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Babri Mosque

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurated on Monday a grand new Hindu temple built on the ruins of a historic mosque in the town of Ayodhya, in a religious spectacle taking place ahead of elections in the country.

The temple, built at an estimated cost of \$217 million, lies atop the debris of the 16th-century Babri Mosque, which was torn down in 1992 by Hindu mobs who believed it was built on temple ruins marking the birthplace of Hinduism’s Lord Ram.

The site has long been a religious flashpoint for the two communities, with the mosque’s demolition sparking communal violence throughout India that left 2,000 people dead, most of them Muslims.

The construction of the temple is a central promise of Modi’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party, and the opening has turned into a massive national event attended by more than 7,000 special guests and watched by millions across the country in various live screenings planned by the government.

“This is the temple of India’s vision, India’s philosophy, India’s direction. This is the temple of national consciousness in the form of Ram,” Modi said in a speech.

“The construction of this temple of Lord Ram is also a symbol of peace, patience, mutual harmony, and coordination of Indian society. We are seeing that this construction is not giving birth to any fire, but to energy.”

Though the temple is still under construction, Monday’s ceremony was widely seen as Modi delivering on a crucial Hindu nationalist pledge and was expected to increase his chances of clinching a record third successive term by drawing on the religious sentiment of Hindus, who make up 80 percent of India’s 1.4 billion population, as the nation heads to elections between April and May this year.

The Ram temple has also sparked concerns over the future of secularism in India.

“We have lost the constitutional way of life. We have by all practical purposes declared that we are no longer a secular state and that means the end of rule of law, that also means the end of democracy because Modi has been behaving more in monarchical fashion,”. India, with Modi as its head, was “no longer a secular state,” said Nilanjan Mukhopadhyay, who wrote the book on the Lord Ram temple project titled “The Demolition, The Verdict, and The Temple.”

“The construction of Ram temple cannot be a moment of glory for Muslims, Christians, and Sikhs. It’s meant for Hindus, and the BJP will go to Hindus and ask for rewards and the rewards are votes.

Pak-China meet on Future of CPEC - II

Efforts will include public-private partnerships, comprehensive geological surveys, and international technical collaborations. This approach aims to bring substantial foreign investment and advanced mining technologies to Pakistan. The exploitation of these mineral reserves is expected to significantly boost Pakistan’s GDP, spur new industrial sectors, and lead towards energy self-sufficiency, setting the country on a path towards a diversified and robust economic landscape.

Hopefully, the meeting will also focus on exploitation of Pakistan’s extensive coastline along the Arabian Sea, a gateway to untapped economic opportunities, poised for transformation through CPEC-2 and SIFC. This coastline, strategically situated on major shipping routes, holds immense potential for boosting maritime trade and shipping industries, both cargo and passenger.

Additionally, the region’s natural beauty offers significant prospects for tourism development, from luxury resorts to eco-tourism. The fertile marine life along the coast presents opportunities for a sustainable fishing industry, capable of bolstering food

security and export revenues. However, tapping into this wealth requires considerable investment in infrastructure, sustainable practices, and an integrated approach to coastal development.

CPEC-2 and SIFC are ideally positioned to catalyze this transformation. They can drive infrastructure development by building advanced harbor facilities, upgrading existing ports, and establishing new maritime routes.

developing Pakistan’s coastal areas could be profound. It promises not only enhanced economic growth through trade, tourism, and fisheries but also a significant upliftment of local communities. The creation of a myriad of job opportunities across sectors will lead to improved living standards and community development. Furthermore, a vibrant coastal economy will bolster Pakistan’s international standing as a key mari-

ing the natural allure of its coastline.

The 4th meeting of the CPEC Joint Working Group, occurring at a pivotal moment just before Pakistan’s 2024 general elections, holds substantial significance. The decisions to accelerate the progress of both CPEC-1 and CPEC-2 are crucial, as these projects are increasingly seen as the backbone for Pakistan’s future economic prosperity. With a strong focus on enhancing the country’s financial and economic status through infrastructural, industrial, and technological development, these initiatives are expected to lay a robust foundation for the incoming government.

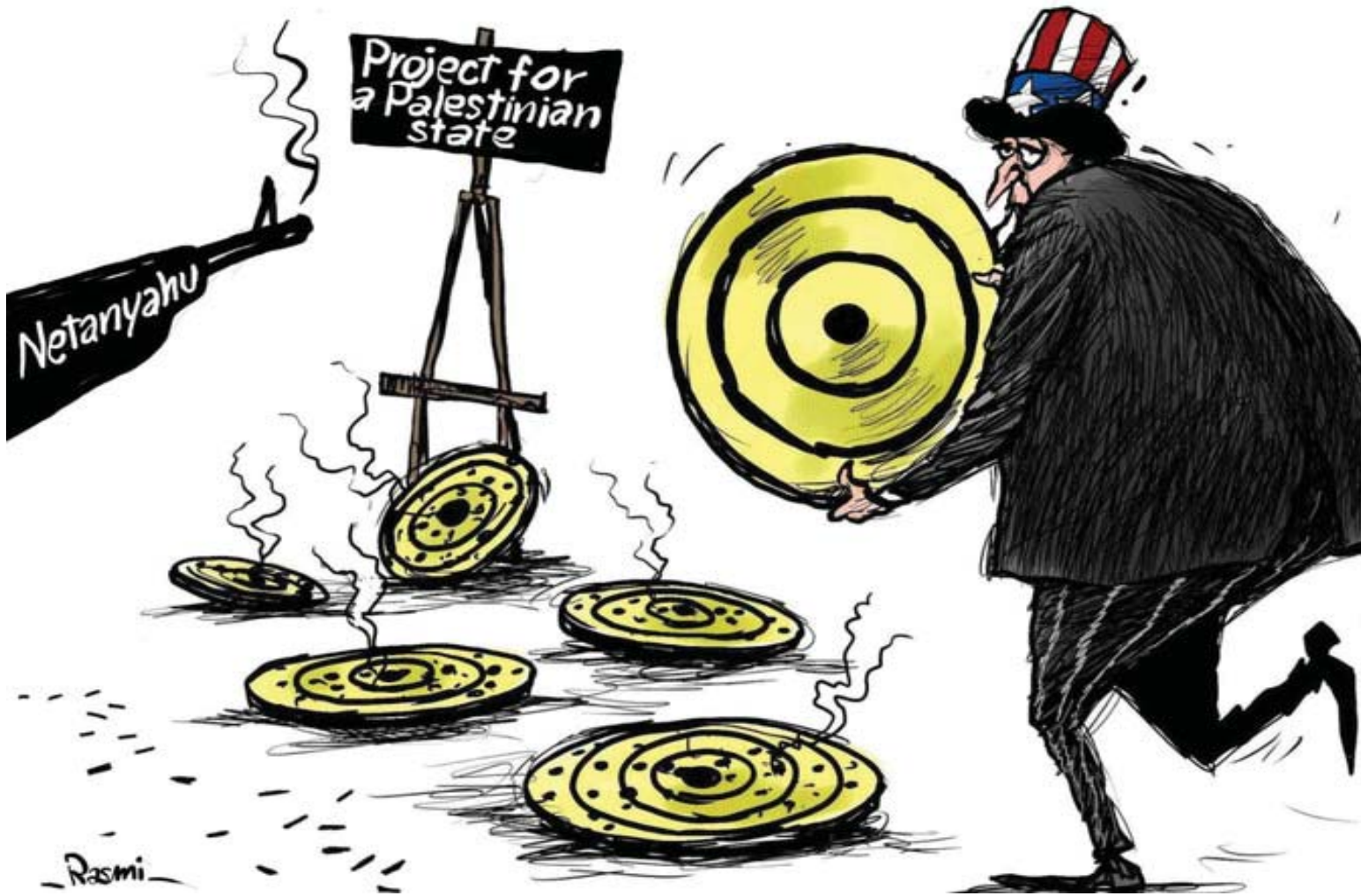
This groundwork promises to offer an advantageous starting point for the new administration, which will have the opportunity to propel these initiatives forward. Leveraged by the collective wisdom and intellectual contributions of representatives from across Pakistan, the new government will be well-positioned to elevate these projects to new heights, thereby catalyzing a significant qualitative and quantitative uplift in the lives of the Pakistani people.

Writer is former Press Secretary to the President, Former Press Minister at Embassy of Pakistan to France, Former MD, SRBC

Analysis



Qamar Bashir



Cartoon by Amjad Rasmī. (Courtesy of Asharq Al-Awsat)

Mature Response on Iranian Aggression - I

Pakistan, endowed with a strategic geopolitical position and a wealth of cultural heritage, has consistently played a pivotal role in international diplomacy. Over time, the nation has exhibited notable diplomatic acumen in navigating intricate global challenges, forging alliances, and contributing to regional peace and stability.

Actively fostering strategic partnerships worldwide, Pakistan has cultivated particularly strong ties with China, resulting in a robust economic and strategic collaboration, exemplified by the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a flagship project under the Belt and Road Initiative. In addition to this, Pakistan has maintained enduring alliances with nations like Saudi Arabia, Turkey, and the United States, skillfully balancing relations in a complex international landscape.

Pakistan’s diplomatic endeavors have frequently focused on promoting peaceful resolutions to regional conflicts. The nation has played a pivotal role in facilitating talks between the Afghan government and the Taliban, aiming to bring stability to Afghanistan. Moreover, Pakistan has advocated for dialogue between India and Pakistan to address longstanding disputes, emphasizing the significance of diplomacy over confrontation.

A key pillar of Pakistan’s foreign diplomacy lies in its commitment to global counterterrorism efforts. Actively participating in international collaborations, Pakistan shares intelligence and coordinates efforts with various countries. The nation’s sacrifices in the fight against terrorism have gained recognition from the international community, underscoring its responsible role in addressing global security challenges.

Pakistani troops have a strong tradition of contributing to international peacekeeping missions under the United Nations, deploying to conflict zones worldwide to provide stability and support conflict resolution efforts. This reflects Pakistan’s steadfast commitment to global peace and security.

The humanitarian dimension of Pakistan’s diplomacy is evident in its response to various crises. Actively

participating in providing humanitarian assistance to countries affected by natural disasters, conflicts, and health emergencies, Pakistan has solidified its standing as a compassionate and responsible global actor.

Economic diplomacy holds a central position in Pakistan’s foreign relations strategy. Actively seeking foreign investments, trade partnerships, and economic collaborations, the country engages in regional and global forums such as the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) to create a conducive environment for economic development.

Effectively leveraging its soft power, including rich cultural heritage, arts, and literature, Pakistan has employed cultural diplomacy initiatives like exchange programs, film festivals, and educational partnerships to showcase its diversity and foster understanding among different cultures.

Pakistan consistently demonstrates a mature and civilized demeanor in its interactions on the global stage. The approach of a civilized nation to foreign relations reflects its dedication to diplomacy, collaboration, and responsible global citizenship. A mature foreign relations strategy is marked by a nuanced comprehension of international dynamics, a commitment to peace, and a focus on collaborative solutions to worldwide challenges.

Pakistan is recognized as a peaceful nation that refrains from interfering in the affairs of other countries. The country’s campaign against terrorism has been a multifaceted and intricate endeavor influenced by both domestic and international factors. Positioned as a frontline state in the global fight against terrorism, Pakistan has encountered numerous challenges, but it has also made substantial progress in addressing extremism and fostering regional stability.

Pakistan’s involvement in the anti-terrorism effort traces back to the 1980s Soviet-Afghan War, where it played a crucial role in supporting the Afghan resistance against Soviet occupation. However, the aftermath saw the emergence of extremist elements in the region, finding refuge and backing in the porous border

regions between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The events of September 11, 2001, marked a pivotal moment for Pakistan’s role in global counter-terrorism. In response to international pressure and recognizing the threat to its own stability, Pakistan became a key ally in the War on Terror. This decision resulted in heightened military operations and counter-terrorism measures within Pakistan’s borders.

Several military operations, including Zarb-e-Azb and Radd-ul-Fasaad, were conducted to eliminate terrorist sanctuaries and dismantle their infrastructure in tribal areas and urban centers, respectively. These efforts significantly degraded the operational capabilities of various militant groups. In recognizing the necessity for a comprehensive approach, Pakistan implemented socio-economic and educational reforms to address the root causes of extremism. Initiatives focused on poverty alleviation, education, and employment opportunities aimed to create an environment less conducive to the recruitment of individuals into terrorist organizations.

Pakistan actively sought international cooperation in its fight against terrorism, collaborating with neighboring countries, particularly Afghanistan, and engaging in information-sharing with global partners. Despite occasional challenges in relations with the United States and Afghanistan, Pakistan remains dedicated to regional stability and countering transnational terrorist threats.

However, the war against terrorism in Pakistan has not been without challenges. Internal challenges include the existence of terrorist safe havens, a complex socio-political landscape, and the necessity for sustained economic development. External factors, such as strained relations with neighboring India and Afghanistan, have occasionally impeded collaborative efforts. The future of Pakistan’s anti-terrorism efforts hinges on sustained actions across multiple domains, including continued military operations, intelligence sharing, regional cooperation, and addressing root causes such as poverty and lack of education. As geopolitical dynamics evolve, maintaining a delicate balance in international relations will be crucial for Pakistan’s success in countering terrorism.

To be continued

Steady Environment: Peace Education as the Bedrock of Pakistan’s Economic Future - II

Dr. Muhammad Shahzad Ashfaq

When individuals have access to quality healthcare, adequate nutrition, and other necessities, they are better equipped to lead productive lives. Good health acts as a catalyst for economic growth by reducing absenteeism, increasing worker productivity, and lowering healthcare expenses. Moreover, societies that prioritize healthcare can better ease the impact of pandemics, epidemics, and other health crises enabling them to sustain economic activities even in difficult times.

Education is the cornerstone of societal development and economic growth. Investments in education facilitate the development of human capital, fostering innovation, and encouraging creativity. By offering quality education to all members of society, a nation expands its talent pool, improves workforce skills, and attracts investment. This creates an environment conducive for innovation and entrepreneurship leading to economic diversification and a higher standard of living for its citizens. As we move forward, it is crucial for policymakers, businesses, and citizens to recognize the vital role played by societal well-being in fostering economic develop-

ment. When a majority of citizens have access to economic opportunities, they become active participants in the economy-driving consumer spending innovation, and entrepreneurship. By ensuring the well-being of citizens, societies can create the necessary conditions for growth, innovation, and sustainability.

Pakistan’s economic future lies in a steady environment, free from the shackles of violence and conflict. Peace education, as the bedrock of this environment, offers a comprehensive framework for fostering understanding, tolerance, and conflict resolution skills among individuals. By incorporating peace education into the national curriculum, Pakistan can thrive economically attracting investment. By investing in renewable energy sources, reducing carbon emissions, and adopting sustainable practices, a nation can mitigate the impact of climate change on its economy. This leads to long-term stability and resilience, ensuring economic prosperity for future generations. Moreover, peace education creates a society that actively works towards inclusive growth and equal opportunities for all its citizens. Therefore, it is crucial that Pakistan takes the necessary steps to prioritize peace education as it paves the way for a prosperous and peaceful future.

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