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Title: The Minister of External Affairs made a statement regarding "Significant Developments in our Neighbourhood".

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI S.M. KRISHNA): I rise to inform the House of significant developments in our relations with three important neighbours - Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal.

Hon'ble Members will recall the Prime Minister's remarks in this House on June 9, 2009. He had said then that it is in our vital interest to make peace with Pakistan. In our vision of a cooperative and harmonious sub-continent, the relationship between India and Pakistan can be a critical building block. The Prime Minister had also referred to our intention of meeting Pakistan more than half way, if its leaders have the courage, determination and statesmanship to take the high road to peace. These sentiments encapsulate our approach. We also recognize the importance and salience of a continued dialogue with Pakistan. However, dialogue addressing mutual concerns is premised on an atmosphere free of the threat of violence. It was with this explicit premise that the Composite Dialogue Process was restarted in 2004. Despite achievements, the dialogue and our very relationship with Pakistan have come under stress recurrently because of the license which terrorist groups have had in Pakistan to carry out attacks on India.

Hon'ble Members are aware of the Government of Pakistan's assurances to us at the very highest level that it would not let territories under its control to be used for attacks against India. Notwithstanding these assurances, we have been repeatedly and severely hit by a series of terrorist attacks emanating from Pakistan. It is the responsibility of the Government of Pakistan to take all such steps as are necessary to address this issue and expose and take action against the conspiracies and conspirators responsible for such attacks. Unfortunately, terrorists in Pakistan continue attacks against India.

When the Prime Minister met President Asif Ali Zardari of Pakistan at the margins of the SCO Summit in Russia last month, the President of Pakistan told us of Pakistan's efforts to deal with the menace of terrorism and the difficulties that they face. It was agreed that the Foreign Secretaries of India and Pakistan will discuss what Pakistan is doing and can do to prevent terrorism from Pakistan against India and to bring to justice those responsible for these attacks, including the horrendous crime of the attacks in Mumbai. After the Foreign Secretaries report, we will be able to take stock of the situation at Sharm-el-Sheikh where, at the margins of the Non-Aligned Summit, Prime Minister will be meeting the Pakistani leadership.

MR. CHAIRMAN: Mr. Minister, the Statement seems to be very long. You may lay it on the Table of the House.

SHRI S.M. KRISHNA: Sir, I, with your permission, lay the rest of my statement on the Table of the House.

*Permit me now to briefly apprise the House of recent developments in Sri Lanka. As Hon'ble Members are aware, after more than two decades of conflict involving the Sri Lankan Government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), a terrorist organisation proscribed in India, the Sri Lankan Government in mid-May 2009 proclaimed the end of military operations after wresting back all the territory held by the LTTE. The death of several LTTE leaders was also announced, including that of Velupillai Prabhakaran, who is a proclaimed offender in India. This is a significant conclusion to the military conflict in Northern Sri Lanka.

The end of military operations in northern and eastern Sri Lanka is an opportunity to rebuild the country after the ravages of conflict. In the immediate post-conflict situation, the most pressing concern is to ensure the early resettlement and rehabilitation of the nearly three lakh Tamil civilians displaced

â€ This part of the speech was laid on the Table.

by the conflict in the last year. The early return of the Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) to their homes is a crucial first step towards reclaiming their lives and restoring normalcy. We have been assured by the Sri Lankan Government and President of their intention to proceed quickly with the task of resettlement. Mr. Basil Rajapaksa, Senior Adviser to the President of Sri Lanka, led a high-level delegation to India on June 24, 2009 when we studied the resettlement and rehabilitation issue in great detail. The Sri Lankan Government have committed themselves to resettling most IDPs in 180 days.

India will provide every possible assistance in the task of rehabilitation, resettlement and reconstruction. Hon'ble Members will recall that Prime Minister himself announced in this august House, India's firm commitment to engage with the process of relief and rehabilitation in Sri Lanka in keeping with our abiding interest in the well being of the Tamil people in that country. The Government has earmarked Rs. 500 crores for this purpose and we are willing to do more.

The immediate focus of the projects that will be taken up as part of this effort include deployment of four demining teams, which is a prerequisite for IDPs to return to their homes, reconstruction of houses and supply of shelter material, medical assistance, and provision and repair of civil infrastructure.

Since November 2008, India has shipped 1.7 lakh family relief packs from Tamil Nadu for IDPs and civilians affected by the conflict. The packs included essential items such as dry rations, personal hygiene items, clothes, utensils etc. and were distributed to the beneficiaries by the ICRC. Another consignment of family packs will be dispatched from Tamil Nadu shortly. India has also been operating a full-fledged 60-member field hospital in Sri Lanka since March 2009. Since moving to its new location near Vavuniya after the end of military operations, more than 14,000 patients have been treated by the facility which is equipped with modern equipment and amenities and they have done commendable work. Further, two consignments of medicines have also been gifted to Sri Lanka in view of the urgent requirement for civilians and IDPs.

The cessation of hostilities gives Sri Lanka an opportunity to make a new beginning and to build a better future for all her peoples and, therefore, for the region as a whole. We are convinced that a closure to the cycle of violence and terrorism that has plagued Sri Lanka requires an inclusive political process of dialogue and devolution. Such a process must address the legitimate aspirations of the minorities, including the Tamil community, within the democratic framework of a united Sri Lanka.

We have been assured by the Sri Lankan Government of their intention to pursue a political process that envisages a broader dialogue with all parties including the Tamil parties, the full implementation of the 13th Amendment to the Sri Lankan Constitution and to go beyond, so as to achieve meaningful devolution of powers. We will remain engaged with them through this process.

I would also like to take this opportunity to mention that the Government continues to closely monitor incidents affecting the safety of our fishermen in the waters between India and Sri Lanka. We have reiterated to Sri Lanka the need to ensure strict compliance with the understanding on fishing arrangements reached between the two countries in October 2008.

As a close neighbour with whom our security and prosperity are inescapably intertwined, the Government attaches utmost importance to the future course of events in Sri Lanka and has an interest in ensuring that a lasting political settlement is reached.

Finally, I wish to inform the House of recent developments in Nepal. As Hon'ble Members are aware, the peace process in Nepal after the Constituent Assembly elections last year has gone through many ups and downs.

Due to the nature of our relations and the open border, developments in Nepal have a direct impact on us. We are therefore concerned at the lack of progress on peace process issues and fraying of the political consensus that was critical to the peace process. The task of constitution making has also not progressed as per agreed schedule, and it remains to be seen whether it can be completed by the stipulated timeframe of April 2010.

There are also significant differences between political parties as to the structure of governance, issues like federalism etc., which they need to resolve. The Army Integration Special Committee, with the mandate to supervise, integrate and rehabilitate the combatants of the Maoist Army, was constituted in January 2009 along with a Technical Committee. No tangible progress has been achieved by it on the issue, too. Over 19,600 combatants of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) of the Maoists and over 4000 cadres disqualified by the UN Mission in Nepal (UNMIN), which include minors, continue to stay in cantonments with their upkeep paid for by the Government of Nepal and international donors.

Prime Minister Prachanda resigned on May 4, 2009, after a political crisis brought about by his insistence on removal of the Chief of Army Staff of Nepal Army in spite of opposition from major political parties, including the main coalition partner CPN-UML, and advice of the President.

Following his resignation, a new coalition Government has been formed under the leadership of Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal of CPN-UML. The coalition Government is supported by 22 political parties and enjoys a majority in the 601 member Constituent Assembly, which also acts as Legislature-Parliament.

On her part, India has provided full support to the ongoing peace process in Nepal, including material assistance to strengthen the civil security forces and law enforcement machinery, and support for elections to the Constituent Assembly. We hope that the new government would be able to move expeditiously on the tasks of constitution making and conclusion of peace process on the basis of widest possible consensus. We have conveyed our commitment to assist the Government and people of Nepal in their endeavour of transition to multi-party democracy and conclusion of peace process, in any manner and to the extent Nepal would like us to.

The open border between India and Nepal offers opportunities, as well as challenges. Recently, there were allegations in the Nepalese media of encroachments on the border by Sashastra Seema Bal (SSB), which were found to be false. Strip maps covering about ninety six percent of the India-Nepal boundary have been jointly finalized and initialed. We have also agreed to establish local

level mechanisms across the border to address issues related to border management.

Closure of the breach in the embankment of the Kosi river that occurred in August 2008 in Nepal has been carried out. We are also carrying out additional anti-erosion and protection works.

Our relations with Nepal are unique, and will continue to be a matter of highest priority for India. We do not view our fraternal ties with Nepal through the prism of its relations with any other country. A peaceful democratic Nepal is in the interest of the people of Nepal, of India and of our region. India will continue to support Nepal in its democratic transition and economic development in any manner and to the extent it would like us to.*

(Placed in Library, See No. LT – 126/15/09)