

# The Tweeting Yogi, And Other Tales From The Modi-nama

## The Needle's Eye



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Narendra Modi is a follower of Yogi Adityanath. On Twitter, that is. But the Mahant from Gorakhpur has no qualms about setting a tone that neither Modi nor his senior colleagues can publicly take. Why, while Modi basks in the afterglow of a series of foreign-policy successes, the yogi has seen fit to broadcast his robust opinion on what external relations ought to be. On Tuesday he tweeted in Hindi: "After Independence the nation had such weak leadership that small countries became accustomed to glaring [at India]. ... After the Modi government took power, our neighbours have learned to speak as befits their status."

Now these remarks display more than a smidgen of attitude. After all, India's neighbours have in large part reacted amicably to Modi's overtures, the latest being Nawaz Sharif, who welcomed Modi's offer of help for Kashmiris struck by flooding on the Pakistani side of the Line of Control. Presumably the neighbours the yogi refers to include China, whose president Xi Jinping is going the extra mile to start his visit to India on Modi's birthday, September 17, in

Ahmedabad no less, where the former Gujarat chief minister plans to be for celebrations (and to meet his mother). Xi had already adjusted his dates so President Pranab Mukherjee would be back from a trip to Vietnam. This will be Xi's second meeting with Modi in two months. He crossed Pakistan off his South Asia itinerary because of the unrest there. China is already India's largest trading partner, with two-way trade totalling over \$65 billion last year, which includes an Indian deficit of over \$35 billion. China has offered to invest more in India, and set up industrial parks in several locations. And on Tuesday, the same day Adityanath was venting about neighbours, China's Assistant Foreign Minister was making even more soothing noises, telling reporters in Beijing that ties with New Delhi went back thousands of years and "China has never, and will not, use so-called military or other means to try and hem in India".

Modi believes in the 'speak softly and carry a big stick' brand of diplomacy, but these are certainly soothing noises from a neighbour who our prime minister had indi-



rectly accused of 'expansionism' during his trip to Japan, echoing similar remarks he made during this spring's election campaign. But then Modi, who is a keen student of history, ought to know that the Japanese themselves believe in the concept of 'honne' (true attitudes) and 'tatemae' (what is outwardly visible). Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who now follows only four people on Twitter, two of them Indian (Modi and Rajnath Singh) pledged to more than double

## Road to Lucknow



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Japanese direct investment in India to \$35 billion over the next five years. This excited some Indians; the fact is that we currently account for just 1.2 per cent of total Japanese overseas investment. Modi told Japanese business leaders that India's "democracy, demography and demand" are magnets for investment; the truth is that Japanese companies find India very difficult to do business with and that perception is not going to fade in a hurry.

But that is not to take away from

the goodwill that surrounds Modi on the world stage. The past few weeks have been full of very rich symbolism; the world is courting him, and he is enjoying every moment of it. Flush with the success of his Japanese visit, he welcomed Australian prime minister Tony Abbott last week and signed a significant pact on uranium supply and a civil nuclear agreement.

You could argue that Narendra Modi is adept at plucking as many low-hanging fruit as he can lay his hands on. Whether it is launching a ship or a rocket or a new train or a power station, or accepting the return of two 11th-Century stolen Indian idols, he looks purposeful, even if the ship or rocket or train or power station may have been built, or the idols demanded, by his predecessors. He will be the first Indian PM to visit Australia in 28 years this November. Manmohan Singh did not bother to go during his decade in office, even though India coveted Australian coal. But like Kipling wrote: "If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue, Or walk with Kings — nor lose the common touch," Modi is quick to seek out his

sweet spots. Last Friday, his nationwide hookup with school-children on Teachers' Day drew a fair bit of harrumphing from the Colonel Hathis, but what resonated was his appeal to not lose the 'bheetar ke balak' (the child within) or his narration of how watching a poor family's girl child enrol in a school meant more to him than his own swearing-in as chief minister of Gujarat.

Such symbolism is lost on Yogi Adityanath. His saffron robes flapping in a communal wind, the monk is relishing his role as chief campaigner in UP, where the Bharatiya Janata Party has concocted the Love Jihad bogey. Results will be announced on the 16th, and Adityanath obviously wants to give Modi a nice birthday gift the next day. In my June 5 column I predicted the BJP would not let the Samajwadi Party complete its term in Uttar Pradesh. One Adityanath fan tweeted last week: "Dilli mein Modi aagaye, ab UP mein yogi baki hai" (Modi is in Delhi, now it's time for the Yogi in UP). No guesses on who wants to succeed Akhilesh Yadav.