

# **Analysis of Foreign Media Perception of Narendra Modi and the BJP government**

By

Kushagr Sharma



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SPMRF has attracted young scholars and students who have always chosen its encouraging environ and focus on research for undergoing internship. This summer, a number of students interned with SPMRF. Kushagr Sharma, from the University of Leicester, undertook a study of the perception of the BJP, Narendra Modi and the BJP led NDA government in the foreign media. He has done the analysis in a narrative form and has succeeded in giving an idea of how he perceives and reads the foreign media's understanding of Prime Minister Modi and of the BJP, its world view and politics. Kushagr argues that the media perception in the West has evolved and changed and it is poised to further alter positively. He also argues that some ideologically driven and politically biased media outlets in the West will keep propagating negatively but Prime Minister's Modi's positive agenda of governance will effectively counter these. I commend Kushagr and his sincere effort in putting together this report as part of his summer internship with SPMRF.

**Dr. Anirban Ganguly**  
**Director, SPMRF**

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## Foreword

India has never figured high in the spaces of the foreign print and electronic media, and the occasional publicity it got often had to do with negative news such as dowry deaths, rapes and social discrimination. The foreign Press may have moved on from its image of India as a land of snake-charmers and elephants, but it has been rare that the country was seen as being worthy of being discussed in the same breath as the western nations, be it in the area of politics or economics or science. But over the years, perceptions have been changing with India emerging among the fastest growing economies, rising in the region as an important strategic player and laying claim to a bigger voice in international relations. The foreign media, especially the west-based ones, gave copious space to the India-US civil nuclear deal of 2008. But then, soon after, India fell into disrepute as scams of monumental proportions began to tumble out of the then government's cupboard, paralysis hit policy-making, investor sentiment dipped to dangerous levels and a general sense of despondency seized the country. The foreign Press duly reflected the decline.

As the Congress-led coalition government battled the negativity with futility, it became clear to all, including the foreign media that the 2014 Lok Sabha election will throw up a new party and a new leader in power. Then Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi and his party, the BJP, emerged as the alternative. With the BJP's emphatic victory and Modi's ascension to Prime Ministership, the foreign media revived its interest in Indian affairs. Interestingly, the first time in 20 years that the foreign Press had showed real interest in India was when the BJP government led by AB Vajpayee had conducted nuclear tests. But that publicity was largely negative, though in time to come, India proved her credentials as a responsible nuclear power.

Modi and the BJP's tryst with the foreign media has been one of a roller-coaster ride. After the 2002 Gujarat violence, Modi became persona non grata for most western nations, and it was rare to find something good written about him in the western media, despite the remarkable governance he provided to Gujarat as chief minister. Given this background, the changeover in the foreign media about Modi that we see today is almost a miracle.

This research paper traces the relationship between the BJP & Modi and the foreign Press over the years, from the earlier lows to the present highs. It also seeks to understand the mindset of the global media, and what motivated

them to take positions that were often based on innuendo and less on material evidence. It also attempts to place the present turnaround in their positions (though there still are foreign media houses that continue to revile Modi and the BJP as they are hopelessly shackled to dated beliefs and presumptions) in the context of the aggressive global diplomacy Modi has undertaken since assuming power in May 2014.

The foreign media has been, if reluctantly in some cases, coming around to acknowledging India's growing stature and its unapologetic self-confidence which is presently being forcefully projected globally by the Narendra Modi regime. The analysis presented in the following pages will prove to be a useful guide in the endeavour to understanding the shift.

**Rajesh Singh**

Senior journalist and commentator

New Delhi

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I would also like to thank Mr. Rajesh Singh, a senior journalist and former Opinion Editor of the daily, The Pioneer. His expertise, insight and experience all played an overwhelming part in the paper and greatly improved the manuscript.

I would also like to thank Shri Mahendra Pandey, BJP Office Secretary of the national headquarters. His continued support, guidance and blessings have resulted in the completion of this research paper.

Lastly I want to thank everyone I may have missed and anyone who is reading this paper. I hope this paper helps your understanding of how Shri Narendra Modi and BJP are portrayed outside Bharat. Finally, I hope you enjoy the research and learn something new.

Thank you,

**Kushagr Sharma**

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## Snapshot of Research Paper

This research paper will look at how Narendra Modi and BJP are portrayed outside India with an emphasis particularly on the west. In much more particular the introduction of each to the western media will be looked at first. This will then be followed by the development of portrayals and finally the future will be looked at. It is clear that some portions of the media are heavily influenced by certain political ideologies. This will also be briefly looked at. As the west is the leader and quite influential in the world in terms of shaping images, the focus of this analysis will be on the western media. The Hindu philosophy of life encourages critical questioning and debates unlike totalitarian ideologies. Therefore, I welcome and encourage constructive criticisms and fact based debates.

## Introduction

**O**n June 8<sup>th</sup> 2016, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi gave a speech to the US Congress. This was not the first speech given in the Congress by an Indian PM. Neither was it the first time PM Modi spoke in English or the first time he visited the US. However, this was indeed the first time that such an Indian leader got 50 clapping ovations and 7 standing ovations for such a speech. This was also the first time that a leader with such charisma, vision combined with a resounding mandate represented India to US. Even though Modi may not have got as big a media attention as his European counterparts, the media gave significant attention to Modi. Modi was projected by many as the bold leader looking to change India-American relationship forever. This new portrayal is very historical and different for the country of India. PM Modi and his ruling party, the BJP, have come a long way in the way they are portrayed by America. However, it is important to note that the BJP and Modi were not always presented in the best light. This research paper will look at the development of the portrayal of not only BJP but Modi in the west by the media. While Modi can travel the world, say the right things, do the right things and make the nation proud, it is the foreign media which plays a significant role in strengthening the image of India. In a perfect world this shouldn't be a problem as the media *should* portray the events as they happen, not showing them in a different light under their personal agenda. Unfortunately, certain portions of the media indeed have a personal agenda.

## Introduction of BJP to the Foreign Media

To look at the history of BJP, it is important to first start with Bharatiya Jana Sangh. The BJP's predecessor was the Jana Sangh established by Dr Syama Prasad Mookerjee. Unfortunately, the Jana Sangh didn't get enough time to develop to be big enough to grab any media attention of the west. However, in the wake of the Indira Gandhi imposed Emergency in 1975, there was a unification of anti-Indira Gandhi parties, creating the Janata Party. In 1977 the Janata party came into power with a big mandate defeating Indira's Congress. Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the leader of Jana Sangh and future Prime Minister, was given the post of Foreign Minister; while another leader LK Advani was also made a minister. This government came into the eyes of the foreign media as this was the first time India had seen a non-Congress party government. It is important to note that 1977 was a completely different era from that of today. At that point in time the world, after seeing the end of Second World War was in the middle of the Cold War. This meant every country in the world was seen as either a communist sympathiser for the Soviets or a pro-capitalist sympathiser for the west. Despite India openly making a declaration of non-alliance, India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, and Indira Gandhi later, were seen as sympathisers of the USSR. This meant India was seen as pro-communist with the west looking down upon the great nation. The Bangladesh war had further strained the relationship between the US and India.

With the Janata Party Government coming into power, the west saw a possibility of evolving a fresh terms of engagement with India. As foreign minister, that year Vajpayee became the first person to deliver a speech to the United Nations General Assembly in Hindi. The Janata party also opened up to the US with President Jimmy Carter making an official state visit to India. Despite the Janata Party government's short tenure, it had made its mark in a positive light. The Jana Sangh may not have gotten the spotlight it deserved but had nevertheless been introduced to the public as a more neutral and India-first party.

As the Janata Party decommissioned, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) was formed on April 6<sup>th</sup> 1980. The BJP first came to the attention of the western media in 1991. With Advani's historical Rath Yatra the BJP was able to get a full mandate in the Uttar Pradesh and a significant tally in Parliament. Advani organised another rally in Ayodhya with 1,50,000 supporters. This time in the heat of the moment the crowd dismayed and demolished the illegally built structure. This event did not play well with the western media as BJP was given the image of a hardliner/extremist party despite no evidence showing any BJP member taking part in the demolition. Luckily this issue was not blown up big enough as the west was not directly affected by it.

However, the first true introduction of the BJP to the media came in 1998. This was also not a good period for India. India had seen 8 different governments during a span of only 10 years. When the BJP formed a minority government in the election of 1998 there was still a perception of India being a broken country. Therefore, not much attention was being paid on India. However, just months after the general election, PM Vajpayee followed his election promises with a nuclear missile test in Pokhran. This test effectively brought the world to its knees. BJP suddenly became a part of every headline in the world. India had conducted the test in such secrecy that the Americans called it their greatest intelligence lapse ever. The CIA said they only learned of the tests after Vajpayee announced its success.

But this did not help the image of BJP in the west. The west was still recovering from the effects of the Cold War and was suddenly faced with a threat of nuclear arms race and warfare. Also, thanks to the Nehru-Indira affair with the USSR as mentioned beforehand, India was seen as a Russian sympathiser. Naturally when the nuclear test happened this was not seen as something beneficial by the west. Newspapers in the west all started attacking India. *BBC* wrote "Third World joins the nuclear club"<sup>1</sup>, *Financial Times* called it a "nuclear fallout".

The worst effects of the western world's spotlight were the sanctions imposed by countries like Canada, Japan and the US. When India had previously conducted tests in 1974, the economy was closed, meaning the nation could easily deal with sanctions. However, in the 90s, the economy had opened up and was becoming freer. This meant that sanctions would have a greater adverse impact on the country's economy. Despite the heavy sanctions, the BJP government managed well. It seems that the western countries had forgotten that with 1.2 billion people, India has a bigger population than North

America and the European Union put together. This means, despite GDP numbers, India had and still does have quite a large economy. This was quite the reason why India did not crumble under sanctions. Another reason for the relative ineffectiveness of the sanctions was the fact that only 4.0% of the GDP were imports and exports. All sanctions were therefore lifted within 5 years.

In the US the centre-left *New York Times* also called out BJP by saying it was a “Hindu Nationalist party unwilling to give into international pressure”<sup>2</sup>. In much more particular the BJP was hit out as being a group of individuals willing to do anything possible to make the country a superpower. In short the BJP was portrayed as a bunch of ludicrous fanatics not true conservatives/nationalists like the Republican Party in the US. This is a tag that has stuck on for a long time and is even prevalent today as western journalists try to sketchily understand the BJP. While Vajpayee and the BJP worked to give India a lot more power, this was seen as a threatening move by the west. Overall the BJP did not have a good first impression on the western media. Surprisingly Vajpayee was seen as a moderate through the eyes of more political-centre news outlets such as CNN due to his previous dealing under foreign minister.<sup>3</sup> This tag helped the image a little bit.

## Introduction of Narendra Modi to the west

The introduction of Modi to the west comes right after the introduction of the BJP in the light of Pokhran nuclear tests. In the early years Modi was a big worker behind the scenes who played a huge part for the BJP and before that for the RSS especially during the Emergency period. This resulted in his rising within the rank all the way up to Chief Minister of Gujarat.

There was nothing on Narendra Modi in the media before he became CM. However, as Modi came into the spotlight, only 4 months into his rule Godhra and subsequent served brought him into focus in the western media. A violent incident in Godhra happened, where Hindu *karsevaks* alongside women and children were burnt alive in a targeted attack. This event triggered the Gujarat violence of 2002. Ignoring the volatile history of riots in Gujarat as well as the quick response from the Modi government, which had peace restored in 24 hours, the western media was quick to paint Modi in negative light. The media narrative on Modi increased in its shrillness and portrayed him as an intolerant

and insensitive leader. There obvious biases in these descriptions but sustained propaganda by a number of news outlets forced the EU, US and UK to issue travel bans on him. It is strange to then see these countries banning Modi for human rights violations, when they forgot that one of the principles of human rights is the right to justice, meaning an individual is innocent until proven guilty by a court of law. The courts have cleared Modi numerous times of any wrongdoing in the riots. While many newspapers acknowledge this, there are still some left-wing newspapers who continue to blame Modi for the riots, like *The Guardian* and the Qatar based *Al-Jazeera*. This issue of the media will be looked at later on.

## Development of BJP and Modi from Introduction to present

### Pre-election

Over the years not only did Modi win multiple elections but more importantly also strengthened Gujarat's economy, evolving what is now referred to as the Gujarat Model. While Modi was rising, the BJP was recalibrating itself at the Centre post Vajpayee's retirement.

With two back-to-back losses, BJP needed a change at the leadership level. Many started suggesting the name of Narendra Modi as a potential prime ministerial candidate. While many party workers were very supportive of Modi being the official party PM candidate, this was not met with full support from the party's allies. The media reported that some parties were afraid of losing their Muslim vote-bank while others did not think Narendra Modi was the perfect candidate to bring the party back into power. This theory started to gain strength when Nitish Kumar left the NDA alliance and another ally, the Shiv Sena, was reported to be unhappy with the nomination of Narendra Modi. However, the high support from key leaders like Rajnath Singh, Arun Jaitley and Nitin Gadkari, as well as the overwhelming support from party workers, were the deciding factors. This paved the way for Modi to enter the national stage and contest the 2014 general election as the BJP prime ministerial candidate.

However, the struggles did not end there as the media changed its tune from not getting the nomination to not winning the election. The usual left-

wing outlets like *The Guardian* and *New York Times* among others, continued with headlines like 'Modi Mass Murderer', and 'Hindu Supremacist' effectively ignoring the truth. However, the politically centre and right-wing outlets promoted Modi as the future leader India needed. American outlets like *Wall Street Journal* applauded the choice of Narendra Modi by the BJP who predicted a "historic moment for BJP" and 'unprecedented change'.<sup>4</sup>

### **Immediate post-election**

Immediately after the conclusion of the election the stock market soared with investment going up with positive expectations for market. This was mainly due to long term investors expecting the markets to rise on the longer run under a pro-business BJP/Modi Government. The positive press continued with right-wing outlets like *National Review* predicting Modi to be the Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan of India.<sup>5</sup> Fox News was also quite supportive of PM Modi and portrayed him in a positive light by having academics like Jeff M Smith, Director of Asian Security Programs and the Kraemer Strategy Fellow, who portrayed Modi as the great leader who would take US-India relations to new heights.

### **Effects of the trips abroad**

The biggest increase in bolstering the image of India, BJP and Modi came in the wake of the trip that PM made abroad. These cynically mocked by his critics. The question prominently asked is: Why does the PM Modi need to travel abroad so much? The answer is because of business. India needs to develop a strong relationship with the world, now more than ever. As the economy is opening up more, the need to undertake foreign trips by the Prime Ministers is very important to shape the perceptions of the country.

The Prime Minister, by travelling abroad, has the chance to portray the country in a certain way as the attention is on that one individual. Modi's trips exceeded expectations as they were nothing short of spectacular. It is very uncommon for the Prime Minister of a visiting country, attract thousands of people who fill up stadiums with thousands of supporters and address them passionately for an hour. Politicians in the west are not accustomed to speaking like Modi, as they speak for 10-15 minutes straight, that too in front of much smaller crowds. These two things were quite astonishing for the media which had never seen a politician get such a rock star welcome.

Headlines from trips read, 'India's new prime minister took on rock star status', PM Modi makes historic speech'. People across the world saw an image of not only PM Modi but India as well. The trip also caused severe confusion for the left-wing media outlets which attempted to focus not on the brilliance and crowd inside but on a handful, "protesting" outside against the apparent tyranny happening in India. Nevertheless, the benefits of the trips were enormous.

Apart from the media, it is also important to look at how certain NGOs portrayed Modi and the BJP. NGOs are very important as they are also responsible for shaping the image alongside the media. Recently, the government made an unprecedented move to ban certain number of NGOs who were not complying with regulations. NGO's banned or prohibited by India have had no effect on its image. For example, Greenpeace which was banned last year is already seen as an environmental extremist/terrorist group by many.

If anything India showed that it shall not tolerate these towards these extremist groups. Modi has done a very good job to woo US NGOs. For example, his recent trip included a meeting with the prominent think tanks of the US. These think tanks have an immense amount of influence in the news and political world in the US. While it takes a long time to get think tanks to favour you, this is still a very good start to a relationship. Other US NGOs like New York Global Leaders Dialogue<sup>6</sup> proclaimed that Modi's visits had a 'global impact'. PM Modi took 57 days to cover 18 countries (new trips not taken into account). That means there are 18 countries which now have a better view of the nation as a result of PM Modi. This fact is supported by every country having at the very least something positive to say about the trips of Modi. Also each visit has also resulted in some sort of bilateral benefit. These trips have revamped the image of Modi and BJP the most. Today's image of BJP and Modi is not the same one associated in the initial struggles. Today BJP and Modi are seen as the best ally of the west. Below is a list of countries PM Modi has visited with local news headlines and benefits of the trip.

## Table on Country Visited + Some Local Headlines + Benefit

Country Visited	Local News Headlines	Trip Benefit
Bhutan	<p>“Thousands greet India's PM Narendra Modi upon arrival”</p> <p>“PM Modi’s historical visit” – Bhutan News Service</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• India will invest in the building of Supreme Court and four hydro electric plant.</li> <li>• India will receive some electricity from these plants.</li> </ul>
Brazil	<p>ÍNDIA-IOGA: A diplomacia da ioga (INDIA-YOGA: Yoga diplomacy) - Eplais</p> <p>Visita ao Brasil do Primeiro-Ministro da República da Índia ( Visit to Brazil of the Prime Minister of the Republic of India) – Itamarty</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Development of new bank called New Development bank (NDB) as an alternative to World Bank and IMF</li> </ul>
Nepal	<p>Indian Prime Minister Modi concludes historic visit to Nepal</p> <p>Nepal, India PMs pledge to strengthen 'historic ties' – Himalayan Times</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• India will invest in the building of one hydro electric plant.</li> <li>• India will receive some electricity from this plant.</li> </ul>
Japan	<p>“Visit to Japan of H.E. Mr. Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India” – Japan Times</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment from Japan will be 35 billion dollars for development projects including first bullet train.</li> </ul>
United Nations	<p>“Indian PM Narendra Modi Calls on United Nations to Define Terrorism”</p> <p>India's leader calls for genuine global partnership for peace and prosperity</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• India added to global partnership for peace and prosperity.</li> </ul>

United States of America (4 visits)	<p>Indian Leader Modi to Make Splashy Appearance in U.S. – Wall Street Journal</p> <p>“Crowd chants 'Modi, Modi' as India PM winds up Silicon Valley tour” – New York Post</p> <p>India's Modi Gets Big Welcome in New York” - Voice of America News</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment from American Industrialists will be 45 billion dollars</li> <li>• Agreements on defence, intelligence to counter terrorism</li> <li>• USA to drop rule of Nuclear fuel tracking rule and sort-out Liabilities rules which now open the gates for next 16 Nuclear power plant projects.</li> </ul>
Myanmar	<p>“Great expectations: India under Modi, and Myanmar today”. – MM Times</p> <p>“Modi in Myanmar: From 'Look East' to 'Act East’”. - IPCS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment between India and Asean is expected to help bilateral trade touch \$100 billion.</li> <li>• Project is underway to develop a 3,200-km highway linking India, Myanmar and Thailand.</li> </ul>
Australia	<p>Indian PM Narendra Modi's Australian Visit Marks a Dramatic Turnaround in Relations Between the Two Nations</p> <p>Modi in Australia: An unprecedented level of engagement – Business Insider</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Australia committed to Make in India</li> <li>• Australia will supply Uranium for our energy production.</li> </ul>
Fiji	<p>Fiji Trip in India 'Massive Success'</p> <p>Modi’s bold move–Island Business</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• USD 75 million credit line for Power Plant and Sugar Industry.</li> <li>• USD 5 million for development of villages</li> <li>• Assistance for parliament library.</li> <li>• Scholarships and training slots of Fijians in India.</li> </ul>

Seychelles	<p>“Seychelles ready to welcome Indian PM” – Nations Paper</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four bilateral agreements in fields such as hydrography, renewable energy and security</li> <li>• Seychelles gets coastal surveillance radar system, one, Dornier aircraft and visa waiver on travel to India</li> </ul>
Mauritius	<p>“Mauritius welcomes Modi”- Newsfeed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The construction of World Hindi secretariat started.</li> <li>• Agreements related to Ocean Economy, health, and culture, among others took place.</li> </ul>
Sri Lanka	<p>“India’s Prime Minister Modi to visit Sri Lanka: First visit after 28 years” – Lanka Business Online</p> <p>Modi's visit to Sri Lanka helped strengthen ties. – ITN News</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four agreements signed between both countries which are related to the investments on businesses.</li> </ul>
Singapore (2 visits)	<p>‘Straits Times’- PM Lee, Modi hail 50 years of close ties in book’</p> <p>“Singapore, India elevate ties to 'strategic partnership' with signing of key agreements”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nine Bilateral agreements including including defence relations, economic and cultural cooperation, skills development and capacity building.</li> </ul>
France (2 visits)	<p>Modi remet l'Inde « sur la carte du monde » ( Modi puts India “on the map) – Le Monde</p> <p>Focus sur la visite en France du Premier Ministre Indien Narendra Modi (Focus on Modi trip to France) - Dipolomatie</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment from France will be 2 billion euro.</li> <li>• Direct deal sped up and finalized with France about 36 Rafael planes (fighter jets.</li> <li>• Memorandum of understanding signed for construction of 6 reactors at Jaitapur power plant</li> </ul>

Germany	<p>Hoffnungsträger für 1,2 Milliarden Inder (Hope for 1.2 billion people) - HANNOVER MESSE</p> <p>“Modi und Merkel wollen Wirtschaftsbeziehungen vertiefen” (Modi and Merkel want to deepen economic relations) - DW</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Germany committed to make in India</li> <li>• Make in India being advertised all over the country</li> <li>• Rs 3000 crore investment pledged by German Small and Medium Enterprises</li> </ul>
Canada	<p>Thousands cheer India's Prime Minister Modi during Toronto visit' - Toronto Star</p> <p>Narendra Modi, Indian PM, delivers major speech in Toronto - CBC</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment from Canada will be 35 crore dollars</li> <li>• India to buy Uranium from Canada.</li> </ul>
China	<p>High expectations over Modi's visit to China - CNTV</p> <p>Modi Visit to Fuel Chinese Investment into India – China Briefing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investment from China will be 52 billion dollars</li> <li>• Bharti Airtel received US\$2 billion in financing commitments from the</li> <li>• Investment will include areas such a telecommunications, Information Technology, Renewable Energy, Manufacturing, Infrastructure, Steel, Transportation, Shipping, Sister-city relations and Film and entertainment.</li> </ul>
Mongolia	<p>“Modi visit: India to open \$1bn credit line to Mongolia” – Mongol Beat</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 BILLION USD credit line to Mongolia</li> <li>• India to help build an English medium school.</li> <li>• India gives Mongolia a third neighbour (surrounded by China and Russia)</li> </ul>

South Korea	“S. Korea, India to upgrade ties during PM Modi's visit” – Korea Herald	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• FDI platform called ‘Korea plus launched’</li> <li>• South Korea declares support for India’s NSG</li> </ul>
Bangladesh	“MODI'S VISIT TO BANGLADESH: Hope for faster resolutions” – The Daily Star	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 22 bilateral agreements signed, sealed and delivered.</li> <li>• This includes the big land enclaves exchange.</li> </ul>
Uzbekistan	“India and Uzbekistan enjoy close strategic relation” Uzdaily.com	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MoUs signed</li> <li>• Expand cooperation on defence cyber-security</li> </ul>
Kazakhstan	‘Indian Prime Minister Visits Kazakhstan, Boosts Business Ties’ – Tengrin news	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 Agreements signed</li> </ul>
Russia (2 visits)	<p>“Modi's Moscow visit moves Russia ties forward” - TASS</p> <p>“India Prime Minister Hopes Visit to Russia to Strengthen Bilateral Ties” – Sputnik News</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 15 documents signed</li> <li>• Agreements in all sectors.</li> </ul>
Turkmenistan	Modi visit strengthens ties – News Central Asia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 Documents signed</li> <li>• Bust of Gandhi unveiled</li> <li>• Centre for yoga opened</li> <li>• Traditional Medicine Centre opened</li> </ul>
Kyrgestan	“Modi visit huge for small country” - AKI Press	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 Key agreements signed</li> <li>• Joint military exercises planned</li> <li>• Cooperation on Defence and culture.</li> </ul>
Tajikstan	“Tajikstan and India to cooperate” - Times of Central Asia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreement to cooperate in trade, agriculture, hydropower, defence</li> </ul>

UAE	Modi visits the UAE, 'a paradise in the desert'- The National	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Counter terrorism Cooperation</li> <li>• Defence Cooperation</li> <li>• Trade and Investments including USD 75 Billion</li> <li>• Permission for local Hindus to build Mandir</li> <li>• Online Portal MADAD for Indians there.</li> </ul>
Ireland	<p>“Honour for Ireland to welcome Prime Minister Modi” -DFA</p> <p>“This political giant is coming to Ireland for the first time today” – The Journal</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Commitments for Make in India</li> <li>• Ireland backs India for USC and NSG</li> </ul>
United Kingdom	“Modi visit: 'Huge moment' for UK and India”- BBC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Signed Over \$13.7B in Deals</li> <li>• Finalized Civil Nuclear Agreement</li> </ul>
Turkey	“Modi'nin tarihi ziyareti Hindistan'ı karıştırdı” (Historic Modi trip to Turkey) – milliyet (Turkish newspaper)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turkey Committed to promoting make in India</li> <li>• Cooperation on counter-terrorism</li> <li>• Offered to double flights in, to and from India.</li> <li>• Turkey Issues special stamp featuring Modi</li> </ul>
Malaysia	“Modi seeks to further enhance India-Malaysia ties” - New Straits Times	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MoUs on cyber security, performance management and project delivery.</li> <li>• -Indian cultural centre in Malaysia to be named after Netaji</li> </ul>
Afghanistan (2 Visits)	“India wins hearts in Afghanistan with 'Friendship Dam' “- Kabul times	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$290 million Dam</li> <li>• Delivered attack helicopters</li> <li>• Chabahar Port/Corridor Deal</li> <li>• Anti-terror agreements.</li> <li>• USD 2 billion investment by India.</li> </ul>

Pakistan	<p>“Prime Minister Modi's Surprise Visit to Pakistan Makes Airwaves” Ary News</p> <p>“Modi's visit to Pakistan a pleasant surprise” – CNBC Pakistan</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agreement to enhance ties</li> <li>• Showed goodwill and bright intentions of India to not only Pakistan (for like the 100<sup>th</sup> time) but to the world at large.</li> </ul>
Belgium	<p>“Hopes High as Indian Prime Minister Modi to Visit Brussels” – The Diamond Loupe</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• MoUs on renewable energies, migrations (tourism) and counter terrorism</li> </ul>
Saudi Arabia	<p>“Modi mesmerizes workers in Riyadh camp” – Saudi Gazette</p> <p>“Modi's visit to usher in new era” – Saudi Gazette</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• BJP Govt. convinced Saudi Arabia to not charge “On-Time Delivery” Premium charges on Crude Oil</li> <li>• Cooperation accords signed regarding counter terrorism trade and investments.</li> </ul>
Iran	<p>“Iran finds new port partner in India” –Al- Monitor</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chabahar Port/Corridor signed</li> <li>• India Cleared part of 6.4-billion-dollar debt</li> <li>• India doubled on oil exports</li> </ul>
Qatar	<p>“Modi's visit the beginning of a change” – The Peninsula Qatar</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 MoU signed to extend relations beyond bilateral relations.</li> </ul>
Switzerland	<p>“How sweet are Swiss companies on Modi?” Swissinfo.ch</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Swiss back India for NSG</li> <li>• Swiss to help India tackle black money</li> </ul>
Mexico	<p>“Mexico, India agree to upgrade relations” - Vida Latinasd</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mexico Backed India for NSG</li> <li>• MoUs on agriculture, agricultural research, biotechnology and waste management, management of natural disasters and solar energy</li> </ul>

## **Effects of reforms**

While it has only been two years since the Modi government has been in power, the reforms so far have had tremendous effects on the image of India. Here is a list of reforms that have changed the perception of India to the world.

### **1. Make in India**

This initiative was started to encourage foreign companies to manufacture products in India. To help encourage the idea the government allowed more FDI into the country. This ease in foreign investments regulations resulted in FDI to increase by 61%. Companies ranging from Apple to Hitachi to Boeing all announced plans to manufacture in India under the new initiative. What this did in return was help the country increase in its rankings in various lists like, ease of doing business and the corruption index. However, the Modi government was not done and on June 21<sup>st</sup> announced further relaxation to open up the FDI in nine sectors with some opening up all the way to 100%. This further boosted incentives to Make in India which will lead to further more job creation. Overall India is now a more lucrative market for foreigners to do business in. Foreigners will prefer India over China to invest as it is closer to the west, easier to communicate and finally it is easier to do business. This will get the economy of the country going as well as create a more positive image for India. In the words of PM Modi the image of the country “has developed from scam India to skill India.”

### **2. Swachh Bharat Abhiyan**

This initiative was set out as a national cleanliness drive to ensure India became cleaner. This was visible everywhere from airports, to local schools to local streets. What this has done in return is help bolster a clean image which will create a better image of India and help tourism grow. This will help foreigners get over the idea of India portrayed in slum dog millionaire to the idea of clean India under Modi. While the primary focus of this mission was to increase health and hygiene. It has had an enormous effect on productivity in the country. Besides this the mission has helped promote tourism, especially international tourism and India’s image abroad has been cleaned up also.

### **3. Visa/ OCI passports**

Under the BJP government further more visa restrictions have been eased on lots of foreign countries incentivizing foreigners to come visit India. For NRIs and PIOs the process of getting a visa has also gotten better as visa has a

longer valid date and OCI passports are easier to obtain. This is another major initiative which has increased the image of India as well as Modi.

#### **4. Space Programmes**

While India's space programme has been continuous from UPA, Modi has encouraged the science sector and allowed funds from the budget to be set out for space missions. India's space program has excelled and is now poised to take over NASA if it continues with the current trends. India has developed a name for doing effective research at a fraction of cost that other countries have.

India has also developed their own version of the GPS known as the SAARC Satellite. This will be quite helpful and avoid situations like Kargil war where US refused the use of GPS for the army. This will also help other countries which are apart from SAARC except Pakistan who have decided to opt out. Besides the military advantage to India, the civilian population of all SAARC countries (except Pakistan) will benefit areas of telecommunication and broadcasting applications viz television (TV), direct-to-home (DTH), very small aperture terminals (VSATs), tele-education, tele-medicine and disaster management support.

Another impressive achievement that India has made in the space industry is the launch of over 20 satellites in a single mission. Not only is this a new record for most satellites launched. But this also helps the civilian population directly in things related from TV signals to weather forecasts. However, the biggest benefit will be all the foreign investment this will provide due to India developing an image for its cost-effectiveness and credibility.

Overall the space programmes under Modi have helped India become a worldwide leader in the space industry and India has made a big name in science and technological development. This will also significantly help India's image in the neighbouring countries apart of SAARC.

## **Media Agenda?**

One the biggest problem for the foreign media is covering India. As not every news outlet is able to have its own reporters in India, it must rely on the conveyances given to them by secondary sources which usually consists of the

domestic media in India. Even the few news outlets that do have correspondents in India often end up mingling with left wing media agenda in India.

Faith in the media is one of the most important pillars of democracy as it represents the public's right to knowledge and demonstrates transparency. Unfortunately, when the media becomes corrupt this makes them not only untrustworthy but also undemocratic. Nevertheless, the Indian media has indeed changed in the last two years with its portrayal of the BJP government. The origin of the word 'presstitute' does not reside with General VK Singh but was originally used in the US where Gerald Celente used it to criticize the American media in a similar way General V.K. Singh did. This media agenda problem is present across the world; however the domestic change the media in India has shown is quite positive for the country. This means that domestic media will pass on accurate information onto their western counterparts.

Most of the western media has grown to appreciate Modi and everything he has brought to the world. Here is below analysis of some media outlets below.

## CNN

As stated before CNN is known in America as a fairly politically-centre and independent news source. They portrayed BJP in a negative light back in the 1991 destruction of the structure in Ayodhya. They have seemed to portray Vajpayee in a bright light. Modi was also portrayed negatively for the 2002 Gujarat riots. However, with time they have changed their portrayal of Modi. He has gone from being called a 'populist Hindu nationalist leader' to the 'man of the millennium'. The coverage of Modi is now very similar to that of American president Obama. His reform attempts, speeches and foreign trips are all shown in a very central, non-political way. Overall CNN is quite fair and just in their portrayal of Modi and BJP.

## Fox News

Fox News is an American news outlet which is loved by the right and hated by the left. It is one of the very few news channels in America which is right-wing. While American conservatism and Indian conservatism differ on many levels, fox news has made it clear that they appreciate Modi. This is demonstrated by the pro-Modi experts that are featured on their news like Jeff M Smith. They also surprisingly include details of Modi's reforms that other

news misses out on. For example, Fox News had an article on the cooperation with Switzerland on tax-evasion fight. This topic was not that well covered in India, given its boost to the government in its fight against black money. Fox news also covered the Thailand-India agreement surrounding drugs and security. As these two issues affect Americans the most, the publishing of this agreement by Fox news boosts the image of India and Modi in the eyes of Americans. Fox news portrays Modi in a generous but also fair way.

### Daily Mail

Daily Mail is another right-wing newspaper in the UK. It is also loved by the right and hated by the left who call it daily fail. This newspaper is the complete opposite of *The Guardian* which will be discussed later on. Similar to Fox News, they have also portrayed Modi in a very positive light. Their worst portrayal of Modi, though, was in an article called “India’s new PM and ex-tea boy with blood on his hands’. Despite the title, there was nothing substantive in the article which did a fair portrayal despite the misleading title. Daily mail has gone further than any news in the west to cover every move of Modi from his latest speech to issues Modi should be worried about. It is safe to say that the Daily Mail is a friend of the BJP, and does not cross the line and is fair as well.

### Wall Street Journal

This newspaper is a financial newspaper which leans heavy right on economic standpoints. They proclaim to only be politically biased on economic issues but are centre on everything else. As BJP is seen as pro-business party, they are both a natural fit. As Modi was not well known for his business views the Wall Street journal (WSJ) did not have a lot of coverage of him. However, as the Gujarat Model started to develop, so did the interest of WSJ. As a result, the WSJ has done well in portraying and assessing the policies of Modi. For example, when the court cleared Modi of any wrongdoing in the 2002 Gujarat riots, the WSJ immediately published an article on it. This court clearance has been the biggest deciding factor for WSJ on its positioning on Modi. After that decision Modi was brought into the spot light for them and has been covered sufficiently as mentioned before. They have even gone further than other news in some circumstances by, for example, looking at how the Indian media covers Modi.

## The Guardian

As mentioned beforehand throughout the paper, there are some left-wing media outlets who continue to try and damage the growing image of Narendra Modi. A glowing example is *The Guardian*. *The Guardian* is one of the most read papers in the UK making it an effective propaganda machine. Unfortunately, instead of acting with responsibility they choose to attack Modi with unsubstantive statements. If you do a search on *The Guardian* website with the name of Narendra Modi or BJP, you will find lots of articles with one common theme. The one common theme is hatred for Modi and BJP. *The Guardian* hates Modi this is quite clear from the range of articles with headlines like 'India's prime minister is a Hindu extremist' or 'India is being ruled by Hindu Taliban.' Even those headlines that look neutral often have severe criticisms in the content. It is clear that *The Guardian* is the most anti-Modi paper in the world. Another close second in this category is *The Huffington Post*. This paper also loves to bash Modi with some of the most ridiculous arguments ever. For example, recently, an Islamic gunman in Orlando, Florida killed over 50 innocent people. Narendra Modi as one would expect, tweeted his condolences on twitter towards these very people. *The Huffington Post* had an article called "Modi's Response to the Orlando Shooting Has Made a Lot of Indians Very Angry." This article was not a small blog or personal opinion as it was published by the editor of *Huffington Post India*. This article attempted to show that the majority of Indians were angry with Modi for giving his condolences to the humans killed in the tragic attack. They blamed Modi specifically for the violence against homosexuals as he had in their eyes failed to repeal a British imposed law that prohibits homosexual activities. It is absurd and quite irrational to make an issue out of someone paying respects to innocent victims of a shootout. However, this is not the least bit surprising as these people are the perfect examples of liberals. *Huffington Post* publishing such articles exposes their agenda as well. However, since they do allow some (very few) conservative articles to be published. It is not fair to give them the top anti-Modi spot. Another interesting trend noted is that all of the people who write these anti-Modi propaganda (for both *The Guardian* and *Huffington Post*) are not foreigners but Indians or people of Indian descent.

## Al-Jazeera

Another example of left-wing agenda is by the Qatar royal family's Al-Jazeera. Al-Jazeera has also demonstrated an agenda against Modi, BJP and the ideological mentor RSS. Prominent example is the interview of a BJP leader by Mehdi Hasan. While Mehdi Hasan maintains that there was no agenda, the facts tell a different story. First Hasan used part of statistics on riots to mislead the audience and paint BJP as an extremist government responsible for intolerance and rise in riots. He either didn't look at the whole statistics or deliberately did it. He then took the next shot at PM Modi by using the clichéd argument of his alleged involvement in the Gujarat riots. Again it seems he must not have known about the clean chits or he deliberately did it. To top things off he attacked RSS by painting M.S.Golwalker as a fascist extremist and portraying Akhand Bharat as an RSS imperialist agenda opposed to the peaceful/unifying agenda it holds in actuality. Again he must not have done his research properly on RSS and Golwalkers or he had an agenda. It is really hard to believe that someone educated at the world class oxford university makes these mistakes. This makes the case stronger for an ulterior agenda. However, if these were not convincing enough of an agenda, the layout of the audience was quite fishy as well. In the audience Mehdi Hasan had three "experts" consisting of a former advisor to Modi, and two pro-Pakistani academics. The first row of the audience also constituted of Pro-Kashmiri extremists. Despite proclaiming impartiality by making the interview take place at the Oxford Union with a mixed audience the points discussed beforehand make that proclamation hard to believe in.

A good comparison to Mehdi Hasan's "neutral" interview was the interview of Modi by CNN's Fareed Zakaria. Both Zakaria and Mehdi Hasan claim to be Muslims of Indian origin. However, the difference in the way both of these reporters conduct interviews is night and day. Zakaria did a one-on-one interview with Modi without any 'experts' or 'audience'. In this interview Fareed did not once attempt to portray Modi, BJP or the RSS in a certain light. Instead he focused on Modi's views on foreign policy, democracy etc. These issues are more of importance to the viewers in America than the events *apparently* happening in India. Fareed also did not shy away from controversial topics as he asked PM about women's rights in India. However, it is important to note that Fareed did not once interrupt the PM, nor did he attempt to paint PM, BJP or RSS as anything. In the end Fareed gave Americans the views of PM Modi, not the propaganda created by Modi's critics.

## **Times of Israel**

While Modi has not made a trip to Israel, it is very important to look at how Israel has portrayed the government. Despite its highly disputed territory and small size, Israel is a key ally of the west as it has a lot of influence. Israel and India are natural allies as both are home to some of the most persecuted people in the world. India is for Hindus what Israel is for Jews. Despite this Israel has a poor view of India as only 9% have a positive view of India and 57% have a neutral view. India needs to capitalize on this relationship with the Israel. This neutral view percentage needs to be turned into positive. It is very easy to do this as a result of the portrayal of the Modi government by Times of Israel. The Times of Israel is a leading paper in the nation and has portrayed Modi as the leader who will capitalize on this relationship. They have publicized all the bilateral deals between the two nations such as \$3 billion arms deal or solar panel robot cleaners outsourcing. They have also highly publicised the planned trip of Modi to Israel. This trip will surprisingly be the first by an Indian PM to the nation and will help strengthening ties between the countries. Israel has the potential to be a loyal ally and will be necessary in order to further increase the image of the country. Modi will get this job done and help create a long lasting relationship.

## **What does the future hold?**

One thing is clear. Modi, BJP and India have come a long way since the 90s and 2000s. There is some amount of positive excitement about India across the world. There is not a country in the world which wants to shun India right now. Instead everyone sees that there is something special happening in India and try and connect with it. Many people thought BJP was a joke but Vajpayee proved them wrong and – Modi did again. Many people put a lot of hate on Modi but he also proved them wrong. Modi went from being banned by a state to addressing the very place where the ban originated from. Today Prime Minister Modi, with his massive democratic mandate is being recognised the world over and leaders from Barack Obama to François Hollande to Tony Abbot claims to be friends with Modi. The media portrayal has changed all around the world. including India. Where once Modi was the target of attacks, he is

now the focus of analysis and compliment. In particular, the image of India is seen to its highest point since its independence in 1947. While much of the media has changed it is important to note that those newspapers who are grounded in ideological views will continue to pursue their agenda. However, if the government continues with its positive and development oriented agenda, the left-wing outlets will have no choice but to take note as they cannot continue to repeat the same arguments over and over again. ○

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### (Endnotes)

1. [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/special\\_report/1998/05/98/india\\_nuclear\\_testing/92783.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/special_report/1998/05/98/india_nuclear_testing/92783.stm)
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