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Title: Made a statement on his recent visit to Colombo in connection with SAARC Summit and recent developments affecting India's foreign policy.

11.14 hrs

THE PRIME MINISTER (SHRI ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE): Sir, over the last few weeks, the Government has kept the House regularly informed about the developments in the fields of international relations and our foreign policy. I take this opportunity to bring the hon. Members up-to-date on the most recent events, dialogue meetings.

I visited Colombo on 28th - 31st July, 1998 to participate in the 10th Planning Commission, as well as Minister of State for External Affairs who led our delegation at the Ministerial level meeting preceding the Summit.

strengthen cooperation in the region. There was general agreement with our perception that to meet the challenges and to avail of the opportunities presented by the substantially transformed global economic situation, it was technical cooperation. The agenda and the discussions during the Summit were focussed on these areas.

Free Trade Area; a group of experts will be set up to negotiate a comprehensive legal framework for this purpose incorporating schedules for liberalised trade and facilitation measures, taking into account least developed countries' concerns. Parallel steps will be taken to conclude the third round of the trade negotiations under the South Asian Preferential Trading Arrangement, and to commence the next round.

We have reiterated our commitment to, and readiness for bold initiatives to speed up trade liberalisation. I announced our Government's decision to lift all Quantitative Restrictions preferentially, on imports from far-reaching positive economic and developmental consequences for the region and has been welcomed. We also made known our readiness to enter into has taken up this offer.

In our discussion, it was recognized that the benefits of trade liberalisation would be more extensive and balanced through promoting trade-related joint ventures, investment and trade-in-services such as tourism. India's decision to substantially increase the ceiling for investment 15 million has also been welcomed. This will encourage a greater flow of Indian investment and stimulate trade.

Important initiatives have been taken in the social sector, to combat Illegal Trafficking in Women and Children. This is to be signed at the developed.

We underlined the importance of cooperation in energy through networking. India has, further, offered to host a special meeting of Science projects in rural areas, directly benefiting the people. We also underlined the utility of cooperation in traditional systems of medicines and have invited participation in a Health Ministers' meeting in India for this purpose. India has reaffirmed support for comprehensive environment related proposals.

I would also like to draw attention to my bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the Summit, with the Presidents of Maldives and Sri Lanka, the Prime Ministers of Bangladesh and Nepal and the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Bhutan. These meetings provided the occasion for renewing our friendly contact, for fruitful discussions enabling a review of our bilateral relations and of progress in specific areas of cooperation, as well as for sharing our perceptions.

I took the opportunity, in my interaction with other leaders, to reiterate our commitment to peace and stability, setting at rest misconceptions about our recent nuclear tests. Our initiatives for confidence building and disarmament have been appreciated. There was an agreement on the need to commence purposeful negotiations towards a comprehensive and nondiscriminatory global nuclear disarmament regime and a nuclear weapon-free world.

We have conveyed our appreciation to the Sri Lankan Government for the excellent arrangements made for the Summit, and in particular to President Chandrika Kumaratunga for the vision and efficiency with which she

steered the Summit deliberations. We wish her well in her new responsibility in Chairing In my interaction with Pakistan Prime Minister, Mr. Muhammed Nawaz Sharif, which included a long meeting on July 29, I reiterated our commitment to developing peaceful and friendly ties with Pakistan, and our interest in a secure, stable and prosperous Pakistan. I urged that we should work together to develop trust and confidence, and avail of the many opportunities for mutually beneficial cooperation in the economic, social and other fields so that we can improve the lives of peoples. I further underlined the need to work together to address our differences in a rational and realistic manner. The atmosphere of our discussions was cordial and constructive. I look forward to continuing a purposeful interaction with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

My discussions with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif also focussed on our official level dialogue. Hon. Members will recall that such a dialogue had been resumed last year, and that the subjects for discussion were jointly identified in June 1997. The modalities for this purpose have not yet been finalised. We directed our Foreign Secretaries to meet and complete this exercise.

India has consistently underlined its commitment to a direct, composite dialogue with Pakistan. Such a comprehensive and sustained process will contribute to building trust and confidence, promote mutually beneficial cooperation and help address bilateral issues. The dialogue must address the totality of the relationship and not be pursued in a narrow, segmented fashion which would defeat its very purpose which is to build a wide ranging and enduring relationship. A direct bilateral interaction which seeks to generate confidence and foster cooperation in functional areas, and enhanced people to people contacts would also help create a positive climate, in which difficult issues under discussion could be purposefully addressed. It is recognised by the international community that all outstanding issues between India and Pakistan, including Jammu and Kashmir should be settled bilaterally in a peaceful manner. The modalities which we have suggested would help ensure that the process moves forward on a broad front in a constructive and sustained manner, while at the same time, providing a meaningful opportunity for discussions on confidence building measures, cooperation and dealing with outstanding issues, as part of a composite process.

Our Foreign Secretaries met in Colombo and exchanged views on this subject. We will remain engaged in the process and continue contacts through diplomatic channels, to work out an agreement, so that the dialogue could be continued.

During my talks with Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, I also emphasised that instigation and support of terrorism was incompatible with our common desire for friendly and peaceful relations and that these activities must cease immediately.

Hon. Members are aware that we also participated in this year's ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference which is an important part of ASEAN's interaction with its dialogue partners, as well as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Meetings, held on July 24-29. Our delegation was led by Deputy-Chairman, Planning Commission. My Government has reaffirmed the policy of strengthening cooperation with countries in ASEAN and the Asia Pacific Region as a whole. Apart from bilateral contacts, we have also established active communication with them in the framework of the dialogue partnership and ARF. Our participation in these meetings this year, was particularly important, as it provided an opportunity to once again clarify our policy on nuclear disarmament in the context of the recent tests, as well as to demonstrate our continued engagement in the economic and political stability of the region and share perceptions on regional and international developments. While the ARF "Chairman's Statement" contained a paragraph disapproving of the recent tests in South Asia, with which we disassociated ourselves, we also found a better overall understanding on the part of ASEAN countries of the rationale of our policy, as well as of the need for purposeful moves by the Nuclear Weapon States towards comprehensive, universal nuclear disarmament on a non-discriminatory basis. We assure the ASEAN countries that we fully respected the status of the Nuclear Weapon Free Zone in South East Asia.

Our interaction with ASEAN reflected an understanding that cooperation and dialogue partnership with India had made good progress, and that we needed to jointly consolidate this through implementation of projects and measures under discussion, in trade and investment, infrastructure and human resource development, tourism, culture and people to people contacts.

The leader of our delegation also had constructive and forward looking discussions with the Foreign Ministers of ASEAN countries, Russia, China, Australia and New Zealand, the US Secretary of State and the Ministers of State of Japan and the United Kingdom. Our bilateral and multilateral interaction in the ASEAN and ARF meetings has helped our post-Pokhran - II diplomatic efforts. Our overall approach, and importance of the steps we have taken to address international and regional security concerns is better acknowledged. There is also continued recognition that India is a factor for peace, stability in the region.

MR. SPEAKER: As the hon. Members are aware, a short duration discussion on the recent developments affecting India's foreign policy is listed in today's List of Business in the names of Shri K. Natwar Singh and Shri P.A. Sangma. The Prime Minister has also made a statement today in the House which has a direct bearing on the subject of the short duration discussion.

If the House agrees, we may enlarge the canvass of the short duration discussion to include the statement made by the Prime Minister as well.

SEVERAL HON. MEMBERS: Yes.

MR. SPEAKER: The Members, may, therefore make reference to the statement made Shri P.A. Sangma may initiate the discussion regarding recent developments affecting India's foreign policy.

... (Interruptions)

डा. शफीकुरहमान बर्क (मुरादाबाद) : अध्यक्ष महोदय, जानसठ में पुलिस ने जो पांच आदमियों की हत्या की है, उस सिलसिले में मैंने ३१ तारीख को भी जीरो ऑवर में नोटिस दिया था, लेकिन मुझे मौका नहीं दिया गया। मैं चाहता हूँ कि इसपर मुझे बोलने का मौका दिया जाये। आज भी इस पर मैंने नोटिस दिया है।

अध्यक्ष महोदय : कल जीरो ऑवर में मौका देंगे।

DR. SHAFIQR RAHMAN BARQ : Sir, this is a very important matter. ...(Interruptions)

अध्यक्ष महोदय : आज नहीं, कल जीरो ऑवर में मौका देंगे।

डा. शफीकुरहमान बर्क : इसमें आज ही बोलने का मौका दे दीजिए, यह जरूरी है।

श्री मोहन सिंह (देवरिया): ऐसा है कि यह मैटर फॉरेन पॉलिसी को भी प्रभावित करने वाला है।

... (व्यवधान)

SHRI E. AHAMED (MANJERI): Sir, this is a very serious matter. Five people have been killed by the policy ... (Interruptions) Five innocent youth have been killed by the police in U.P. ...(Interruptions) It is a human right violation. The Legislative Assembly of the U.P. State is not sitting now. I have also given a notice on this ... (Interruptions)

अध्यक्ष महोदय : आज मौका नहीं मिलेगा, कल बोल दिया न।

SHRI P. UPENDRA (VIJAYAWADA): Sir, the Prime Minister should remain present at least to hear the first speech of the discussion regarding India's foreign policy.(Interruptions)

THE MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI L.K. ADVANI): Sir, the hon. Prime Minister has to make a statement in Rajya Sabha. ...(Interruptions)

MR. SPEAKER: The hon. Prime Minister will come back after making a statement in Rajya Sabha.

... (Interruptions)

SHRI BUTA SINGH (JALORE): Sir, I want to raise a very important matter.

अध्यक्ष महोदय : बूटा सिंह जी, आज नहीं, कल मौका देंगे।

श्री बूटा सिंह : मुझे कल मौका देंगे?

अध्यक्ष महोदय : हां, कल देंगे।