

Modi Ki Guarantee: Embracing Vishwa Bandhu Bharat for Global Cooperation

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The release of the Bharatiya Janata Party's (BJP) manifesto for the 2024 elections indicates an intent to shift the country's approach to global affairs. Having led India's foreign policy for the past decade under the leadership of Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi, the manifesto contains the most detailed section focusing on foreign policy and national security priorities. With a renewed emphasis on the "Bharat First" approach, the manifesto outlines a vision that diverges from traditional paradigms, opting instead for a more collaborative and nuanced engagement with the international community.

In its manifesto, the BJP presents India as a "consensus builder, first responder, and a voice of the Global South." Last year's India's G20 presidency certainly reaffirmed the government's intentions and capabilities to take the centre on the global stage. Notably, the term "Bharat" has replaced "India" in official discourse, and the BJP manifesto pledges to pursue a "Bharat First" foreign policy devoid of isolationist inclinations.

It is pertinent to mention that the BJP manifesto pledged a shift from its previous assertion as a Vishwa Guru, stating that a government would pursue policies aligning with the ethos of "Vishwa Bandhu Bharat" (kinsman of the universe) to advance India's interests. It is interesting to mention that Ian Hall, in his study of Modi's approach to foreign policy, usefully defines 'world guru India' as 'the notion that India has a unique mission in the world and unique wisdom to convey'. However, this shift from 'Vishwa Guru' to 'Vishwa Bandhu' in its foreign policy approach indicates the intent of the party for a nuanced and collaborative approach. Instead of positioning Bharat as a mentor or a world teacher, the word Bandhu further portrays our civilisational ethos of universal brotherhood, as well as values such as Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (the world is one family).

Furthermore, as rightly said by External Affairs Minister Dr. S Jaishankar, "As electoral outcomes have affirmed across continents, the trend line today points towards stronger cultural identities and more nationalist narratives". The BJP's 2024

manifesto stands out for its clear focus on India's soft power diplomacy, which is the most intriguing aspect of it.

The BJP's manifesto showcases a notable focus on India's soft power diplomacy, dedicating a separate section to this aspect. It highlights the current government's accomplishments in this realm, including vaccine diplomacy during the Covid pandemic, the successful Chandrayaan-III mission to the lunar south pole, India's contributions to establishing international days like the International Day of Yoga and the International Year of Millets in 2023, the global recognition of India's digital payment solution through UPI, and commitments such as the International Solar Alliance and the Biofuel Alliance. The manifesto attributes these achievements to bringing a sense of pride among both citizens and the diaspora. Therefore, one can rightly say that by emphasising a 'Bharat First Foreign Policy', the manifesto proudly declares that India has showcased "independence of thought and action" in pursuing its national interests under PM Modi's leadership.

Similarly, in addition to the existing 37 cultural centres spread across various countries, the manifesto pledges the establishment of Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centers across the globe. These centres aim to celebrate and showcase rich values, political beliefs, and the Tamil language, serving as hubs of cultural exchange to deepen global understanding and appreciation of India's diverse culture. As Prime Minister Modi rightly stated, "We will build Thiruvalluvar cultural centres all over the world. The world's oldest Tamil language is our pride. BJP will undertake every effort to enhance the global reputation of the Tamil language." These centres will not only promote the Tamil language but also provide training in Bharatiya music and various other cultural activities. It's noteworthy that PM Modi has consistently highlighted Tamil culture, such as in his mentions of the Tamil festival 'Putandu Vishnu' on several episodes of Mann Ki Baat and his appeal to learn Tamil on 30th April 2017. Additionally, the Tamil connection is evident through initiatives like the Kashi-Tamil Sangamam in Varanasi and the

adoption of 'Sengol' as a symbol of Amrit Kaal.

Moreover, the BJP manifesto emphasises the importance of reclaiming Indian artefacts that have been unlawfully taken from the country's soil over the years. This commitment reflects the party's dedication to preserving and protecting India's cultural legacy for future generations. The manifesto also highlights the significance of collaborating with other nations to restore and safeguard historical sites that hold immense importance in India's cultural and historical narrative.

Building on the historic inauguration of the Ram Mandir in Ayodhya in January 2024, the BJP proposes an ambitious global outreach program to commemorate the enduring legacy of Lord Rama. This initiative seeks to promote the values and teachings of Lord Rama on an international scale, ensuring greater cultural exchange and understanding among nations. It will particularly aid in furthering our Neighbourhood First and Act East policy due to the common Ramayana connection in the region. So far, in the past few years, the government has been organising the 'International Ramayana Festival' and inviting East and Southeast Asian countries to participate. Similar events could be organised in collaboration with state governments with 'Ramayana' relevance, such as Chitrakoot in Madhya Pradesh, Ayodhya in Uttar Pradesh, or Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu. Furthermore, the Ramayana circuit may boost tourism in the country, attracting international travellers. Collaboration with Indologists across the world could also facilitate academic research in this aspect, ultimately creating a network of researchers and academics concerning Ramayana and Indian Knowledge Systems at large.

It is noteworthy that the current government, through the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, has already taken proactive steps by declaring the year 2024 as the 'Year of Connecting the World through Ramayana.' This initiative aims to leverage the timeless epic of Ramayana as a bridge for cultural diplomacy and enhancing people-to-people ties across borders. Through these concerted

efforts, the BJP envisions a world where India's rich cultural heritage serves as a unifying force, promoting harmony and cooperation among nations.

In conclusion, the BJP's 2024 manifesto marks a significant shift in India's foreign policy, advocating a "Bharat First" approach characterised by nuanced collaboration over isolationism. Departing from the "Vishwa Guru" narrative, the manifesto embraces "Vishwa Bandhu Bharat," reflecting a more inclusive stance. Concrete initiatives like soft power diplomacy, cultural outreach, and heritage preservation demonstrate India's commitment to global engagement. Promises to establish Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centers, repatriate artefacts, and commemorate Lord Rama's legacy underline India's cultural and historical significance. This manifesto signifies a departure from insular tendencies, emphasising India's independence of action while promoting international cooperation. Considering the visionary objectives of the party vis-a-vis foreign policy in the manifesto, one can infer that the party is not only considering its policies for its 3rd consecutive term but rather leading a roadmap for 2047.