

Title: Statement regarding Prime Minister's visit to abroad and important foreign dignitaries received by him.

15.58 hrs.

STATEMENT BY PRIME MINISTER

THE PRIME MINISTER (DR. MANMOHAN SINGH): Mr. Speaker, Sir, since the last Session of Parliament, I have had the opportunity to interact with a number of world leaders during my visits to London, New York, The Hague and Vientiane.

Sir, I visited London at the invitation of Prime Minister Blair on 19-20 September *en route* to New York for the UN General Assembly Session. Following our talks, we adopted a Joint Declaration on "India-UK : Towards a new and dynamic partnership". This Declaration outlines areas of future cooperation in our strategic relations reinforcing our partnership in foreign and defence policy, in combating terrorism in all its forms and manifestation, expansion of economic ties and intensifying cooperation in the areas of Science and Technology, education and culture. Prime Minister Blair reiterated the United Kingdom's support for permanent membership of India in the UN Security Council.

16.00 hrs.

Our relations with the UK, one of our most important political and economic partners will receive special focus in 2005, when the UK will hold the Chairmanship of the G-8. It will also hold the Presidency of the European Union in the second half of 2005, when we expect to hold the 6th India-EU Summit in New Delhi.

I addressed the UN General Assembly in New York on September 23, 2004. The broad themes covered in my address were: the global and transnational character of the challenges confronting the world, the need for a global response based on consensus, and the need to impart substance and credibility to the global war against terrorism. I emphasized India's commitment to multilateralism and to its embodiment – the UN, the imperative of reforms to enable the UN to refashion itself to become relevant to our times. I outlined the reasons why we believe India should be a permanent member of the UN Security Council.

In this context, a Summit of the leaders of, what is now being termed as the 'Group of Four aspirants' – Brazil, Germany, India and Japan was held on September 21, 2004 in New York. This was a significant statement of our intent to participate in the UN reform process on the basis of a mutual understanding to support each other for permanent membership of the Security Council. We also highlighted the need to reform the Security Council to make it more representative and more effective.

While in New York, I also had bilateral meetings with the Presidents of USA, South Africa, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

My meeting with President George Bush was very positive in setting the direction for further development of India-US Strategic Partnership. We welcomed the recent implementation of Phase I of the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership. We agreed on the need for expanded economic and defence cooperation. We recognized the importance of working closely in the war against terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

During my meeting with President Musharraf, I conveyed our sincere desire to pursue the dialogue with Pakistan systematically and on a sustained basis. I emphasized to President Musharraf the criticality of his fulfilling the reassurance of January 6, 2004, that any territory under Pakistan's control would not be used to support terrorism in any manner.

We agreed that confidence-building measures (CBMs) of all categories under discussion between the two governments should be implemented. This should be done keeping in mind practical possibilities, as these will contribute to generating an atmosphere of trust and mutual understanding so necessary for the well-being of the peoples of both countries.

We also discussed bilateral issues, including Jammu and Kashmir. We agreed that possible options for a peaceful, negotiated settlement of the issue of Jammu and Kashmir should be explored in a sincere spirit and a purposeful manner. I made it clear to President Musharraf that while we are willing to look at various options, we would not agree to any redrawing of boundaries, or another partition of our country.

The possibility of a gas pipeline via Pakistan to India was also discussed in the context of the bilateral economic and commercial relationship. We feel such a project would have considerable mutual benefits.

On November 23, I highlighted these points, of concern to Pakistan Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz who visited India as the current SAARC Chairman.

We intend to pursue the path of cooperation and dialogue with Pakistan in an atmosphere free of mistrust and terror, building upon the support that we have received from the people of the two countries, and without compromising upon our basic national interests. Technical level meetings on various subjects are already underway. The two Foreign Secretaries would meet on December 27-28, 2004, to initiate the next round of the Composite Dialogue.

The Fifth India-EU Summit was held at The Hague on 8th November 2004. This Summit represents a landmark for it launched the India-EU Strategic Partnership. This Partnership is a recognition of India's growing stature as a major regional and global power. India and the EU agreed to intensify consultations on a range of issues including the UN reforms and major multilateral conferences, on disarmament and non-proliferation and to strengthen joint efforts in fighting terrorism. With regard to our economic relations, we also agreed to find ways to enhance our trade and investment relations. Two proposals of special interest were the decision to set up an Energy Panel to discuss cooperation in energy matters and an Environment Forum.

In order to carry forward and intensify our relations in various areas, the EU and India will prepare a Joint Agenda for Action over the next few months. We hope the Joint Agenda will be endorsed at the Sixth India-EU Summit to be held in New Delhi next year.

I visited Vientiane, Lao PDR to participate in the Third India-ASEAN Summit which was held on 30th November 2004. Our relations with ASEAN constitute an important cornerstone of our "Look East" policy. At the Summit, ASEAN leaders and I signed the document titled "India-ASEAN Partnership for Peace, Progress, and Shared Prosperity". This Partnership Document lays out a short to medium term road map of India-ASEAN cooperation in various sectors.

The Third India-ASEAN Summit gave us an opportunity to take stock of the progress made in India-ASEAN relations over the last two years and consider new initiatives and measures to further strengthen cooperation in various sectors such as economic, science and technology, information and communication technology, agriculture, health and pharmaceutical and people to people contacts. We also reviewed the progress in the negotiations of the India-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement in goods.

Sir, the potential of India-ASEAN cooperation is not confined just to the economic sphere, but includes human resource development, science and technology, health and pharmaceuticals, information and communication technology and agriculture.

During this Summit, I also met the leaders of Japan, People's Republic of China, Singapore, Lao PDR, Vietnam, Australia and Indonesia and exchanged views on issues of mutual interest. In my discussions with the Chinese Premier we reviewed the progress made in the two rounds of talks between our Special Representatives on the Boundary question and agreed that these would continue with a focus on substantive issues.

Recently, we have also received several important leaders here in New Delhi. I should like to inform hon. Members about these.

Russian President Putin's visit on December 3-4 was of great significance and has given considerable momentum to substantive aspects of our strategic partnership. Our discussions were marked by traditional trust and mutual confidence.

Cooperation in the field of energy was a particular focus; we signed five MoUs on cooperation in the petroleum sector. We also signed two agreements relating to cooperation in the field of space, including in respect of the Russian Satellite Navigation System GLONASS.

There was purposeful discussion on the supply of defence equipment and spares and we received a categorical assurance that recurrent issues that have arisen with the supply of spares will be dealt with.

We in turn agreed to support Russia's accession to the WTO and to treat Russia as a Market Economy for purposes of anti-dumping investigations, to which the Russian side attaches great importance.

We have also maintained a high tempo of productive engagement with our neighbouring countries and received their leaders.

I met His Majesty the King of Bhutan on November 25 and had an extended discussion with him covering the various aspects of our close and mutually beneficial cooperation. He has agreed to be the Chief Guest at our Republic Day celebrations next year.

The President of Sri Lanka, Mrs. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, visited India from 3-7 November, 2004. Discussions were held on various bilateral and international issues of mutual interest including expansion of economic ties through early conclusion of a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, utilisation of lines of credit and cooperation in areas such as power and transportation. The President also briefed us on internal developments in Sri Lanka, including the state of the peace process.

The Prime Minister of Nepal, Mr. Sher Bahadur Deuba visited India from 8 to 12 September. This visit provided us an opportunity to share perceptions on current developments within Nepal as well as India's assistance to various developmental projects in that country. We emphasised our traditional policy of support for multi-party democracy and constitutional monarchy as the twin pillars of the Nepalese Constitution. We are in continuous touch with Nepal with regard to the security situation in that country. His Majesty, the King of Nepal, will be coming to India on December, 23.

The Chairman of the State Peace and Development Council of Myanmar, Senior General Than Shwe paid a state visit to India from 24th to 29th October 2004. This was the first Head of State level visit from Myanmar in 24 years. An MOU on cooperation in the field of Non-Traditional Security Issues was signed during the visit. Expansion of bilateral cooperation in industry, energy, rural transportation, communication and science and technology were also discussed. We conveyed that while India did not wish to interfere in Myanmar's internal affairs, we would welcome early realization of the goal of multi-party democracy based on national reconciliation and an inclusive approach.

During this period, other important visitors we received include the Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Mr. Gerhard Schroeder, the President of the Republic of Korea, Mr. Roh Moo-Hyun, the Prime Minister of New Zealand Rt. Hon. Helen Clark, Prime Minister of Morocco Mr. Driss Jettou and the President of the Slovak Republic. The Prime Minister of Malaysia is currently on a State visit to India.

Sir, it is now seven months since our Government took office. Our objective is to focus on the centrality of national interests in the conduct of our external relations and the pursuit of our economic interests. We have taken important initiatives, keeping in mind the imperative of retaining our freedom of options, remaining alive to our concerns. Our efforts have contributed to making the international environment for India's development more secure. I am confident that our foreign interlocutors have a better appreciation of our position on issues of importance to India. We will continue to remain engaged in this endeavour.

Sir, I am placing on the Table of the House, for the information of hon. Members, the following documents:

1. India-UK: Towards a New and Dynamic Partnership – A Joint Declaration
2. US-India Partnership: Cooperation and Trust
3. India-Pakistan Joint Statement

4. Statement by India, Brazil, Germany and Japan (G-4)
 5. Joint Press Statement of the India-EU Summit
 6. ASEAN-India Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity.
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