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Before the Air Force One touched down in Mumbai in the wee hours of November 6th, some in India still suspected whether President Barack Obama is as good a friend of India as his last two predecessors, Bill Clinton and George W. Bush.

Some of the president's statement on the Kashmir issue during the 2008 campaign, his nuanced stand on the Pakistani support for terrorism and his position on outsourcing of American jobs had them wondering whether the president's heart was at the right place when it came to India.

But when his plane disappeared into the Delhi skies four momentous days later, gliding eastward to Indonesia, not only was the skepticism in India gone, but he had connected to India the same way Presidents Clinton and Bush did during their visits. From a public diplomacy standpoint, Obama's India trip turned out to be as significant as any of the previous five trips by U.S. presidents.

Perhaps, in the end what won over the last remaining skeptics in the host country was the president's ringing endorsement of India's bid for a permanent membership of the United States Security Council. "And we welcome India as it prepares to take its seat on the United Nations Security Council," Obama said addressing the joint session of Indian parliament on November 8. Those were perhaps that sweetest

# Obama's Passage to India

17 words many in India have heard from a world leader in a long while.

As an emerging global power and a country of 1.2 billion, various Indian governments have made it clear that the country wants and deserves a seat at the UN's high table. Until now successive U.S. administrations have been refusing to formally back India's claim.

In fact, prior to the visit the Indian media has been speculating whether Obama would reverse the U.S. position. On its part, the White House had been mum on the issue, apparently not to steal the president's thunder.

And what better stage could there be to announce the U.S. support than before a gathering of legislators representing the world's largest democracy?

Another issue that drew the applause of Indian parliamentarians was his statement on Pakistan-based terrorism directed against India. The United States will, the president said, "continue to insist to Pakistan's leaders that terrorist safe havens within their borders are unacceptable, and that terrorists behind the Mumbai attacks must be brought to justice."

Many Indians had complained that Washington was not reining in on Islamabad despite India supplying enough proof of the Pakistan's



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complicity in the November 2008 attacks in Mumbai by terrorists that traveled by sea from Karachi. At least 173 people had lost lives in that carnage. India has also implicated Pakistanis in several terror attacks on Indian soil.

Obama may not have gone far enough in condemning Pakistan, but with him finally addressing the issue was seen as an advance in his administration's position on the issue of cross-border terrorism in India. It is not just what the president said that made the visit a huge success; the business and defense deals concluded during the trip were equally significant.

One of India's long-standing demands has been the removal of restrictions against defense and space-

related entities from India. The move will allow several cutting-edge Indian research centers and entities, among them Bharat Dynamics Ltd., Defense Research and Development Organization and Indian Space Research Organization access to sensitive technology from the United States.

For many Americans, perhaps the most significant accomplishment of the visit—at least in the short term—was probably the bilateral commercial and defense deals announced by the president in Mumbai. U.S. firms bagged \$10 billion worth of exports deals that are likely to create nearly 54,000 jobs in this country.

Though the deals are relatively modest, for America's struggling economy, the new jobs could not have come at a better time.

They are a pointer to the future. As the White House pointed out on November 6th, the day Obama announced the agreements, bilateral commerce has been increasing at great pace over the past decade. Over an eight-year period, from 2002 to 2009, American exports to India quadrupled, increasing from just over \$4.1 billion to more than \$16.4 billion.

India-U.S. trade is still a fraction of Sino-American commerce. Goods from the United States account for

only a tenth of overall Indian imports, and just two percent of U.S. exports go to India. As the president pointed out, the bilateral trade is "still one of enormous untapped potential."

As the two sides showed during the presidential visit tapping that potential would be a key goal for both sides in the years to come.

The success of Obama's visit lied in how the both sides getting down to identifying the areas where they were apart and addressing them. Before the trip many commentators in India were predicting that Obama not bring any "major deliverables" or "big-ticket items," such as the U.S.-India civil nuclear deal, which was President George W. Bush's gift to India.

For Obama, the journey to India turned out to be a personal triumph. To the Indians, he showed that he is capable to taking the relationship between the two great democracies to the next level. To his compatriots, he demonstrated that the defeat of his party in the midterm elections has not had any effect on his ability to lead, at least when it comes to foreign relations.

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