**A Diplomatic Triumph**

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Amid the gloom of inflation and turbulent economic conditions on the domestic front, Pakistan achieved a significant diplomatic victory when its candidate won the contest for one of the six Vice Chairs at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) executive board last week against India. It is noteworthy that 38 members of the 58-member executive board voted for a Pakistani candidate, while only 18 voted for an Indian representative.

The executive board is one of the three constitutional organs of UNESCO, an agency of the United Nations (UN) aimed at promoting world peace and security through international cooperation in education, sciences, culture, communication and information. Members of the executive board are elected by the general conference who act under the authority of the general conference and exercise specific functions assigned to the board by the constitution of UNESCO. India was elected to the UNESCO executive board in the year 2021, for a four-year term till the year 2025. Pakistan was elected earlier this year for a four-year term that will end in the year 2027.

It is important to note that this has come at a time, when India has been projecting itself as the ‘voice’ of the ‘Global South,’ which is used to refer to low and middle-income countries located in the Southern Hemisphere, mainly in Africa, Asia and Latin America. The outcome suggests that these ‘Global South’ countries have largely sided with Pakistan since they formed the majority of the board members. All members of UNESCO are grouped into six regional electoral groups and each such group is represented by a vice-chairperson. This latest election won by Pakistan was for the vice-chairperson of Group IV, which includes Australia, Bangladesh, China, Cook Islands, India, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, the Republic of Korea, Sri Lanka and Vietnam.

‘Global South’ countries have largely sided with Pakistan in the recent election for Vice Chair at UNESCO

The chairperson of the board elected from its members declares the opening and closing of meetings, directs the discussions, ensures observance of rules of procedure and accords the right to speak. The chair also rules on points of order, puts questions to vote announces the results, and represents the board with member states, the UN and other specialised agencies. The six vice-chairpersons, in the absence of the chairperson during a session, exercise the chair’s functions.

India’s permanent representative to UNESCO is Mr Vishal V. Sharma, who is a political appointee. He was a former independent director of Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) as well as a former officer on special duty to Narendra Modi when he was Gujarat’s chief minister. The nepotism has paid off to India in a negative manner. India’s defeat in the UNESCO election contradicts its traditional diplomatic policy of participating in elections deemed winnable, raising questions about its influence and standing in international organizations. India’s stature in the world has been on a decline, especially after its heinous plots of murder and attempts to assassinate Sikh separatist leaders in Canada and the USA respectively were exhumed. Under PM Modi, India was already on a path to commit severe human rights violations against minorities. Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, and Dalits all have been subjected to violations of their basic rights in the Indian homeland as the RSS under the patronage of Mr Modi moves ahead to form Akhand Bharat.

India’s state-sponsored terrorism reached overseas when a Sikh separatist leader considered a threat by India was killed in Canada while two such attempts were unearthed by the US authorities. Pakistan has been sounding these concerns with proof for a long time. India has been involved in state-sponsored terrorism within Pakistan, especially in Balochistan.

India must realise that now the world is uncovering its real face and it is in the line of fire. This defeat is just a consequence of what Canadian Prime Minister Mr Justin Trudeau has been voicing against India’s external terrorism. By mere slogans of democracy and secularism, a country does not become one. As the adage goes “actions speak louder than the words” India has to act accordingly to prove its claims. However, the ground reality is otherwise and the consequences may prove severe for India. This should be a matter of concern for the Indian leadership who must review their strategy on how to operate at the international level.

Pakistan’s diplomatic victory in UNESCO is commendable and also a testament that sane and rational voices are heard around the corners of the world. The trust reposed on Pakistan by the UNESCO executive group members is indicative of the elevated stature that Pakistan is gaining vis-a-vis India among the comity of nations. It is also proof of their belief in Pakistan’s capability to handle such important assignments.

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