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Title: The Minister of External Affairs laid a statement regarding Prime Minister's visit to Bhutan for 16<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit-laid.

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI S.M. KRISHNA): Hon'ble Speaker, Hon'ble Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh returned from Bhutan on 30<sup>th</sup> April where he participated in the 16<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit. This was a historic summit as it marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Organization. This was also the first gathering of the SAARC leaders in Bhutan.

As Honourable members are aware, we have a historically close relationship with Bhutan. We would like to compliment the Royal Government of Bhutan and its enlightened leadership on the excellent manner in which they organized the Summit, and ensured productive outcomes.

Prime Minister had very fruitful discussions with Prime Minister Jigmi Thinley and an audience with Their Majesties the King of Bhutan and the Fourth King of Bhutan. These discussions have reinforced my conviction that India-Bhutan relations remain strong, deep-rooted and steeped in mutual trust and understanding. Prime Minister and Prime Minister Thinley launched two new large hydropower projects as part of our commitment to jointly develop 10,000 MWs of hydro-power capacity in Bhutan by the year 2020. They also laid the foundation stone of the Bhutan Institute of Medical Sciences and initiated an e-governance and IT project in Bhutan.

At the SAARC Summit, Prime Minister recalled what Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi had said at the first SAARC Summit in Dhaka in 1985, that the establishment of the organization was an act of faith. The Summit provided an opportunity to reflect on what we have achieved in these two and half decades, what more needs to be done, and on the kind of a South Asia we wish to create for our present and future generations.

Prime Minister stressed that regional cooperation should enable freer movement of people, of ideas, and of goods and services. It is not sufficient to merely conclude agreements and conventions. The challenge before us is to translate these agreements into practical activities and programmes, which touch the lives of our people. Prime Minister emphasized the need for greater regional cooperation in areas such as agriculture, forestry, education, healthcare, women's empowerment, skill development and technological innovations. The Summit concluded an Agreement on Trade in Services.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century cannot be an Asian century unless South Asia marches together. Prime Minister shared our vision of a prosperous and vibrant South Asia playing its rightful role in shaping the global discourse on issues facing the world. There was a convergence of views on the need to transform SAARC into a truly action-oriented, people-centric and dynamic regional organization. There was unanimous condemnation of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations.

The theme of the Summit was "Climate Change". The leaders of the SAARC countries exchanged views on deepening regional cooperation for tackling the effects of global warming in our region, and how we can benefit from each other's experiences and strengths. A Summit Declaration on Climate Change as well as a Convention on Cooperation on Environment was concluded.

There was widespread appreciation for India's initiatives and role in contributing to the region's stability and prosperity. We will continue to persevere in our efforts to create a climate of constructive cooperation in South Asia based on mutual respect and mutual benefit.

Prime Minister had the opportunity of having bilateral meetings with the Presidents of Maldives and Sri Lanka, and the Prime Ministers of Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan. There was a common desire among all our neighbours to further strengthen their relations with India.

During Prime Minister's meeting with President Nasheed of Maldives, the two sides reviewed our close and friendly relations, based on mutual trust and understanding and shared interests. Prime Minister reiterated India's commitment to deepen our partnership with Maldives across all areas.

President Rajapaksa of Sri Lanka informed Prime Minister of their efforts for political reconciliation and for bringing lasting peace in the country. Prime Minister congratulated the President on the recent election victory in Presidential and Parliamentary elections, and reiterated India's commitment to assist Sri Lanka in its relief and rehabilitation efforts, and to strengthen our bilateral relations in diverse areas.

With Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina of Bangladesh, Prime Minister reaffirmed our commitment to expeditiously implement the various decisions taken during her landmark visit to India in January 2010.

Prime Minister conveyed to Prime Minister Madhav Kumar Nepal, India's support for the ongoing efforts of the people of Nepal for the consolidation of multi-party democracy in Nepal. Both sides expressed satisfaction at the progress made in our cooperation since the visits of Prime Minister Nepal to India in August 2009 and the President of Nepal in February 2010.

Prime Minister had a cordial and frank discussion with Prime Minister Gilani of Pakistan. He told him that if the trust deficit between India and Pakistan can be eliminated all issues can be resolved through dialogue. Good neighbourly relations between India and Pakistan were in the interest of both our countries as well as in the interest of the peace, stability and development in the region. He reiterated our serious concerns on terrorism emanating from Pakistan, and urged the Pakistani Prime Minister to expedite action against the perpetrators of the Mumbai terrorist attack. He was assured that Pakistan was serious about bringing these perpetrators to book. The Foreign Ministers and Foreign Secretaries have been entrusted with the responsibility to work out mechanisms on how the trust deficit can be removed.

President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan visited India on April 26-27, 2010, before proceeding to Thimphu for the SAARC Summit. Prime Minister met President Karzai and discussed a broad range of bilateral and regional issues of mutual interest, and the two leaders reaffirmed their commitment to the strategic partnership between the two countries. Prime Minister reiterated our commitment to assist the Government and the people of Afghanistan in their efforts towards the reconstruction and development of their country.

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