in favor of either nation.

India's lobbying became more intense at the time of the nuclear deal with industrial interests and the Indian-American

community helping in the process. Although there are rigid ethical regulations with regard to hospitality and other gifts that lawmakers can receive, lobbyists find ways and means to cultivate them for one foreign government or another.

The creation of an India Caucus in Congress was the direct result of lobbying by the professionals and Indian-American community leaders. The Caucus, in turn, lobbied their colleagues to support Indian causes in Congress. The attendance at the joint session will depend on the extent of Indian lobbying to get important Congressmen to attend.

India-US relations have certainly improved since Modi became prime minister on account of the mutuality of interests, which have developed. Modi sees the US as the main source of investment and defense equipment. He is counting on the US for his initiatives such as Make in India and Digital India, for which the US has been enthusiastic.

The co-designing and co-production of defense equipment, together with the agreement on logistics, have taken defense cooperation to a higher level.

Nuclear trade has not begun yet, despite the claim that the nuclear liability law was out of the way. A senior official of the Indian nuclear establishment suspected that the US was using the liability law as a smokescreen for their reluctance to engage in nuclear trade with India.

On political issues, the greatest gain has been the understanding reached during President Obama's visit to India that India would be inclined towards the US in the ongoing rivalry with China in the Asia Pacific region. India has not, however, taken any concrete steps to formalize the strategic partnership by joining any of the US-sponsored groupings.

On the part of the US, there is no progress on the horizon on India's permanent membership of the United Nations Security Council, India's joining the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the Missile Technology Control Regime and even the Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation.

India has concerns about immigration rules and the US has even greater concerns about the pace of liberalization of the Indian economy. Modi will have an opportunity to discuss these issues during his visit, but not much progress can be achieved on them.

Given Modi's record of creating surprises, we may expect him to produce a rabbit or two from his magician's hat. His visits to Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE may be of immense interest to President Obama. China will, of course, figure in many ways, particularly after President Pranab Mukherjee's visit to China. On Pakistan and Afghanistan, Obama may not be helpful as he has developed a new interest in Pakistan and the Taliban is not a *bête noir* for him.

Modi's visit is taking place under the shadow of the Presidential elections in the US and Donald Trump's dramatic emergence as the Republican candidate. Indians generally are comfortable with Hillary Clinton, but she has not done anything to deserve their trust. Trump, on the other hand, may be helpful to India because of his distrust of China and Pakistan. Anti-terrorism measures might also become more effective under Trump.

Modi should do well to meet both Hillary and Trump during his visit. Vajpayee was in a similar situation in 2000 and he requested meetings with both Presidential contenders Al Gore and George W Bush. He met Gore, but all that Bush could do was to put in a call, while he was on the campaign trail. Modi may have better luck with Trump. Modi and Trump may get along well because of their basic business instincts.

Modi's foreign policy in the second year of his tenure has lost some of its dazzle. Like in the second act of a Shakespearean play, nothing spectacular is happening on the stage. His dreams about a cooperative neighborhood have been shattered. His visit to Iran has rejuvenated him to a certain extent. The US visit, with a splendid performance on the Hill, may well be the ultimate aphrodisiac Modi is looking for.

**Ambassador T P Sreenivasan (IFS 1967), former Governor for India of the IAEA, served as Deputy Chief of Mission at the Indian embassy in Washington, DC from 1997 to 2000.**