

India's Disastrous Isolation Around the World

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It is pretty clear now that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will probably not join the elite G7 meeting in Alberta, Canada, scheduled from June 15 to 17.. Alberta is not among the cities he seems to have seen so far in his 152 foreign visits to 72 countries in the last 11 years. So, it's a bit of a miss on both sides. What he may miss more is not being able to hug the new Canadian PM Mark Carney (what a relief, after that hostile Trudeau!), the new German Chancellor Friedrich Merz and his known leaders, like PM Starmer of the UK, President Macron (after that dreadful family incident) and PM Ishiba of Japan. One is not certain that the glamorous PM Giorgia Meloni of Italy would welcome a public embrace. As for Trump — even he does not know whether he'll hug Modi for photo ops, or punch him for denying repeatedly and vociferously that he brokered the Indo-Pak ceasefire. Best to stay clear of him while he plans how to pocket Canada as the 51st American state.

It is rather strange (and sad) that a fortnight before the big meet, there is no invitation sent to PM Modi. After all, he has been a fixture there, rubbing shoulders with the creme de la creme of the world's most powerful capitalist nations, who also flaunt their highest per capita GDP. It really did not strike his enthralled supporters back home that the USA has crossed \$80,000 as GDP per person and even doddering Japan's per capita GDP is \$32,000 — while sauntering India's is around \$2,800. We hope the snobs did not use this tiny detail to stop Viksit Bharat at the club gate.

Modi may, as well, utilise these pencil-marked 'G7 days' in his diary to flag off some more trains and fire some deadly guns at the opposition in Bihar, since buddy Dolun Trump will not let him point the big guns towards Pakistan. Where Modi is concerned, everything is mumkin and he could actually visit Manipur after 25 long months, now that his tight schedule is annoyingly relaxed. Or, he may pose for some grim photos in Pahalgam's pristine but now infamous Baisaran Valley, where the clime is almost like Alberta's. There's some talk that he may actually prefer the sunny beaches of the Maldives.

The whodunit mystery deepens — who could have actually stopped Modi from hanging around and twiddling his thumbs as a guest, while the seven hosts attend to their more serious G7 business? After all, he has been attending these upper crust meets for the last 6 years. According to media reports, Canada has invited the political heads of Australia, South Africa, Brazil and even Ukraine, but not India. A good guess is that pesky Khalistanis pressured the Canadian PM not to invite Modi. But can Sikhs, who are just 2.1 percent of Canada's population, wield such disproportionate clout? It is believed that many (if not most) of them are not in favour of violence or of Khalistan. Or, is it that Canada's police and security don't want messy and TV-magnified anti-Modi demonstrations at the venue? The Five Eyes intelligence-sharing group, consisting of the US, the UK and its three white country cousins, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, were mighty cut up with India after the killing of Hardeep Singh Nijjar, the Khalistani separatist leader in Canada. Like the Security Council, there is a closed door cabal of a handful of nations, the intelligence agencies of which are authorised to eliminate their enemies, wherever they be. Other than the CIA and MI-6, as well as FSS (Federal Security Service) Russia's successor of its deadly KGB, there is

darling Israel's Mossad. But others are a strict no-no. This could be a signal by G7 to Modi to start behaving more diplomatically and within his station in life.

This may explain why India had absolutely no country on its side, when it attacked terrorist bases deep inside Pakistan — after the unpardonable slaughter of 26 innocents at Pahalgam. Only two arms suppliers, Russia and France, made some interesting noises, but the remaining 70 countries of the world that Modi has visited (many, many times — in some cases) remained mute spectators. It appears strange as they had assiduously supported India's innumerable international resolutions against terror. Obviously, our Foreign Office miscalculated, busy as it is in converting every Indian mission abroad into an extension camp for core Hindu values. They keep sharp watch on the many brilliant minds among the NRIs and OCIs lest they speak a bit too much in favour of democracy, secularism or constitutional propriety. Off then go their heads (Indian visas) if the conscientious OCIs doth speak too true. Shopkeepers, big businessmen, street-smart deal-makers and even truck-drivers, labourers and sweepers of Indian origin abroad — legit or otherwise — have no such worries from our missions, as most are smitten by the infallible leader and swear by him. Never in Indian history have Indian missions abroad been viewed so strangely like the Chinese or the Russian ones — despite the superb quality of most Indian diplomats and our long tradition of being a plural democracy. They are, after all, being cajoled into this by their former tribal chief, who acts more and more cranky since he was catapulted to the Foreign Minister's hot seat. He was selected precisely because he knows his flock and can ensure — a la Amit Shah — that there ain't no conscientious dissenters in this vast global network, that now spews whatever boss-man wants. Orders are orders — even if they mean glib-talking about Adani's dubious deals in, say, Kenya or Bangladesh — the backlash of both of which India faces today.

One of the biggest irritants that hapless diplomats face nowadays is to work in tandem with the overseas Hindu Right and the 'Friends of India' organisations to round up Indians and fill stadiums when Modi visits. Nothing thrills him more than to address them in massive numbers — amidst wild cheers. Never mind that the expensive jamboree with Trump at Houston in 2019 has more than backfired and the 2023 event in Sydney was a starkly visible flop. Of course, several specific money-only Indian social groups go into raptures at the very sight of the big man. But what about the impression left behind among the citizens and ruling groups in those countries? In many, Indians are usually accused of ghettoising and only chasing wealth, with little participation in community activities and in integrating. Foreigners there are as delighted as (say) Bangaloreans would be if a Bangladeshi ruler addressed huge numbers of legitimate visa-holding Bangladeshis there. Think of the backlash — because our External Affairs Ministry has stopped doing so. It looks stumped when it gets zero friends for any worthy cause.

Indians were usually viewed in western countries as a peaceable, hardworking lot — unlike those from the Middle East. Monotheistic foreigners looked on as Hindus worshipped their multitude of gods — with Hare Krishna being the most prominent. Hinduism was seen as a less pronounced or disruptive foreign religion. Not any more. With the rapid growth of ostentatious, overwhelming Swaminarayan and associated temples everywhere, and the 'big bang' that follows, the older quieter temples like those of Ganesh or Vishnu or Devi have been beaten into obscurity. No one pondered over the impact of extra-loud assertions on foreign soil of a religion that is increasingly being viewed as aggressive and intolerant of the world's two biggest religions. Hindu bashing has just begun and, god forbid, may get worse. The friendly Indian, in fact, the sentimental South Asian community that banded together, is now split into fierce groups — which does not enhance a nation's popularity. Loud protests by a vocal and powerful diaspora that takes umbrage at locals or at other brown people for the slightest insult further alienate foreigners about Indians.

Anti-Indian demonstrations are on the rise — against attacks on minorities in India or for reasons that protestors consider condemnable. These were usually viewed by Indian diplomats as an

occupational hazard. But, nowadays, the sound and ferocity with which each is shouted down by an undiplomatic foreign minister — to please his new Hindu extremist party, its members and the boss — again startles the more diplomatic diplomats. Not a single country or major leader has escaped the wrath of India's current foreign minister— who usually expresses his unduly-aggressive statements in the very countries he visits. One may recall how Nehru's pontifications on the big bad Cold War and the holier-than-thou attitude of Indian leaders and ambassadors were torn apart by both blocs. But now, the world sniggers at India's high flaunting principles and statements on world peace and democracy made by a regime that has the lowest credibility abroad. Not one country is India's friend and even a badly cornered Pakistan has at least three strong supporters— two of which matter a lot.

Trump 2.0 is an unmitigated disaster where India is concerned, but while lesser economies like Canada, Mexico and even Brazil gave him large pieces of their mind — and China outstared and out-dared him — India is viewed as a wimpy cringer. We have no Plan B and we refuse to play the China card to cut him to size. Besides, while the media and parliament in India have been beaten into silence by Modi about China's slaughter of 20 Indian soldiers at Galwan in Ladakh and its continued occupation, the whole world has seen how Modi has shied away from retaliation. He has, in fact, rewarded China thereafter, by almost doubling imports — from \$65 billion in 2020. India's trade deficit with China has surged from \$50 billion to almost \$100 billion. Snapping at other countries at the every provocation is not self assertion, but surrendering economically to China is looked down upon by the informed world — but not by Modi's fans in India and (say) in the USA. India's untenable stand at the UN during the Russian invasion of Ukraine, just because Indian private sector refineries were making a cool additional profit of \$30 billion in 2022-23, was intensely disliked by most countries. India's slimy support to Israel, that is carrying out an extermination programme in Gaza, may be overlooked by obscenely-rich autocratic Sheikhs, but not by conscientious citizens and countries all over the world. Now, we get why India was diplomatically isolated, as never before.

It is puerile even to ask whether there is any chance that the 7 so-called all-party delegations to 32 countries may swing the world in India's favour. Some 59 MPs and others — representing mainly the ruling alliance and establishment, as well as some who play footsie with them, may sing together with a few handpicked opposition MPs during their Vishwa Darshan. But we are stuck where we were. Modi has proved once again that Curzon was a child in the 'divide and rule' game and in one stroke, he has satisfied many whining ruling party loyalists who he could not give ministerial berths. But knowing MPs a bit leads me to believe that heart-burning would lap up the disproportionately meagre cost-benefits of the largest parliamentary exercise in global tourism.

A couple of hours spent by these teams with a handful of 'intellectuals' or 'policy makers' in distant Congo, Guyana or Latvia are unlikely to convince 32 nations to clap for India and against Pakistan. The literal occupation of the Kashmir valley for five years from 2019 rankles just too many, as does the non-stop minority-bashing by cowardly religious fanatics. India's annoying arrogance-cum-swagger, which is well above its weight and strength, is quite clear to most well-read citizens and leaders across the globe. It is India and its leadership at home that has to introspect and make course corrections. Perhaps, Dale Carnegie's immortal *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, now priced at just 120 rupees, may help.

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