

Transcript of Media Briefing by Secretary (East) on upcoming visit of PM to Singapore

November 12, 2018

Official Spokesperson, Shri Raveesh Kumar: Good afternoon friends and welcome to this special briefing on Prime Minister's visit to Singapore for the 16th ASEAN-India Breakfast Summit and the 13th East Asia Summit.

I have with me Secretary (East) Ms. Vijay Thakur Singh and two Jt. Secretaries, Jt. Secretary (ASEAN) Anurag Bhushan and Jt. Secretary (South) Manish, who will be taking us through Prime Minister's program in Singapore. After the initial remarks by Secretary (East) we will have some time for a Q&A session. Ma'am the floor is yours.

Secretary (East), Ms. Vijay Thakur Singh: Good afternoon and very nice meeting you and this is my first briefing and this is on Prime Minister's travel to Singapore on 14 – 15 November.

This is Prime Minister's second visit to Singapore. You would recall that he had been there earlier in June this year when he had delivered the Shangri-La Dialogue keynote address and he had spelt out the vision for Indo-Pacific.

This time the Prime Minister will arrive in Singapore on the morning of 14th November and he will leave in the late afternoon of 15th November. In this very short and focused visit of about 36 hours there would be many engagements.

Let me run you through the program. He arrives on 14th, as I mentioned, and his first engagement is a keynote address at the Singapore Fintech Festival where there is also an Indian Pavilion. Then he would be attending the second RCEP Summit Meeting and thereafter there is space for bilaterals and there would be a dinner which he would attend which is being hosted by the current Chairman of ASEAN Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong.

On the 15th he starts his day with ASEAN-India Breakfast Summit and thereafter there is the East-Asia Lunch Retreat in which Prime Minister would participate followed by the 13th East Asia Summit in a plenary setting. Immediately after the East Asia Summit he will depart for India.

So when he is in Singapore you would notice that he is attending a number of summits, the RCEP Summit, the India-ASEAN Breakfast Summit as well as the East Asia Summit and apart from that there would be bilateral meetings and there would be the address at the Singapore Fintech Festival and he would also be meeting the participants of India Singapore Hackathon.

Now the ASEAN meetings, they are annual meetings and they are very integral part of our diplomatic calendar. It is where India engages with the ASEAN countries essentially because we have a very active Act East Policy, we have continued engagements with our Eastern neighbors.

The ASEAN region together with India is actually one of the most dynamic economic spaces today. If you look at it we have a combined population of 1.9 billion which is a quarter of world's population and the combined GDP of \$5 trillion. So India ASEAN is essentially a very important economic blocking.

It was, if you go back into 2017, India and ASEAN celebrated 25 years of their engagement, of a dialogue partnership, they celebrated the 15th anniversary of the their summit level partnership and the 5th anniversary of the strategic partnership. And all these celebrations culminated in the India-ASEAN Commemorative Summit, you would recall, was held in January this year on 25th of January and it was followed by the participation of all ASEAN leaders in our Republic Day celebrations as our Chief Guests, something which is very unprecedented and it is a special gesture to India.

The summit then resulted in the adoption of the Delhi Declaration which will guide India's relationship with the ASEAN countries. So therefore the forthcoming India-ASEAN Summit will be an occasion to review the progress that we have made and to have discussions which look at the three pillars of cooperation; political security, socio-economic and cultural.

Then the second engagement, I will first deal with the East-Asia Summit, the Prime Minister would be participating in the East Asia Summit and that is a summit with which India has been engaged since its very inception in 2005. This will be Prime Minister Modi's 5th East Asia Summit and as I mentioned it will be held in two segments.

One segment will be the retreat segment where there will be active discussions between the leaders in an informal kind of setting where they look at global and regional issues and thereafter there would be the formal East-Asia Plenary meeting. The issues which are on the table are many including ICT, the Smart Cities, there is maritime cooperation, there is trans-border terrorism.

At the end of the East Asia Summit as is the normal practice there will be a chair summary and there would be other statements which are considered appropriate by the leaders. East Asia Summit, if I may mention, is a very leaders driven summit where they have discussion as they feel on issues they need to focus on at that time.

Then Prime Minister Modi will be participating at the 2nd RCEP Summit and this summit is where there will be the 16 leaders of 16 countries who are negotiating the RCEP. At this summit they would review the progress that has been made in the negotiations of RCEP which in fact are currently ongoing in Singapore. There is the ministerial meeting which is in Singapore and they are discussing RCEP at this stage. I can mention that on the sidelines of these summits, the three ASEAN led summits, there would be time for bilaterals and we are working on them and tying them up.

Apart from that Prime Minister would be participating and giving the keynote address at the Singapore Fintech Festival. Now this is a festival which is one of the largest events on financial technology and it is in its third edition. This is for the first time that a Head of Government will be giving the keynote address and it is essentially because there is a recognition that India has done a lot of work in leveraging technology for innovation, for development and for financial inclusion.

It is a large event and at one point of time there will be about 30,000 people there and Prime Minister would be there giving the keynote address. In another very important event Prime Minister would be meeting the participants of the India-Singapore Hackathon. This hackathon was agreed to when Prime Minister had gone to Singapore and he had met Prime Minister Lee in June 2018, so that hackathon is taking place and the Prime Minister would be meeting the participants there. There has been enthusiastic participation. About 80 participants from India and equal number from Singapore and the lead is being taken by Nanyang Technology University in Singapore and by the All India Council of Technical Education on our side.

We do hope that and we are confident that Prime Minister's visit to Singapore will give

new momentum to the relationship and our engagement with ASEAN and the EAS leaders apart from also strengthening India's relations with Singapore.

Official Spokesperson, Shri Raveesh Kumar: Thank you Ma'am. Now I open the floor to questions. We will take two questions at a time.

Question: Where we stand on RCEP negotiations, there is considerable pressure from some of the ASEAN partners including Singapore to come up with a substantial agreement this time around and these negotiations have been going on for some time now, where do we stand and what kind of conclusion can we look at, at the end of these RCEP negotiations?

Question: The meet between Indian Prime Minister and US Vice President Mr. Pence, what are the key things which Indian side is going to put? Also on quad, the quad meeting is going to take place, what are the sectors which India is going to focus on especially when it comes to India's policy on Indo-pacific?

Secretary (East), Ms. Vijay Thakur Singh: There are three set of questions, one is RCEP, then there is the meeting and later the quad.

Let me first of all confirm that there would be a meeting between Prime Minister and Vice President Mike Pence. We would of course brief you once the meeting has taken place and the outcomes of that meeting, but we confirm that there is a meeting and that meeting is taking place.

Second, I would come to quad, let me say that India engages with countries in different formats and with many countries at the same time as well. We meet at bilateral levels, we meet at trilateral levels, we meet in quadrilaterals, we meet in pluri-lateral and we meet in multilateral formats. So this quad meeting is something which is going to take place but it has got nothing to do with the East Asia Summit. It is a meeting which takes place at the official functional level between the four countries and the agenda there normally is to look at how we can look at peace and prosperity issues in the region.

The RCEP Summit, as I told you, is on 14th of November. It is a time when the leaders will take a review of the negotiations which have been going on. These negotiations have been on since 2012 and I can only tell you that this is a very important grouping. If you look at RCEP 40% of global trade is covered who are involved in the RCEP

negotiations. India has been adopting a very constructive position in these negotiations but since there are so many countries involved and there are so many issues and as I said at this very moment discussions are going on at the ministerial levels so I cannot prejudge the outcome but we can say that progress has been made in these negotiations.

Official Spokesperson, Shri Raveesh Kumar: For both the meetings, for the meeting with the Vice President of the US and also the Quad, normally we bring out a press release. For Quad definitely after Prime Minister's meeting with the US Vice President we will have some kind of a release which will give you details about the meeting.

Question: It is has been little over four months since the Prime Minister delivered the keynote address at Shangri-La Dialogue. What has been its evolution and concept thinking on Indo-pacific and will it figure in the Prime Minister's diplomatic outreach with leaders from East Asian countries at the Breakfast meeting or otherwise. And also very briefly, what has been the progress in key deliverables, key outcomes that emanated from the Delhi Commemorative Summit especially on the maritime transport cooperation?

Question: Can you give any details, any announcements at the Fintech? I think last time he was there he mentioned some digital payments apps and made some announcements, so any details on what sort of initiatives might be launched there?

Secretary (East), Ms. Vijay Thakur Singh: Let me start with the Fintech. Fintech as you know when the last time Prime Minister was in Singapore there was the launch of the Rupay Card in Singapore. This time we are looking at launching a platform which is the API. The ASEAN countries have put together their financial institutions on one platform and Prime Minister would be launching that link with the Indian financial institution so that is being slated at the Fintech Summit.

Coming to the Indo-pacific, yes the Indo-Pacific has been enunciated and as you know that the principles of Indo-pacific are an open and a free, progressive, prosperous Indo-pacific region which is inclusive and respects international law. So this has been the basic principle that we are enunciating.

The discussions about working in the region together and what other countries have to say on Indo-pacific is something which would happen there because we are going to

the region and we are in the region and there will be talks on how different countries look at Indo-pacific.

Official Spokesperson, Shri Raveesh Kumar: Next set of two questions please.

Question: This is the first ASEAN Summit after Prime Minister Narendra Modi meeting Chinese President Xi Jinping in Wuhan for informal summit. Prime Minister and President must have talked about Indo-pacific, so do you think there will be any update from our side on the issue of Indo-pacific, South China Sea, Freedom of Navigation etc.

Question: Would the Prime Minister be meeting Chinese leader there in Singapore?

Secretary (East), Ms. Vijay Thakur Singh: As you go into a summit, there are a lot issues like scheduling issues and other issues. We will be working on bilateral meetings and as and when they are finalized we will be briefing you as to when those meetings takes place. On a daily basis JS(XP) would be there and he would be briefing you on those meetings.

As far as discussions are concerned on Indo-pacific, as you can see we are going into the summit. So let us see what the discussions are and how they evolve but definitely we are looking at working with many countries on how to look at progress and prosperity in the Indo-pacific region. Official Spokesperson, Shri Raveesh Kumar: Regarding the bilateral meetings let me again mention that normally the day before we do bring out the schedule. So for the schedule on Wednesday, we will put something out tomorrow evening. So that will have details of all the Prime Minister's engagements including the bilateral meetings as well.

You also keep in mind that there is another multilateral event taking place in Argentina i.e. G20. So there are meeting which are being scheduled there plus some meetings that are being scheduled on the sidelines of the EAS.

Question: Could you give us sense of progress and the key outcomes that came out from the Delhi Summit especially the maritime cooperative agreement, civil aviation etc. there were several initiatives, what has been the progress?

Secretary (East), Ms. Vijay Thakur Singh: I will spell out a couple. One of the decisions was that we will look at digital connectivity and we have put aside \$40 million

for digital connectivity in CMLV countries. So in all these countries we are looking at a digital village connectivity. Our TCIL team has gone there and done the surveys so we do hope that that progress will be reflected.

We are looking at 2019 as the year of tourism between India and ASEAN. So that is another implementation. We are also looking at, as you said, maritime cooperation is very very important. We have had two meetings on Blue Economy, one in Vietnam and one in India. So that is another area in the maritime domain in which we had discussions.

So a number of initiatives are taking shape and I won't spell all of them out but we will go to the India-ASEAN Summit and there would be a review of implementation of the Delhi Declaration.

Question: A small clarification, this meeting with the Vice President of the US is scheduled on the 14th of the month?

Secretary (East), Ms. Vijay Thakur Singh: Yes, it is on 14th.

Official Spokesperson, Shri Raveesh Kumar: Any other query on Prime Minister's visit to Singapore. I see none. Thank you Ma'am for coming to this briefing, thank you Manish and Anurag and thank you all for joining.

(Concludes)