



INDIA AND IRAN RELATIONS DURING JAWAHARLAL NEHRU'S TENURE AS PRIME MINISTER OF INDIA

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Abstract

The peoples of India and Iran are two ancient neighbouring civilisations. They have enjoyed close historical links throughout the ages. They shared a common homeland, linguistic and racial past. Over the several millennium, they interacted, an enriched each other in various fields like language, religion, arts, culture, food and other traditions. Today the two countries are enjoying warm and friendly relations and cooperating in a wide range of fields.

After India got independence on 15 August 1947, Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru was elected the first Prime Minister of independent India from 15 August 1947 – 27 May 1964. On India and Iran age old ties Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru said 'the Indians and Iranians are like two brothers, who got separated from each other, one going towards the East and the other towards the West' This paper focuses on the relationship between India and Iran during Prime Minister of India Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru's tenure.

Keywords: Treaties, oil crisis, Baghdad Pact, exchange of visits, Indo-China war.

INTRODUCTION

India and Iran have connected with each other since time immemorial. The continuity of these age old relations was broken for a time after the British conquest of India in the early 19th century but they were revived after the departure of the British from India in August 1947.

It may be recalled that by 1947 both India and Iran experienced the aftermath of the Second World War. For India, it brought independence on a mixed note with the creation of the new state of Pakistan. Iran found itself deeply involved in the Cold War. An inevitable sequel was that independent India lost its age-old territorial

contiguity with Iran. India's loss was inherited by Pakistan of about 590 miles of common border with Iran. Since then, it could be said that Pakistan emerged not merely geographically between India and Iran but it also stood as one of the determining factors in Indo-Iranian relations.

After India became independent, there arose an unavoidable need to establish diplomatic relations with the neighbouring countries as well as with major powers in Asia and others. The strong historical, political, cultural, and economic ties determined Indian foreign policy perceptions with Iran. Iran was one of the earliest countries to establish ambassador level diplomatic ties with India. Both India and Iran became closer by signing of several bilateral agreements.

TREATIES WITH IRAN

The political relations between India and Iran started from 15 March 1950 with the signing the treaty of friendship. The treaty stated that 'there shall be everlasting peace and friendship between the governments of the two countries and that their differences would be settled through politic channels, by compromises and by such other peaceful procedures as deemed suitable by them.'

In December 1954, a treaty of Commerce and Navigation was concluded between India and Iran. The treaty provided for the rights of the nationals of both the countries in the other and their rights to engage in trade, commerce, and industry and to acquire movable and immovable property and the imposition of concessions in the custom duties were given.

India and Iran motivated by centuries old cultural relations that led to a common desire to establish and develop closer cultural relations in the future in the spirit of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organizations. They were desirous of promoting their relations in the realm of science and education. Both decided to conclude a Cultural Agreement on 1 December 1956.

An Air Agreement was signed in Tehran on 10 August 1960. The Government of India and the Imperial Government of Iran concluded an agreement for the purpose of establishing and operating commercial air services between and beyond their respective territories.

India signed its first trade agreement with Iran in 1961. An Indian trade delegation headed by Mr. K.R.F. Khilnani, the Joint Secretary, Ministry of Commerce and Industry of India visited Tehran in April 1961 to do agreements with the Iranian government. An agreement was also signed. Iran agreed to import from India 6000 tons of sugar and India undertook to import dry fruits of value of Rs.2.5 million and gums, dates etc., of the value of Rs.3.5 million from Iran. India also agreed to export to Iran, tea, light engineering instruments, diesel engines, pumps, fans, electrical equipment, machinery for textiles and other industries, sewing machines, batteries,

chemicals and medicine. The main items of exports from Iran to India included dry fruits, gums, dates, red oxide, medicinal herbs and plants etc.

ANGLO- IRANIAN OIL CRISIS

After the formalization of bilateral relations between India and Iran, a historic event happened in Iran. In March 1951, the Iranian Parliament (the Majlis) voted to nationalise the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company (AIOC). The Prime Minister of Iran Mr. Mossadeq (21 July 1952- 19 August 1953) nationalized the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company.

Although it is generally believed that India extended its support to Iran in its bid to emancipate itself from the clutches of British imperialism, but the fact emerged that Prime Minister of India Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru was critically equivocal in his reaction. In his usual briefings to the Chief Minister of Delhi Mr. Chaudhary Brahm Prakash (17 March 1952-12 February 1955), Nehru wrote the following about the Iranian oil dispute: “The Iranian government has taken up a very strong and unbending approach and perhaps it may be denounced to some extent. On the other hand, we must always remember that such disputes had origin in the past. The Anglo-Iranian Oil Company does not appear to have shown much wisdom in the past. If they had approached the matter thoughtfully a year ago or more, probably no trouble would have arisen now. So far as we are concerned, we have kept out of this dispute. But I have ventured to suggest to the Iranian government, as well as to the British government, that it is in the interests of all concerned as well as of world peace to have an amicable settlement.”

BAGHDAD PACT

Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), formerly known as Middle East Treaty Organization or Baghdad Pact Organization, Mutual Security Organization. It was formed on 24 February 1955. It composed of Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, and the United Kingdom. Until March 1959 the organization was known as the Middle East Treaty Organization, incorporated Iraq, and had its headquarters in Baghdad.

The Baghdad Pact was intended to counter the threat of Soviet Union expansion into Middle East, the oil-producing regions. Iran was well aware of the equation between India and Pakistan. The involvement of Iran in the Baghdad Pact as a member along with Pakistan was a big decision, knowing the fact that it would affect India and Iran relations. After the formation of Baghdad Pact, Iranian government planned a visit to India, because it does not want to hamper its friendship with India. On the other hand, India welcomed the decision made by Iranian government of sending diplomats to India. At the same time, the fact cannot be ignored that the formation of Baghdad Pact affected the relations between India and Iran.

The organization was not very effective. Iraq withdrew from the alliance in 1959 after its anti-Soviet monarchy was dethroned. That same year the United States became an associate member of the organization. The name of the organization was changed to Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), and its headquarters was moved to Ankara, Turkey.

EXCHANGE OF VISITS

The Education Minister of India, Mr. Moulana Abdul Kalam Azad (15 August 1947-2 February 1958) paid a visit to Iran in August 1951. A party of two Iranian Professors and eight students of Tehran University visited India in April 1952 to study some of the institutions of India. A press delegation from Iran visited India in January 1954.

The Shah of Iran in February and March 1956 visited India along with his wife Mrs. Shahbanou Pahlavi. In his talks and statements with Indian government he referred to differences between India and Iran, but he also emphasized the traditional ties. During his talks with Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru, the Shah of Iran tried to reassure the Indian Prime Minister that Iranian government proximity towards Pakistan was not aimed against India and that it was not at the cost of friendship with India. The fact that no joint communiqué was issued at the end of the visit suggested that there was difference of opinion between Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru and Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, the Shah of Iran.

In May 1963 after the Indo-Chinese War, the President of India Dr. S. Radhakrishnan (26 January 1950-12 May 1962) visited Iran, which led to improvement in the India and Iran relations.

INDO-CHINA WAR (20 OCTOBER 1962-21 NOVEMBER 1962)

The Indo-China War was a war between China and India that occurred in 1962. A disputed Himalayan border was the main pretext for war, but other matter of contentions played a vital role. There had been a string of violent border incidents after the 1959 Tibetan uprising, when India had granted asylum to Dalai Lama. India initiated a Forward Policy in which it placed outposts along the border, including several north of the McMahon Line, the eastern portion of a Line of Actual Control proclaimed by Chinese Premier Mr. Zhou Enlai in 1959.

Unable to reach political accommodation on disputed territory along the 3,225-kilometre-long Himalayan border, the Chinese launched at the same time offensives in Ladakh and across the McMahon Line on 20 October 1962, coinciding with the Cuban Missile Crisis (16 October 1962- 28 October 1962). The war ended when China declared a ceasefire on 20 November 1962, and simultaneously announced its withdrawal to its claimed line of actual control.

At the outbreak of the India-China War, when Prime Minister of India Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru notify all heads of state-government about the situation, the Prime Minister of

Iran Mr. Asadullah Alam (9 July 1962- 7 March 1964) stated on 3 November 1962 that Iran “supported India at a time when she has fallen victim to an aggression.” It was reported that the Shah of Iran had advised President of Pakistan Mr. Ayub Khan (27 October 1958- 8 June 1962, 8 June 1962- 25 March 1969) to send his troops to help India in the wake of the military debacle in the North East Frontier Agency (NEFA). The Iranian government forthright political support against China soothed Indian government ruffled feelings towards Iran.

Conclusion

During Mr. Jawaharlal Nehru’s tenure as Prime Minister of India, we witnessed certain changes in the international environment, the consequences of which affected Indo-Iranian relations. The variegation and expansion of trade during this period tended to bring India and Iran closer. It improved their relationship. In 1960s, India was in a position to share its experience and expertise with other developing countries due to the importance that India attached to technical and commercial collaboration with Iranian government.

The Economic advancement and political stability brought more independence in the foreign policy posture of Iran. Iran also extended its relations with India. It led to better technical and commercial cooperation and signing of agreements between India and Iran. Iran’s posture towards India, during this decade was a sort of up and down relationship, for example when Iran joined Baghdad Pact, India was upset with Iran. The Iranian ambassador however assured the Indian government that its country’s friendship with Pakistan would not come in the way of their relations with India. Iran however, did not interrupt its oil supplies to India. Though the visits were conducted in 1956 but the differences between the two countries was visible. On the other hand, during the Indo-China War of 1962, Iran came out strongly and openly on India's side and condemned China.

At the end, I would like to say that Indo-Iranian relations have fluctuated in various degrees. It is normal as bilateral state relations, like those between two individual persons, do not remain static. Nor do they run in straight lines as there are curves and verges. The relations followed a zigzag pattern with marked fluctuations.

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