

Modi treads cautiously on status of Jerusalem

During his historic visit to Palestine, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday reaffirmed India's support for the Palestinian cause, and called for dialogue to find a permanent solution to the crisis, but stopped short of saying anything on the contested issue of the status of Jerusalem.

Traditionally, Indian statements of support for Palestine have said that India backs an independent, sovereign state of Palestine within the 1967 borders and East Jerusalem as its capital. Two years ago, when then President Pranab Mukherjee visited Jordan, Israel and Palestine, he said: "I reiterated India's principled support to the Palestinian cause and called for a negotiated solution resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognised borders, side by side at peace with Israel as endorsed in the Quartet Roadmap and relevant UNSC [United Nations Security Council] Resolutions."

The Quartet Roadmap he referred to is the two-state plan suggested by the U.S., the European Union, Russia and the UN to resolve the Israeli-Palestine conflict.

Manmohan's stand

In November 2013, then Prime Minister Manmohan Singh issued a statement on the occasion of the International Solidarity Day with the Palestinian People, reiterating India's position. "India supports a negotiated resolution, resulting in a sovereign, independent, viable and united State of Palestine with East Jerusalem as its capital, living within secure and recognised borders side by side and at peace with Israel..." it read.

However, in the statement issued by Prime Minister Modi after the India visit of Palestine President Mahmoud Abbas in May 2017, there was no reference to Jerusalem. "[W]e hope to see the realisation of a sovereign, independent, united and viable Palestine, co-existing peacefully with Israel. I have reaffirmed our position on this to President Abbas during our conversation today," the Prime Minister said on May 16, 2017.

On Saturday in Ramallah, Mr. Modi has reiterated this line, with no direct reference either to the borders or to Jerusalem. The Prime Minister said India hoped to see an independent sovereign Palestine living in a peaceful environment, whereas President Abbas, in his statement, stressed achieving the national goals of Palestine "according to the two-state solution on the 1967 borders and the resolutions of international legitimacy. And Israel in peace and security, with East Jerusalem as the capital of a Palestinian state."

Recently, U.S. President Donald Trump's recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital has triggered an angry response from the Palestinians and criticisms from different parts of the world.

UN vote

India voted against Mr. Trump's Jerusalem move in the UN General Assembly in December 2017. After Mr. Trump's move, the External Affairs Ministry issued a statement saying "India's position on Palestine is independent and consistent", but again without any reference to Jerusalem.

Mr. Modi said nothing on Israel while giving the press statement in Ramallah.

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