THE GRAND INDIAN ELECTION AND FUTURE OF INDO-ARMENIAN COOPERATION

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By Arunansh B. Goswami, 6 May 2024

The largest election in the world is ongoing in the largest democracy on the planet, and the result of this election will have a significant impact on Armenia. 75 international visitors from the election management bodies of Bhutan, Mongolia, Australia, Madagascar, Fiji, the Kyrgyz Republic, Russia, Moldova, Tunisia, the Seychelles, Cambodia, Nepal, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, Kazakhstan, Georgia, Chile, Uzbekistan, the Maldives, Papua New Guinea, and Namibia arrived in India to watch the Lok Sabha polls.

The Bhartiya Janata Party

Mr. Narendra Modi, the incumbent Prime Minister of India, is contesting this time for a third term. He is from the Bhartiya Janata Party, hereinafter 'BJP,' a culturally right-wing Indian party leading the National Democratic Alliance in Indian politics. The BJP believes in enlightened realism (not devoid of moral values but giving primacy to national interests) and strategic autonomy in foreign policy. It has been pro-Armenia and Greece for many reasons.

First, it's a strong opposition to pan-Islamism that is inherently against the idea of Westphalian or civilizational nationalism (which is a core component of the BJP's guiding ideology; read about 'cultural nationalism'); second, it doesn't treat Muslims in India as a vote bank and doesn't believe in their appeasement even in the realm of foreign policy; third, it believes in giving befitting replies to Pakistan, a strong ally of Turkey and Azerbaijan, in any of its anti-India actions worldwide. Under the leadership of Modi, India took a strong decision to help arm Armenia to protect it from Azerbaijani aggression. Vijainder K. Thakur, a retired Indian Air Force Jaguar pilot, writes for the Eurasian Times that "Indian Pinaka MBRLS for Armenia Is Giving Sleepless Nights To Azerbaijan." Modi has taken several measures to counter Pakistan's efforts to grow as a military power in different regions of the world, and arming Armenia is one of them.

In October 2020, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan bragged of having sent troops to Nagarno-Karabakh to fight alongside the Turkish military and the Azerbaijan Army. According to the ideology of the BJP, arming Armenia was a natural outcome for Modi-led India. BJP also doesn't attempt to deny Turkic invaders' violence against Hindus (the majority religious group of India) in history like many of its opponents do. The historical experiences of Armenians and Hindus have been quite similar, and this similarity again encourages BJP to support Armenia. Now let's understand the foreign policy of the BJP's primary opponent, the Indian National Congress.

The Indian National Congress

The Indian National Congress, hereinafter 'INC,' is contesting this election as a part of the Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance. For a long period of time, India was ruled by the INC, the oldest political party in India, formed in 1885. When we study the history of this party, we find the close relationship it has had with Türkiye since the days of the Ottomans.

During the British Raj, INC was instrumental in supporting the Khilafat Movement, a pan-Islamic

movement launched to support the Ottoman Caliph against British imperialism, a step it took according to its leaders in order to strengthen 'Hindu Muslim unity.' But it actually wasn't successful. In ensuring this much, and India was partitioned on religious lines, Muslims who supported 'two-nation theory' got Muslim majority Pakistan, which until now is a regional rival of India and the only country in the world that does not recognize Armenia as an independent and sovereign state.

A tall leader of INC, Mukhtar Ahmad Ansari, who served as its president in 1927, went to Turkey to treat the wounded Turkish soldiers of the Balkan wars of 1912–13. His great-grandnephew, another INC leader, Hamid Ansari, was elected as the Vice President of India. Another tall leader of INC who was made the first education minister of India, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, was a strong Ottoman Caliphate supporter too. Azad's support for the Turkish cause is best summed up by Gail Minault in her famous book, The Khilafat Movement. She writes, on page 43, The greatest amount of space in al-Hilal (Maulana Azad's newspaper) was devoted to coverage of news from Turkey…. In one issue, Azad said unequivocally that support for Turkey is the same as support for Islam."

Now, coming to contemporary times, we find that, according to an article by Riyaz ul Khaliq for Anadolu Agency "India's main opposition, the Indian National Congress (INC), opened an overseas office in Turkey, according to a statement by the party. The statement issued by the INC's Indian Overseas Congress (IOC) on the Istanbul-based office identified party member Mohammad Yusuf Khan to preside over the IOC in Turkey…. For his part, Khan said his priority would be to polish bilateral relations between India and Turkey with emphasis on politics, culture, trade, tourism, education, and health."

Conclusion

Readers must have understood by now how different India's South Caucasian foreign policy will be if the INC wins and the BJP loses. The strong support that Modi-led India has given to Armenia can either become less or end altogether, but if Modi gets a third term, the situation would be drastically different. Armenia will have strong support from a responsible nuclear power, India. For maintaining peace in the South Caucasus, India can even increase its support for Armenia if the BJP gets a huge majority in the Lok Sabha. Therefore, the grand Indian election is something that Armenian foreign policy experts and enthusiasts should keenly study.

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Comments



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Let's pray for PM Narendra Modi's election victory.