

Brahmastra to BrahMos

Operation Sindoor has not merely shifted the needle in India’s counter-terrorism doctrine—it has redrawn the map. It is the clearest signal yet that the days of calibrated restraint are over. Bharat has demonstrated that while it continues to seek peace, it will now enforce it on its own terms. The surgical destruction of nine terror camps in Pakistan and Pakistan-occupied Jammu and Kashmir marks more than a tactical victory—it is a civilisational statement. For decades, India bore the burden of terror with a dignified silence. It extended diplomatic olive branches even as its people bled from cross-border attacks. But with Operation Sindoor, that silence has been replaced with a roar. Bharat has invoked its modern-day Brahmastra—not mythological, but technological. BrahMos missiles, Harop drones, Rafale jets armed with SCALP and HAMMER payloads—all formed the backbone of a mission that was as much about strategy as it was about symbolism. Pakistan’s retaliatory missile attacks were anticipated—and entirely neutralised. None found their mark, thanks to a defence web that has matured under years of investment and reform. India’s Integrated Counter-UAS Grid, S-400 systems, Barak-8 missiles, Akash batteries, and indigenous drone defences worked in concert, transforming what could have been a crisis into a controlled assertion of deterrence. This moment has been long in the making. From signing critical defence deals to fostering indigenous military R&D under Make in India, the Modi government has laid the groundwork for precisely such a response. But Operation Sindoor is not just a triumph of weaponry—it is a vindication of a worldview. A worldview that marries ancient dharma with modern geopolitics. The analogy with the Ramayana is instructive. Like Lord Rama, who offered Ravana every chance to walk away from adharma, India has, over decades, called for dialogue and diplomacy. But when every appeal is met with deceit and destruction, the invocation of force becomes a righteous act. Operation Sindoor was not vengeance—it was balance restored. Crucially, India has not abandoned diplomacy. Even with Afghanistan under Taliban control, India has found a way to engage, to rebuild trust, to offer development without domination. This blend of hard power and soft presence—missiles on one front, humanitarian aid on another—defines Bharat’s 21st-century statecraft. The time has come, perhaps, for Bharat to assert not just its will but its name. The Constitution already enshrines it: “India, that is Bharat.” Yet, the reawakening of civilisational identity seen in the response to Operation Sindoor is unmistakable. A quiet yet growing chorus across the nation calls for a symbolic return—one that reclaims not just territory, but ethos. Operation Sindoor was a moment of military clarity and cultural truth. It told the world: this nation may be patient, but it is never passive. And it told us, its people, that the age of Bharat is not coming—it is here.

Trump Nuts to Saudis, UAE INDIA JOINS BRICS ENERGY MEET

■ SHIVAJI SARKAR

President Donald Trump’s Arabia visit has opened up challenges to BRICS, ties Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar in Abrahamic Accord for officially recognising Israel. It has messages for India. Trump on May 16 announced that India has offered a trade deal that proposed almost “no tariffs” on US goods, as the South Asian nation seeks to avert higher import and export costs. Is BRICS dead? Trump on February 14 issued a blunt warning to BRICS nations, threatening a 100 per cent tariff on all imports into the US if they proceed with launching a common currency. He said just hours before a scheduled meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, dismissing the economic bloc’s relevance, declaring, “BRICS is dead.” BRICS is still kicking, but definitely Trump’s aggression for a unipolar dollarized world has thawed it a bit as Russia listens to him for ceasefire with Ukraine and the US-China trade conflict settles for lower tariff. His agreements with Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar add further teeth to the anti-BRICS mission. Trump had said, “I don’t care, but BRICS was put there for a bad purpose and most of those people don’t want it. They don’t even want to talk about it now. They’re afraid to talk about it because I told them if they want to play games with the dollar, then they’re going to be hit with a 100 per cent tariff.” New Delhi is looking to clinch a trade deal with the US within the 90-day pause announced by Trump on April 9, on so called reciprocal tariffs for major trading partners. On May 8, the White House secured a trade agreement with the United Kingdom, two days after India inked a similar pact with it. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates all “wanted to showcase they were open for business, which they were able to do, and they wanted to get the US on side,” Dina Esfandiary, Middle East lead for Bloomberg Economics, says. “They wanted to show that they were back in terms of being in America’s graces,” she said, adding that in return, Trump was able to get massive deals with headline figures. Gulf countries have been looking to revamp their ties with the US, moving away from a transactional oil-for-security understanding to stronger partnerships that are rooted in bilateral investments and shared visions. “It was a “new dawn” in the US’ relationship with the Gulf, Jasmine El-Gamal, a Middle East analyst and former

adviser to the Pentagon says. Saudi Arabia did not get a formalised security deal with the US. That would be replacing the ally, Israel. It came closer to it. Last year, the two nations came close to finalizing a landmark defence and trade pact – but the deal stalled over the Saudi insistence that Israel commit to a path toward Palestinian statehood. Trump now gave to Riyadh a handful of arms deals that may pave the way for a wider agreement. At a formal signing ceremony in a gilded ballroom at the Saudi capital’s Royal Court, Trump and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman signed memoranda of understanding, letters of intent and other executive agreements spanning different government agencies. Saudi Arabia also committed \$600 billion in US investments, including an expansive defence partnership valued at nearly \$142 billion, which the US touts as the “largest defence sales agreement in history.” Riyadh did not get a civilian nuclear programme as it insisted on enriching uranium domestically – raising concerns in the US and Israel over nuclear weapons proliferation. The Saudis are being given massive business opportunity in Syria, as the US lifts sanctions. Trump’s tea with Syrian President Ahmad al-Sharaa, a former jihadist who until recently had a \$10 mil-

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lion US bounty on his head, has opened up billions of dollar opportunity. Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia, have been keen to invest in Syria. The baits are enough to keep off BRICS, the US believes. The Saudis are silent since they attended the last BRICS summit in October 2024. Qatar’s emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, says that talks with Trump, a first visit by US President on this trip will “give new impetus to the existing strategic cooperation between the two countries.” They signed a host of deals during Trump’s visit, including a \$96 billion agreement for Qatar to acquire up to 210 American-made Boeing planes. Trump also accepted a Boeing 747-8 jet from the Qataris, to be used initially as Air Force One, a gift that is stated to influence the Trump administration. Qatar is the Gulf state with the most formalized security ties with Washington. It hosts the biggest US military installation in the Middle East, which the State Department describes as “indispensable” for US military operations in the region. It even helped the US in its Afghanistan operations. The UAE’s main target from Trump’s trip was deeper investments on AI and technology, and while it achieved victories in that regard, the visit fell short of what Abu Dhabi really wanted: unrestricted access to advanced American microchips. Trump gave the UAE a partnership to build a massive data centre in Abu Dhabi to advance AI capabilities with 5-gigawatts of capacity – enough to power a major city. The complex would require 2.5 million chips, bigger than all major AI infra so far. The Arab states got business opportunities in the US, Syria, and in their own countries. They, however, could not replace the ally Israel and may have to protect it even against their will, a major US gain. The US is India’s largest trading partner, with bilateral trade totalling some \$129bn in 2024. India ran a \$45.7bn surplus with the US last year, mainly in the form of pharmaceutical products, electrical machinery and jewellery. The Americans have got what they want with various kinds or arm-twisting methods in the region. Finally, India may get its tariff relief as it extends more to the nutty US relations. India, however is continuing with BRICS as Union Minister of Power and Housing & Urban Affairs Manohar Lal visits Brazil to attend the BRICS Energy Ministers’ Meeting on May 19. This visit underscores India’s determination to actively collaborate with BRICS nations in building a robust, future-oriented, and sustainable energy sector.---INFA

BIG SETBACK FOR PRESIDENT TRUMP AS MOODY’S DOWNGRADES U.S. ECONOMY

■ T N ASHOK

It’s the turn of the United States government to face a sovereign rating being downgraded by the Moody’s from its top AAA rating – Moody’s keeps downgrading the ratings of many developing countries including India. Moody’s Ratings cut the United States’ sovereign credit rating down a notch to Aa1 from the Aaa, the highest possible. however Aa1 would mean the economy is stable but not strong. Moody’s cited the burgeoning debt burden of the US government in financing the federal government’s budget deficit and rising cost of rolling over existing debt amid high interest rates. A sign that it has inherited the burden from the previous Biden government and nothing in 100 days to bring down the debt or the cost of servicing the debt. “This one-notch downgrade on our 21-notch rating scale reflects the increase over more than a decade in government debt and interest payment ratios to levels that are significantly higher than similarly rated sovereigns,” the ratings agency said in a statement. The decision to lower the United States credit profile could be expected, at the margin, to lift the yield that investors demand in order to buy U.S. Treasury debt to reflect more risk, and could dampen sentiment toward owning U.S. assets, including stocks. Having said that, all the major credit rating agencies continue to give the United States their second-highest available rating. The yield on the benchmark 10-year Treasury note climbed 3 basis points in after-hours trading, trading at 4.48%. The iShares 20+ Year Treasury Bond ETF fell about 1% in extended trading, while the SPDR S&P 500 ETF Trust fell 0.4%. Moody’s had been a holdout in keeping U.S. sovereign debt at the highest credit rating possi-

ble and brought the 116-year-old agency into line with its rivals. Standard & Poor’s downgraded the U.S. to AA+ from AAA in August 2011, and Fitch Ratings also cut the U.S. rating to AA+ from AAA, in August 2023. “Successive U.S. administrations and Congress have failed to agree on measures to reverse the trend of large annual fiscal deficits and growing interest costs,” Moody’s analysts said in a statement. “We do not believe that material multi-year reductions in mandatory spending and deficits will result from current fiscal proposals under consideration.” The U.S. is running a massive budget deficit as interest costs for Treasury debt continue to rise due to a combination of higher rates and more principal debt to finance. The fiscal deficit in the year that began October 1 is already running at \$1.05 trillion, 13% higher than a year ago. Revenue from tariffs helped shave some of the imbalance last month. The Moody’s downgrade came as the GOP-led House Budget Committee on Friday rejected a sweeping tax cut package as part of President Donald Trump’s agenda, including extending tax cuts enacted in 2017. Moody’s officially rated U.S. bonds in 1993 for the first time but had assigned a “country ceiling rating” of AAA on the U.S. since 1949. As if Moody’s stripping the US economy of its triple ratings, wasn’t a shock for the Trump administration, GOP Conservatives blocked Trump’s agenda bill from advancing in a major setback. It’s a shock for the GOP seniors. The House Budget Committee - voted down the massive party-line package, with a critical band of Republicans pushing for deeper spending cuts . The GOP-led H BC voted to reject a sweeping package for President Donald Trump’s agenda on Friday, dealing an embarrassing setback to Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., and Republican leaders. The vote in the Budget Committee was 16-21, with a band of conservative hard-liners who are

pushing for steeper spending cuts joining all Democrats in voting against the multi trillion-dollar legislation, leaving its fate uncertain. The Republicans who voted “NO” were Reps. Chip Roy of Texas, Ralph Norman of South Carolina, Andrew Clyde of Georgia and Josh Brecheen of Oklahoma. Rep. Lloyd Smucker of Pennsylvania changed his vote from “yes” to “no,” he said, as a procedural move to allow Republicans to call the bill up again. During the hearing, Roy fired a warning shot at Republican leaders, saying he opposes the bill as written because it will increase the deficit. “I have to now admonish my colleagues on this side of the aisle. This bill falls profoundly short. It does not do what we say it does with respect to deficits,” Roy said. “That’s the truth. Deficits will go up in the first half of the 10-year budget window and we all know it’s true. And we shouldn’t do that. We shouldn’t say that we’re doing something we’re not doing.” “This bill has back-loaded savings and has front-loaded spending,” Roy added. “I am a no on this bill unless serious reforms are made today, tomorrow, Sunday. Something needs to change or you’re not going to get my support.” After the vote tally was read, the HBC chair Jodey Arrington adjourned the hearing. Negotiations with the GOP holdouts will continue in the coming days. The House Budget Committee announced it would reconvene to take up the bill again on Sunday at 10 PM. “You never know until you ask the question where people stand, which is the reason I called for a vote. You can’t accomplish anything in life without having deadlines and decisions,” Arrington told reporters afterward. “Today was a deadline and a decision, and it’s one of the decision points to get us to the successful passage of the reconciliation bill.” But Smucker told reporters he hopes the legislation can pass committee by Monday, which would keep the House on track to approve the measure by the

end of next week. “So, we’re working through some remaining issues here. There are just a few outstanding issues. I think everyone will get to yes,” Smucker said. In a post on X, the Freedom Caucus said its member will work through the weekend to reach a deal to pass the package. Prior to Friday’s committee meeting, Republican leaders conceded that changes would be needed for the bill to pass through the House, where the party holds a slim majority. In addition to the spending and deficit concerns from the right, a group of blue-state Republicans have called for a higher cap on the state and local tax deduction, or SALT. The house strength is now 220 to 215. With GOP hardliners crossing the aisles it’s going to be a tough task for speaker Johnson to get the budget passed. Across the aisle, Rep. Brendan Boyle, D-Pa., previewed the Republican divisions at the outset of the hearing, vowing that all Democrats would oppose it. “You will hear over the course of this hearing a vigorous debate. And frankly there is a strong divide between Republicans and some other Republicans. There is also a divide between both sets of Republicans and this side of the dais,” said Boyle, the top Democrat on the budget panel. “I can speak at least as to why every Democratic member will be voting no on the bill for billionaires.” What are the factors that drive the US economy and the government’s debt burden? Is the US economy driving towards desired objectives? The answer is NO, it appears to be in the same stagnation period that Biden left it in and Trump instead of reducing the debt is only increasing it. And that is because he is not increasing the revenues which can offset the high cost of servicing the debts through increased revenues. Instead Trump wants to resort to tax cuts to increase his popularity base particularly among the super rich who contributed funds to his h victory in the 2024 Presidential elections.

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