

## GUJRAL DOCTRINE

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Synopsis: Gujral Doctrine is new in the sense that it lays more emphasis on open and courteous dialogue on bilateral issues with neighbours without taking into consideration the short term gains and costs. Gujral believes that India as a big economy and country in the region has to give more without expecting commensurate returns. Economic cooperation through SAARC and settlement of disputes by mutual discussions is at the core of the doctrine. The Doctrine believes in the spirit of give and take but India needs to give more and receive less in return. The detractors oppose the policy because of its unilateral concessions which may be constructed as weakness of India by Pakistan and other. But so far the doctrine has yielded some positive results. The doctrine is considered good as it is based on good faith, cooperation, dialogues and give and take.

Mr. Inder Kumar Gujral has been in the most exalted political office and executive post since his swearing in as the 12th Prime Minister of the Country. However, he heads the 14 party combine and it makes his task more difficult. But at the same time he is the product of the present political coalition of 14 parties which depends upon on the support of the Congress for remaining in power at the Centre. Not at all a happy situation to form and implement policies and programmes in a very fruitful and cohesive way. Moreover, Gujral lacks mass political support and following. The constituent parties are pulling in different directions and the Common Minimum Programme has not been a programme at all. In these difficult situations, he has to work and take the country forward towards 21st century. He retains the Foreign Portfolio and was Foreign Minister in the Deve Gowda Cabinet. His experience as an ambassador has been long and fruitful. He believes in consensual politics and as such carries much conviction among his colleagues, friends and foreign politicians. He has formulated his own foreign policy and has been zealously implementing it all these years. As the Prime Minister holding charge of External Affairs Ministry, Gujral has become the chief arbiter of Indian foreign policy which has come to be known as “Gujral Doctrine” in recent times.

Gujral doctrine does not mark any significant departure and deviation from the long accepted and practiced Nehruvian vision of mutual friendship, cooperation, non-alignment and non-interference in one another's internal matters. For all these years, since independence, there has been a broad national consensus in regard to our relation with neighbours and other countries.

But Gujral Doctrine lays greater emphasis on more and more constructive, courteous and open dialogue and discussion on bilateral issues. The policy aims at improving relations with immediate neighbours in particular and with all others in general. This is the right approach to overcome hostility, tension and suspicion in bilateral relations. Keep the doors open and continue the dialogue without any pre-conditions, is the cornerstone of the policy. This is the only way to have more friendly, sincere and dependable bilateral relations. Gujral believes that as a major power and country in the region, India has to take the initiative on the diplomatic front without taking into consideration the short-term gains or costs. His patience and perseverance have considerably reduced the tension and hostility between India and Pakistan and strengthened relations with Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka etc. But at the same time he has been firm and categorical on such questions as our nuclear option, opposition to CTBT in the present form and commitment to non-alignment.

He believes that India should accommodate the neighbours in good faith and trust without expecting the same reciprocity and response. India has to give and not expect commensurate immediate returns. India has to take the prime responsibility for stepping up cooperation in the sub-continent and the adjoining regions. It is a vision in which short-term gains of costs and benefits are of no importance. Gujral wants that SAARC becomes an effective vehicle of all round progress in the region with India's initiative and efforts. Economic cooperation and settlement of issues by bilateral talks and discussions is at the core of the doctrine. There is no alternative to dialogue and discussion for resolving disputes between two countries. Doors of dialogues, both official and non-official, should be kept open. There should be no interruption in the channels of communication and dialogue.

The doctrine envisages genuine cooperation and trust based on the spirit of give and take, but India needs to give more to its neighbours and accept as little as possible in return because India devolves the responsibility for stepping up collaboration and cooperation in the region. Mr. Gujral believes that it is in keeping with India's tradition to offer unstinted cooperation without any short-term calculation of costs and benefits. India should not balance its concessions in each and every issue but at the same time there cannot be any compromise in respect of such national interests as secular unity and territorial integrity, he avers. It is in this spirit that India has liberalized imports from SAARC nations particularly from Bangladesh and Pakistan without matching reciprocity on their part because Gujral believes in keeping with the SAPTA agreement and spirit to provide for the grant of non-reciprocal trade concession to the least developed countries of the region. "Even otherwise," he says, "as the largest

economy in the region, we are conscious of our role and responsibility in ensuring that economic and trade liberalization takes place in a just and equitable manner.” Thus, there is enormous market for smaller countries like Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan and Maldives of SAARC right next door in India. Mr. Gujral would like to offer preferentially to these neighbours for their economic and industrial growth. And in this effort he is willing to offer any support or assistance they want.

But there are many who oppose this policy of unilateral concessions to the neighbours. The detractors of the doctrine say that such a policy towards Pakistan can prove counter-productive and harmful because it sends wrong signals of weakness and appeasement. They say that Pakistan’s willingness to come to the negotiation table to discuss bilateral issues was dictated more by international political and economic pressures than any other thing. But the recent (June 1997) Indo-Pak TALKS AT THE LEVELS OF Foreign Secretaries in Islamabad refutes this charge as these talks definitely help in taking the interaction between India and Pakistan further forward. It marks a positive and desired development in the relations between the two countries. It paves the way of future interaction and dialogue leading to more mutual trust and friendly environment. The Ganga water sharing agreement between India and Bangladesh, the signing of Mahakali Treaty in February 1996 between India and Nepal and continued and successful cooperation between India and Sri Lanka and Maldives in regard to trade and maritime related issues. The main areas of future cooperation would include irrigation, flood-control, hydro power generation, river navigation, pollution control, water conservation etc.”

The other principle of the Doctrines is not using a country’s territory to undermine another country’s security and territorial integrity. It would help a lot in checking terrorist and insurgency activities from across the borders, especially along the Indo-Pak and Indo-Bangladesh borders. If these principles are implemented sincerely and all out efforts are made to curb terrorism, all the concerned nations can benefit immensely. But Gujral cannot afford to neglect our national interests as the Prime Minister of India just because he wants better relations with the neighbours and other foreign countries. As he believes in consensus, it is hoped that he will give due consideration relation and foreign policy towards neighbours and other foreign countries. The Gujral doctrine is the right approach as it is based on the good faith and intentions and mutual accommodation but at the same time it should ensure that our good faith is not misconstrued as our weakness. The doctrine should carry conviction both at home and abroad. Liberalisation, opening up of economy and accommodation should never mean appeasement or subservience.

India needs to be very exact, clear and firm in regard to its policies and programmes with foreign countries. There is no room for adhocism or complacency at any stage. On such issue national security and integrity, NPT and CTBT there cannot be any compromised Mr. Gujral has to move forward but with caution in relation with the US, China, Pakistan and Russia, besides neighbouring countries like Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Maldives and Sri Lanka. Our foreign policy will need constant review and revision in view of the international political changes and developments. It is good to be generous and giving but bilateral relation cannot be there unless there is reciprocity, after all it requires two hands to clap. Periodic discussions, dialogues, consultations and exchange of views are necessary to promote peace, friendship, cooperation and economic development but at the same time India should retain its basic thrust as a sovereign, non-aligned, nation dedicated to world peace, independence, justice, equality and solidarity and development of the Third World countries. India should resist all monopolistic strategies adopted by the developed countries as it has done in respect of NPT, CTBT, and Chemical Weapons Treaty etc.