

Seventeenth Loksabha

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Title : The Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs and Minister of State in the Ministry of Culture (SHRIMATI MEENAKASHI LEKHI) on behalf of the Minister of External Affairs, Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, made a statement regarding latest developments in India's Foreign Policy

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS AND MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE (SHRIMATI MEENAKASHI LEKHI): Sir, on behalf of my senior colleague, Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, I rise to apprise this august House of the key foreign policy engagements and initiatives taken by India since the Monsoon Session which ended on 8th August 2022.

During this period, India's diplomacy continued apace. The hon. President, the hon. Vice President and the hon. Prime Minister interacted with a number of their foreign counterparts in India and abroad. We also participated in events linked to the G-20, the SCO and the ASEAN while hosting a number of foreign dignitaries in India. This included Secretary-General, Antonio Gutierrez of the United Nations.

I myself visited a number of nations as did our Minister of External Affairs and other Ministers of State; and we had received many of our counterpart colleagues here in India. Together, these activities reflected India's growing interests, expanding footprint and more intensive partnerships. Through these efforts at multiple levels, we were able to advance our national objectives in a world that is increasingly beset with uncertainties, disruptions and rivalries.

The hon. President met Her Majesty Queen Máxima of Netherlands who visited India from 29th August, 2022 to 31 August, 2022 in her capacity as the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Advocate. The hon. Prime Minister of Bangladesh, Her Excellency Sheikh Hasina, also called on the hon. President during her State visit to India.

The hon. President's first overseas visit was to the United Kingdom to attend the funeral of the late Queen Elizabeth-II.

The hon. Vice-President represented India at the India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit at Cambodia which elevated the India-ASEAN relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.

He also attended the 17th East Asia Summit which is an important forum to promote free, open, inclusive and rules-based Indo-Pacific. Apart from bilateral engagements in Phnom Penh, he visited UNESCO world heritage temples at Ta Prohm and Angkor Wat where conservation and restoration work has taken place with India's support.

Furthermore, on the invitation of His Highness Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Amir of Qatar, the hon. Vice-President attended the opening ceremony of FIFA World Cup 2022. This reflected India's long-standing friendship and relationship with Qatar, which is home to over 8.5 lakh Indian nationals.

The hon. Prime Minister participated at the Samarkand Summit of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Council of Heads of States where India assumed the Chairmanship of SCO. As Chair of SCO, India's priorities are to advance the theme of 'SECURE' articulated by the Prime Minister initially at the SCO Summit in Qingdao in 2018. 'SECURE' stands for 'Security, Economic Cooperation, Connectivity, Unity, Respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, and Environment.'

At Samarkand, the hon. Prime Minister voiced global sentiment when he declared that this was not an era of war. His statement was in the context of the Ukraine conflict where our advocacy of dialogue and diplomacy has been consistent and persistent.

It has a larger resonance as well. We have also extended support on specific concerns, such as supply of food grains and fertilizers, as indeed on security of nuclear installations. Our position has been broadly appreciated by the international community and finds reflection in the G20 Bali Declaration.

I am very happy to inform the House that Kashi has been designated as the first SCO Cultural and Tourist Capital for 2022-23. This would facilitate showcasing of our age-old knowledge inheritance and our rich social and cultural heritage. The Prime Minister also attended the state funeral of late Prime Minister Shinzo Abe of Japan, who was the particular friend of India. In his meeting with his counterpart, PM Fumio Kishida, Prime Minister noted the invaluable contributions made by Shinzo Abe to strengthening India-Japan relations, as well as conceptualising the vision of a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region.

Both PMs renewed their commitment towards enhancing India-Japan strategic and global partnership and to work towards promoting regional and international cooperation.

The Secretary-General of the United Nations, His Excellency, António Guterres paid an official visit to India from 18th to 20th October and joined Prime Minister in Kevadia to jointly launch the Lifestyle for Environment initiative. Heads of States and Governments from France, UK, Estonia, Georgia, Maldives, Nepal, Madagascar, Mauritius, Argentina and Guinea contributed with their messages of support for the Life initiative.

Allow me to turn now to the subject of G20. As the House is aware, the Prime Minister attended the Bali G20 Summit recently and we thereafter assumed its Presidency. The G20 is the premier forum for global economic cooperation, representing around 85 per cent of the global GDP, over 75 per cent of the worldwide trade, and about two-thirds of the world population. Prime Minister had noted that India's Presidency of the G20 during the year of Azadi Ka Amrit Mahotsav is a matter of pride for every Indian. The G20 meetings have already commenced in India and our endeavour is to organize about 200 of these meetings in 32 different sectors in multiple locations across India. The G20 Summit to be held next year would be one of the highest-profile international gatherings to be hosted by India.

During the G20 Bali Summit held under Indonesia's Presidency, India extended fullest support to ensure its success. Our contribution to finding a common ground among members in a polarised environment was widely appreciated. Prime Minister also held discussions with counterpart leaders on key issues of global concern. They focussed mainly on reviving global growth, ensuring food and energy security, promoting technology, preserving environment, and addressing public health and digital transformation. As is customary, many of these opportunities also provided an occasion to take stock of our bilateral relationships. Since we were assuming the responsibility, this was also the time to seek the support and cooperation of all G20 members for the success of India's Presidency. Hon. Members are aware that the G20 is taking place in the larger context of a geopolitical crisis, food and energy insecurity, slow progress on Sustainable Development Goals, mounting debt burden and challenges to climate action, and climate justice.

Our endeavour is to build consensus within the G20, champion causes especially of the Global South, and shape the setting of the agenda. This will also be an occasion for us to highlight the 3Ds of India: Development, Democracy and Diversity.

In our global engagements, we have discerned strong interest in India's digital delivery, public health response, green growth and development as well as the empowerment of all sections of society. There is also an enhanced interest in our

democratic traditions which go way back in our pluralistic and consultative culture. We envisage the G20 Presidency as an occasion to showcase India to the world. This will be done through cultural activities, regional festivals, technology programmes, sustainability initiatives, Millets promotion, One District One Product, community engagement and civil society activities. Our Presidency will witness a Jan Bhagidari, where all of India would not only participate but celebrate this occasion. As the House is aware, Government has briefed leaders of political parties in this regard. We see this as a truly national endeavour and seek the cooperation of everybody to make it a success.

I would also like to highlight that India will provide stronger voice to the issues of interest to the Global South. This is very much a part of our DNA. It was in evidence most recently during the Vaccine Maitri. Our emphasis will be on sharing the India story, caring for all and taking collective action. It will focus on emphasizing our achievements and priorities such as digital India, clean energy, sustainable lifestyles, women-led development, and multilateral reforms. Prime Minister's initiative on 'LiFE' – Lifestyle for the Environment Movement and India's Millet initiative which has resulted in UN declaration of the year 2023 as International Year of Millets would also be prominent in India's approach towards addressing the Sustainable Development Goals.

Today, we are building stronger bridges with both developing countries and advanced economies. Apart from our G20 Presidency, we are members of a growing number of groups and mechanisms. Some of them are relatively established like the BRICS and Commonwealth. Others have been more recent like the Quad and SCO. And still, others are emerging like the I2U2 and Indo-Pacific. Economic Framework.

We are also increasingly engaging the world in group formats, reflecting the growing interest on their part in cooperating with India. This could be with the ASEAN, Africa or the Pacific Islands, or indeed the Nordic nations, Caricom, CELAC or Central Asia. Our growing collaboration with the European Union is of particular importance.

I would also like to share with the House that the Ministers of MEA have been equally active during this period. The EAM has hosted the Foreign Ministers of Maldives, France, Singapore, Botswana, United Kingdom, Ghana, Gabon, Belarus, Syria, UAE and Germany in this period. I would also like to highlight the India-Singapore Ministerial Roundtable and the collective interaction with 12 African Ministers dealing with education and skills that took place in New Delhi. It would give the hon. Members a sense of the breadth of our engagement and the growing global interest in India.

This was also in evidence during the outgoing visits of the EAM to Thailand, Brazil, Paraguay, Argentina, UAE, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Uzbekistan, USA, Australia, New Zealand, Egypt and Russia. It was our privilege to represent India at the UN General Assembly high level segment this year. We took the occasion to engage with the G4, the L69, Quad, IBSA, BRICS, CELAC, and Caricom and hold multiple trilaterals and bilaterals.

Our Ministers of State have been equally vigorous in promoting the interests of India abroad. Shri Muraleedharan went to Brazil, Senegal, USA, Oman, Djibouti, Kenya, Eritrea and Nigeria. I represented India at the CICA Summit at Kazakhstan and visited Georgia, Norway, Iceland and Malta. Dr. Rajkumar Ranjan Singh was our representative at the IORA Ministerial and visited Indonesia.

The House should also be aware that as Chair of the Counter Terrorism Committee (CTC) of UNSC, India hosted its Special Meeting in October. All the 15 members participated and paid homage to victims of 26/11 Mumbai terrorist attack at the Memorial Wall in Taj Mahal Palace Hotel. This was the first time that the UNSC held a meeting in India. Their 'Delhi Declaration' emphasized the need to display zero tolerance towards terrorism and combat it in all its forms and manifestations.

I am happy to inform the House, that after a gap created by COVID, India will be hosting the 17th Pravasi Bharatiya Divas at Indore from 8-10 January 2023. This year's theme acknowledges the contributions of Indian diaspora as "Diaspora: Reliable Partners for India's Progress in Amrit Kaal". The 32 million Indian diaspora is a great source of support for our country. India's 4C commitment of 'Care, Connect, Celebrate and Contribute' would be on display during the celebrations. H.E. President Mohamed Irfaan Ali of Guyana will be the Chief Guest at Pravasi Bharatiya Divas-2023. Where Republic Day 2023 is concerned, we have invited H.E. President Abdel Fatah El-Sisi of Egypt as the Chief Guest. He has graciously accepted the invitation. Hon'ble Members would also be glad to know that 12th World Hindi Conference will be jointly organized by India and Fiji from 15-17 February 2023 at Fiji. This will be the first occasion of hosting this event in the Pacific region.

Foreign policy today is no longer just an exercise of a Ministry or even of the Government. It has a direct impact on the daily lives of all Indians. This may be in ensuring that our products have market access or that our talent gets into the global work place. But it is equally an effort to ensure that technology, best practices and capital flow into India. Our endeavour in a difficult global situation is that the welfare of the Indian people is ensured, however challenging the circumstances may be. This may be in exceptional situations like Operation Ganga in Ukraine or the ability to access key necessities like energy and fertilizers on affordable terms. Or indeed in concluding Migration and Mobility Partnerships as we have just done with Germany. Indian foreign policy is there to serve the Indian people; we will do whatever it takes to discharge that responsibility. It could be in ensuring international support for our policies or in acceptance of our interests and objectives. These may be difficult times but it is also an occasion to display our leadership and make a strong contribution to global peace, stability, growth and security.

Hon'ble Members know this well and understandably approach the Ministry with their particular concerns and issues. It has been our earnest effort to respond as effectively and sincerely to their communications. We are extremely conscious that foreign policy must respond to the requirements and demands of our society.

We demonstrate that as much through the activities of our Embassies abroad as we do at home, through improved passport and emigration services. I have every confidence that this august House does appreciate both our promotion of national interests abroad as well as our responsiveness to the daily requirements of our people. I conclude with the expectation that the House will continue to extend its fullest support to our efforts and encourage our success in the G20 Presidency. Thank you, Chairman, Sir.

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