

Media Briefing by Secretary (East) during PM visit to Singapore

November 15, 2018

Official Spokesperson, Shri Raveesh Kumar: Good evening and welcome to this special briefing from Singapore on the visit of Prime Minister who is here to attend India-ASEAN Summit, East Asia Summit and other related meetings. Earlier in the day we had a briefing by the Foreign Secretary. He basically covered Prime Minister's meeting with the Vice President of United States.

To take us through his other meetings which Prime Minister had due to his engagements I have with me Secretary (East) Smt. Vijay Thakur Singh. I also have Shri Sudhanshu Pandey, who is Addnl. Secretary in the Ministry of Commerce and Manish who is Jt. Secretary (South). We will start with Secretary (East) and on the RCEP we will request Mr. Pandey to give you briefing on the meeting. Ma'am the floor is yours now.

Secretary (East), Smt. Vijay Thakur Singh: Thank you Raveesh. I will start with the program of Prime Minister. He arrived today morning and the first engagement that Prime Minister had was to be the guest speaker at the Singapore Fintech Festival.

Now this is a festival which you all here in Singapore know that it is in its third edition but it is the first time that a Head of Government has been a keynote speaker. Prime Minister in his address had spoken about the many advances, the way India has leveraged technology in its governance, reaching out government services to people, in its social-economic sector and how India was a place to be in where there is so much happening in the Fintech sector and he spoke about how technology and digital technology can be made to make lives easier in many aspects.

Prime Minister also launched the APIX which is a platform through which the ASEAN financial institutions, innovators and users would connect with the Indian users to begin with but it is finally a global platform in which there will be many more connects.

Thereafter the Prime Minister had a meeting with the Prime Minister of Singapore. Now this was a meeting, you would recall that we had a commemorative summit this year in January in India. It marked the 25 years of engagement between India

and ASEAN and at that commemorative summit all the ASEAN leaders heads were present and not only that thereafter on 26th January all of them were chief guests at the Republic Day of India. So Prime Minister Lee was also present there and subsequently Prime Minister had visited Singapore here in June, where he was at the Shangri-La Dialogue and he spoke about India's vision of the Indo-Pacific.

So this was actually the third meeting between Prime Minister Lee and Prime Minister Modi this year and Prime Minister Modi congratulated Prime Minister Lee for the chairmanship and the excellent leadership provided by the Singapore as the chair of ASEAN. Prime Minister Lee thanked Prime Minister Modi for delivering the keynote address at the Singapore Fintech Festival which had actually reflected how important this sector is not only for the world but also for the two countries and there was a recognition by both the leaders that this could be an area of cooperation in which we must work together even more.

They reviewed the relationship as it is. They were satisfied that the second review of the CICA has concluded and third review was ongoing. They looked at the great connectivity between the two countries. We do know that tourists between the two countries are increasing and so are the passenger flight services who are doing very well. They also exchanged view on the progress being made in the RCEP negotiations.

The second meeting that Prime Minister had was with Prime Minister of Australia. This was the first meeting since Prime Minister Scott Morrison became the Prime Minister, so Prime Minister Modi congratulated him on his becoming the Prime Minister.

Prime Minister Modi recalled his visit to Australia in 2014 which actually was a visit by the Prime Minister of India to Australia after 30 years and since 2014 in the relationship there have been high level exchanges, Prime Minister of Australia visited India and now we would be having the President of India visiting Australia and this would be a first visit by an Indian President ever to Australia. That is going to take place starting 21st of November.

The two leaders had an extensive exchange of views on entire gamut of bilateral relations and including exchange of views on regional issues. In the bilateral relationship they looked at and spoke of Australia's foreign policy white paper as well as the paper which the Australian Department of Trade has got which is India's Economic Strategy. Reflecting on that there was a recognition by both the leaders that there are many areas in which we can work together in building up the

economic partnership especially as the India Strategic Paper which has been prepared as an initiative by Australia has many good ideas about how you can cooperate between one state of Australia with another state of India and how we can move forward in that aspect.

They also discussed issues relating to continuing with high level engagements. Our Prime Minister mentioned three specific areas where there was a great opportunity. One is looking at the Sovereign and Pension Funds of Australia, there is scope for them to invest. Prime Minister Modi invited Australia to look into investing in National Infrastructure Investment Fund. Also the second item which we looked at was; the possibility that was looked at was; the technologies that Australia has for mining, and if there could be a cooperation on that. There was a discussion on defense and security cooperation and both expressed satisfaction that there were a number of areas in which we could be working together including our cooperation which is ongoing in the various joint exercises. I think that covers more or less Australia

The third bilateral which our Prime Minister had was with the Prime Minister of Thailand. Thailand is going to of course become the next chair of ASEAN and it will not only be the chair of ASEAN but it will also be the country coordinator for India, so that assumes significance for the relationship. The two Prime Minister's reviewed the relationship. There was emphasis on projects of connectivity, there was emphasis on projects of economic collaboration and there was the commitment by both leaders that we would be working together in building the India-ASEAN relations in the coming period.

The fourth bilateral which Prime Minister had was with Vice President Mike Pence of US on which Foreign Secretary has already briefed you. I will stop here. Thank you.

Official Spokesperson, Shri Raveesh Kumar: Sir, if you will brief us on the RCEP Summit.

Addnl. Secretary of Commerce, Shri Sudhanshu Pandey: Thank you very much. This was the second RCEP leaders' summit. The purpose of the summit was to take stock of the negotiations where they have reached and given mandate to trade ministers and negotiators to take it forward.

In his intervention Prime Minister made five very important points. One he complimented trade ministers and negotiators for substantial progress that has been made particularly in 2018. As seven chapters out of total 16 have been

concluded. Second he noted that significant progress has been made in the market access negotiations of goods but also highlighted that we need to make similar efforts to make progress in services negotiations as they constitute more than 50% of the GDP of the most of the RCEP countries and in future services are going to be playing a very very important role.

Third important point that was made was relating to early conclusion of negotiations by fast tracking and intensifying negotiations both multilaterally and bilaterally. Lastly the important point that was made that any such multilateral agreement which has diverse circumstances and developmental requirements should be modern, comprehensive, balanced and mutually beneficial. Only then people of all countries would be benefitted by such an agreement.

Official Spokesperson, Shri Raveesh Kumar: Thank you sir. Prime Minister is about to leave for Gala Dinner and Secretary (East) has to attend as well. So we have time only for two questions.

Question: Ma'am Secretary, was the issue of the Quad brought up in any of the bilateral meetings particularly with Prime Minister Morrison of Australia and was there, we are told by the Australians that there was actually an officials meeting of this quad where Indian officials attended along with officials from US, Japan and Australia. Could you confirm that and comment on it?

Secretary (East), Smt. Vijay Thakur Singh: A meeting of the quad was in fact to take place but let me tell you that it is not a part of East Asia Summit but they have met. This is a meeting which is going to be taking place and after the meeting takes place normally there is a press release also that is issued. So you will be kept informed.

Question Contd.: So the meeting hasn't taken place?

Official Spokesperson, Shri Raveesh Kumar: The meeting is going to take place tomorrow, I think between the officials, and after the meeting each country will come up with a press release. India's position on the meeting and the discussions which will take place, we will issue a press release after the meeting is concluded.

Question: Mr. Pandey, just wanted to go back to the RCEP, just wondered if you can elaborate what are India's biggest concerns regarding the RCEP?

Addnl. Secretary of Commerce, Shri Sudhanshu Pandey: Prime Minister very

clearly exhibited his support to RCEP agreement and actually he urged all leaders to give required mandate so that these negotiations could be concluded at the earliest. He exactly used the words 'early conclusion' which means that India is strongly committed.

As regards concerns since the developmental circumstances of each of the country is different and therefore he urged that any such agreement should be, which is finalized should be modern, comprehensive, balanced and mutually beneficial which means it should benefit all the member countries who are participating.

Official Spokesperson, Shri Raveesh Kumar: Any other questions if it is other than the topics you have already asked?

Question: Can you elaborate what is it that India wants in the services sector, India has got a lot of skilled manpower that needs to be sent, can you elaborate on that?

Addnl. Secretary of Commerce, Shri Sudhanshu Pandey: First of all let me clarify that the movement of persons in that sense which you referred to is actually not part of the trade negotiations. It is only the temporary movement of people for the delivery of services that is covered in any trade agreement. And India's concern is not about any particular issue but India is pitching for a balanced and mutually beneficial agreement.

In services areas most of the trade now happens online which you call 'Mode One' in trade parlance and Mode One plays where movement of people is very limited, it is limited to professionals only, it happens online. So most of the trade in future in digital economies is going to happen online where India has competence and it is willing to share that experience and expertise for the benefit of all RCEPs.

Official Spokesperson, Shri Raveesh Kumar: Thank you very much sir, thank you very much Ma'am and thank you all for joining. This concludes this special press briefing from Singapore.

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