

India and New Zealand : Reeling Strategic Relationship Across 13000 Kilometres

Major Malay Mishra@

Introduction

Few would know that in Gallipoli¹, it was also the blood of Indian sons that marked the historic event for eternity. More than 1300 Indian soldiers laid down their lives and about 4500 got injured while fighting on the same side as that of New Zealand (NZ) and Australia. Even fewer would know that the Royal NZ Naval vessel Achilles which had fought in the battle of River Plate was refitted as INS Delhi and served thence for decades. It would be of interest to know that NZ teaches and discusses Kautilya's Arthashastra with great seriousness in its strategic circles. India and NZ are bonded by history.²

India and New Zealand Relations: A Glance

The relations between NZ and India have been warm, cordial and long-standing. We share Commonwealth heritage, Westminster governance, English as common language, democratic traditions and hugely popular cricket links. Gandhi is admired equally well in New Zealand as Sir Edmund Hillary is in India. Bilateral relations have enjoyed the warmth not only recently but also during the times of prime-ministership of Walter Nash, Norman Clark and, of course, that of David Lange, whose period is regarded as the peak in mutual ties. However, beyond cricket, commonwealth and curry, there lies in plenty for readers of contemporary history.

"I am delighted to introduce the New Zealand Inc India Strategy....This strategy is the first. India is emerging as an Asian Superpower and New Zealand needs to make the most of the opportunities it provides for the future." 3 - Rt Hon John Key, Prime Minister NZ in 2011

'Opening Doors to India - New Zealand Inc India Strategy'⁴, released in Oct 2011 by the Prime Minister John Key is going to be the cornerstone of the developing mutual relations. It outlines its vision for India to become its core trade, economic and political partner by 2015. Importance attached can be gauged by the fact that it is the first of the series of all-of-government strategies. The strategy has six broad goals viz : trade, export, mutual investment, retaining skill migrants, ties on regional and global security issues and raising NZ profile. Each merits a deeper evaluation.

Reeling Relations: Sector Wise Analysis

Trade and Economic relations are the main driver of all international relations in this rapidly changing 21st century. Both nations sit poised to compliment perfectly by this arrangement. India is a land of limitless opportunities and NZ can be a great provider and participant. India is a rising, resilient and the predicted-to-be third largest economy by 2025, largely insulated against the global financial crisis due to domestic driven factors and provides huge consumer market.⁵ According to the McKinsey report,⁶ by 2030, there will be 590 million people in Indian cities, nearly twice the population of the US today and an increase of 270 million in the number of working age people. Further, 68 cities will have a population of one million plus, up from 42 today. Europe has 42 today. This demands \$1.2 trillion to meet projected demand in Indian cities. Thus three quarters of India's consumer market in 2025 does not exist today and is up for grabs. About 700 to 900 square kilometres of commercial and residential space needs to be built, a new Chicago, every year. In the bargain, New Zealand's immense expertise in this field, in addition to traditional fields of wood and wool, are going to be invaluable to India, like agro-technology, food processing, supply chain, clean energy and sports technology. Mutual trade presently stands at \$1.1 billion⁷ with \$725 million and \$398 million as NZ export and import respectively, which is low vis-à-vis its global profile. Free Trade Agreement between two countries, whose negotiations are underway, promises to take mutual exchanges to new heights.

No trade can survive without healthy people-to-people connect. A plenty is on the table for both to realise this dream. Educational exchanges are growing strength to strength, courtesy a joint initiative called India-New Zealand Education Council (INZEC). India is a quality source of students and NZ is a responsible provider of quality education with assured safety. India sends about 12000 students annually, second largest contributor.⁸ Tapping skilled migrants from India, as targeted in the vision 2015, is also a win-win supposition. Complimentarily, what is in surplus in India, can address the shortages in New Zealand. India has surplus of ICT-enabled professionals, willing to venture out abroad which NZ software companies would happily embrace.⁹ 0.1 million strong Indian community in NZ forms the base for furthering all such initiatives. Tourism is another chapter of successful story. The number is rising sharply, 30000 in 2011,¹⁰ and thus contributing to the most important economic activity of New Zealand. The jump from 19th position to now 10th largest tourist arrivals from India is a welcome sign. Bollywood, Indian film Industry, has popularised NZ as one of the most favourite tourist-cum-honeymoon destination for middle class Indians, whose number is rising significantly. Amusingly, sweltering Indian summers of 'April-June', which throws out tourists humming for cooler climes fits well for NZ. Bollywood serves more than one purpose. It is world's largest producer of the films, about 1300 in a year, more than double the number of Hollywood's 485 and shoots many of the beautiful dance/ romance sequences in NZ thus raising its country profile.¹¹

Strategic Domain

At strategic level, turn of the century has opened newer realms of cooperation. We are committed to collective security and global peace and multilateral response to these challenges. There exist numerous fields of convergence of interests as described in the succeeding paras.

Asia-Pacific region is one point of convergence where we attach similar importance as this region holds nearly 60 per cent of the global GDP, is home to nearly four billion people out of the world's six billion, and where almost 50 per cent of the world's sea trade passes through the choke points of its archipelagic waters. Its vital economic significance lends itself to the newer forms of rivalry and non-traditional security threats like terrorism, piracy etc. Existing territorial disputes and rise of assertive China has infused new dynamics to the region. We, as common members in various regional fora, work together towards the regional peace such as in ASEAN+6, ASEAN Regional

Forum (ARF) and more recently East Asia Summit and Asia Pacific Community. India strategically sits to dominate the sea lanes where more than 80 per cent of the oil imports of the energy hungry China passes through. "Pivot policy"¹² by the US and perceived role therein for India as 'lynchpin' has brought India as an important player in the region, thus giving greater latitude for New Zealand to accelerate mutual relations. India and New Zealand have taken lead in ARF to initiate dialogue and cooperation on security aspects and their quest for ASEAN based suitable security architecture has led to the formation of ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus Eight Forum. We together, with impeccable track record, would certainly bring wings of peace in the turbulent waters of Asia-Pacific.

India's extended 'Look East Policy'¹³ underscores major shift in its perspective of the region and also shoulders common commitments in the Pacific. India became a dialogue partner in 'Pacific Islands forum' (PIF) in 2003 where its 'Regional Assistance Initiative' with NZ focuses on multilateral assistance to islands such as capacity building, economy, energy and technological aid. PIF is a right forum for both countries to realise vision for sustainable development in the region.

Afghanistan after 2014 is also a shared concern.¹⁴ While New Zealand has contributed immensely to its reconstruction as part of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), by positioning Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Bamyán and with other logistic support, India too has heavily invested in various capacities. Both hope to see a stable and secure Afghanistan. We also utilise other multilateral platforms, like the UN, Commonwealth, WTO and IMF to voice common concerns on key international issues like terrorism, maritime security, trade and environment.

Defence cooperation has been an unexplored territory. World's third largest military of India, approximately 1.3 million strong, has much to learn from a modern, high-tech, well equipped, trained and network-enabled military of NZ. India can offer practical hands-on experience from its rich history of multispectral combat including, four full-fledged conventional wars in all kinds of terrain and full-time sub-conventional wars including counterterrorism operations. Current interaction is restricted to respective navies through port calls, naval symposium or visits through Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) that provides new leverage for shared commitment in the Indian Ocean. Strong common commitment to peace support missions brings us together. India, with about 8000 personnel deployed, has been one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping with constant signature for last six decades. Multiple deployment of over 260 personnel world over by New Zealand Defence Force as compared to its relatively small size is really significant. This rich experience in peacekeeping on both sides presents itself as a good beginner.

However strategy-domain and research can be one bonding factor. This factor came as a pleasant surprise during the strategic studies domain while the author was attending the Command and Staff College Course in New Zealand, wherein an unanticipated inclusion of "Kautilya's Arthashastra" was an eye-opener. It was inconceivable that Kautilya as master strategist and his postulates would be discussed in strategic circles with such seriousness 13000 km away from its homeland India where this resource is touched perhaps only scantily. A simple research on Kautilya's postulates, it can be said with certainty that we have a great deal to learn from his work which is not only comparable but also superior in many regards than the works of Machiavelli and Sun Tzu. His concepts of Shadgunya based foreign policy, Saptanga-theory on state and axioms on war are as applicable today in the contemporary world as they were two millennia ago. This opens a new field of developing strategic relations between the two nations. Kautilya's teachings in his masterpiece across fifteen books covers aspects like strategy, grand-strategy, war, preparing for war, proxy wars, silent wars, insurgency, strategic intelligence, national-power and so on. They must surely be attended to at every level of statecraft in a befitting manner.

Conclusion

The strength of India-NZ relations is deep rooted and takes strength from deep mutual understanding. Having a partner in NZ, provides India, an effective way to further its expanding strategic interests which very much coincide with Wellington's desire for growing presence in the Indo-Pacific region. It should serve as a common thread for Indo-NZ relations in the future, although there will be challenges such as occasional differences in perception of global issues. Given India's burgeoning geopolitical and economic interests eastwards on one hand, and NZ's adage of 'isolation, not insulation' and commitment to collective security, on the other, there exists potential for boundless scripts to be written together.

Endnotes

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@ **Major Malay Mishra** was commissioned into 4th Battalion the Jat Regiment (4 JAT) on 08 Jun 2002. He has served in the UN Peacekeeping Force in Sudan from Jun 2010 to Jul 2011. Presently, he is attending the Command and Staff College Course in New Zealand.

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