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Speech by External Affairs Minister at Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs, Cairo (August 25, 2015)

August 25, 2015

Ambassador Shaker,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Members of the Media,

Sabah al Kheir!

It is a great honour to be at the historic Diplomatic Club this morning at the Egyptian Council for Foreign Affairs. I am delighted, that on the eve of my departure from Egypt, I have the opportunity to meet with the intelligentsia, strategic thinkers, policy makers and the media of this great country.

I bring with me the warm wishes and affections of 1.2 billion Indians, who consider Egyptians as their brothers. I must, at the outset, congratulate you all on the successful completion of the New Suez Canal in a record time of less than a year. It reflects the commitment and the ability of the people and the leadership of Egypt.

It also reflects the continuity in the endeavours that Egypt has always been famous for – a nation not only at the cross road of civilisations but one that is intimately involved in promoting exchanges of ideas and peoples that promote peace, prosperity and stability. Mabrouk!

Excellencies,

Over the last two days, I have met with President Sisi, Foreign Minister Shoukry and Secretary General of the Arab League, Al-Araby as well as many other distinguished Egyptians. I have experienced the warmth of their welcome and seen their visionary approach to relations with India.

It has struck a strong resonance in me as it coincided with my own beliefs and approach for our relations with Egypt. I think with this meeting of minds, we are poised for great success. We all are aware of the geo-strategic location of Egypt, of your large and intelligent population, of your strong armed forces, of your vibrant economy, of your cultural influence in the region and your own civilizational strength. You are the mother of civilisations. You are a great country with great people. You have had a glorious history and are poised for a bright future.

For us Egypt is an old friend whom we have known for millennia. Artefacts from the region were found in Lothal in the Indus-Saraswati valley civilisation and there are records of our exchanges with Egypt in the Ashokan rock edicts.

In modern times, we have renewed our contacts with vigour. Who can forget the close bonds of friendship between the great poets Tagore and Ahmed Shawki. Tagore recognised the greatness of your civilization which he said "grew around a noble river, which spread the festivities of life on its banks across the heart of the land. There man never raised the barrier of alienation between himself and rest of the world".

We recall the meeting of minds between Mahatma Gandhi and Saad Zaghlul, who were committed to the course of freedom of their people. When Gandhi crossed the Suez Canal in 1931, he was charmed by the nationalistic developments and there are vivid references from the Al Ahram editorials of those days. The bond between Nehru and Nasser is legendary.

Our relationship has continued to have positive momentum and has grown over time. India's position has always been consistent with regard to Egypt, for it is a relationship not only between the two governments but one of shared values and faith of two ancient civilisations and of peoples, who have struggled together in the past and wish to share their joys and success in the future.

Today, we are at the cusp of another transformation. We are facing new challenges and new opportunities. On the one hand, developing countries are beginning to close the gap with the developed world in terms of economic growth, social development and advancement of technology and innovation. This is a unique situation which has come about after several centuries.

This provides the kernel for leadership and guidance and closer South-South cooperation. On the other hand, there are new challenges that

have come in our path. We are today witnessing growing violence and intolerance. The growth of extremism as represented by Al Qaeda and now ISIS in your region and that of Taliban, Laskhar-e-Toiba and others in our neighbourhood, are manifestations of this trend.

We have to fight radicalisation and extremism, the threat of terrorism and the emergence of non-State actors who challenge the civilised world in a collective and comprehensive manner. India not only condemns all acts of terrorism but joins hands with Egypt in the fight to remove the scourge of terrorism completely.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We have seen steady progress in India over the last few decades. Our successful democracy, independent judiciary, vibrant media, and vigorous civil society rests on the basis of our Constitution, which assures the rights of citizens and the integrity of India. We celebrate our extraordinary diversity of languages, ethnicities and religions. This has nurtured tolerance in an integrated India.

The Government of Prime Minister Modi is today engaged in transforming India. We were elected on a mandate of maximum governance and minimum government. For our Government the development of our people is paramount. We are focussed on bringing efficiency in our agriculture, innovation in our services and strength to our manufacturing sector. By opening up our economy and unleashing the entrepreneurial spirit of our citizens, India has emerged to become one of the fastest growing economies and third largest economy, in PPP terms, in the world today.

We aim to develop India as a global manufacturing as well as a R&D hub. Introducing the 'Make in India' initiative, Prime Minister Modi invited entrepreneurs across the world to take advantage of our skill, talent and discipline. We are the largest provider of affordable generic medicines globally, major centre of IT services, emerging hub for manufacturing, key player in space and growing overseas investor.

We are in the process of changing the entire ecosystem of public services through the use of IT. We have launched the "Digital India Programme" with the vision to transform India into a digitally empowered society and knowledge economy based in smart cities. The progress of India's technology has also benefitted the world. Our vision is of an inclusive growth process, which has people at its core.

I see a great opportunity for India and Egypt to create a new partnership in this new era. I was delighted that President Sisi and our Government share the same sentiments on this issue. We are both committed to take our relations to the next higher level. I see this new partnership based on three principal pillars. These pillars are:

First, closer political interactions and security cooperation;

Second, deeper economic engagement and scientific collaboration;

Third, wider cultural contacts and people-to-people exchanges.

India and Egypt share aspirations for security and prosperity for our people and for peace and stability in our region. We are in an age where nations are coming closer to each other and we shall maintain frequent and regular contacts at leadership levels. This not only provides vision and guidance to growing relations but also provides direction for its implementation.

In this era where people wish to see change happen, we propose to translate our vision into plans of action with implementation schedules. We envisage even closer security cooperation, which has assumed greater prominence in view of the threats that I had mentioned earlier. Our relationship is one without differences and we propose to step up exchange of information and coordination to combat terrorism, both at the regional as well as global level.

Our defence relationship, which is based on our traditional and friendly ties will be upgraded further to closer cooperation across the spectrum. At the multilateral level, we shall strengthen coordination with the League of Arab States, work closely through the India-Africa Forum Summit and further our outstanding cooperation at the UN and other multilateral bodies.

Excellencies,

The greatest opportunity ahead of us is in the economic sphere. Our economic engagement at present is considerable; with a trade volume of almost 5 billion dollars and Indian investments in Egypt reaching 3 billion dollars, in over 50 Indian ventures. However, this is still way short of the true potential.

In trade, we are the second largest destination of global exports from Egypt but this can be increased significantly as can our exports to Egypt. We can work out mutually beneficial solutions to enhance two-way trade significantly by having preferential arrangements as well as better coordination. Our Joint Business Council, composed of the leading business houses on both sides will discuss the new economic partnership that provides win-win solutions.

On investments, as you are aware, Indian corporates are in an expansion mode with strong domestic growth, growing surplus and rising investments across the globe. They are prepared to step up their level of involvement in Egypt, as well. Our corporates have recognised that Egypt is not only a large market in itself but with the agreements it has with Africa and Europe, Egypt can be the hub for manufacturing in the region. I have noticed that even in the last few years, since the Revolution of 2011, Indian corporates have continued to invest in Egypt. This is quite commendable.

I am confident that the Egyptian authorities would be ready to create a favourable business environment to attract potential investors from

India and offer a transparent and predictable regulatory environment. Our companies have the resources, technologies, managerial skills and entrepreneurship and would make excellent partners.

We are ready to strengthen cooperation in the fields of textiles, apparel machinery, automotive components, chemicals, consumer goods and any other area that Egypt would prefer. Further, India has great strength in new technologies such as IT, pharmaceuticals, health and space. Our companies would be ready to share their competencies with Egypt.

Our small and medium enterprises are the backbone of our industrial development. This has special relevance for Egypt and we could look for strengthened cooperation in the SME sector. In short, given a suitable business environment, the sky is the limit for our economic engagement.

I must also mention that sharing our best technologies and building partnerships are central to our engagement with Egypt.

An Indian-Egyptian joint venture company producing the drug Heterosofir has recently started production in Egypt. This will significantly reduce the financial burden of Egyptians suffering from Hepatitis C disease. In agriculture, apart from Kirloskar pumps which has become a household name, India is sharing its advanced technology in improved seeds and best practices in farming.

In renewable energy, we are undertaking a solar electrification project in Agaween village in Matrouh governorate.

A vocational centre for textiles at Shoubra el Kheima is being upgraded. Under our Pan Africa e-network project at Alexandria University, we are offering online educational courses in tele-medicine and tele-education, establishing connectivity with some of India's finest universities and hospitals.

We all cherish the fact that our cultural connections also go back to history and I have sensed your affection for Bollywood but there is a lot more to India. I am happy that we are expanding exchanges in our literature and arts, in yoga and meditation and also in more modern forms such as multimedia and tourism.

We are pursuing the setting up of an India Chair in one of your Universities. This will be the first in the Arab world!

We are impressed with your rich civilization and would wish to strengthen exchanges. We wish to focus on youth, academic, media and cultural exchanges. We have always maintained that an investment in people-to-people contacts, particularly of the youth, provides a strong base for a durable partnership. The goodwill that exists on both sides will then propel our relations in various other sectors as well.

Excellencies,

Our relations with Egypt also have a bearing on our relations with the rest of the region. Your region is no longer our extended neighbourhood, it is now our neighbourhood. We are now more actively engaged in your region which lies to the west of my country. You are central to my security interest as well as my requirements for energy.

Millions of my citizens work in this region and contribute to its economy. Our political exchanges are frequent and we are strong partners in the emerging structures both political-security as well as economic. But most importantly, we share historic ties of exchanges between people and ideas, of trade and commerce, of language and literature and are bound together in bonds that make us brothers.

We have strong interests in the Arab world and have been strongly committed to its various causes. We have been supportive of your aspirations regarding the resolution of the Palestine-Israel issue. Our strong traditional support to the Palestinian cause remains unwavering even as we pursue good relations with Israel. We commend the Egyptian role in bringing about a ceasefire in last year's Israel-Gaza conflict.

We remain concerned about the growth of terrorism and of sectarian violence in the region and stand committed to support efforts to fight this. We also sense a need to develop a broader approach based on dialogue to shift from an atmosphere of mistrust and violence towards one which exudes confidence in peace and development. We have noticed the positive role played by Egypt in this context on several occasions in history.

There are new developments including the recent nuclear agreement with Iran which can open up new vistas of cooperation and reduce frictions. India is a long-time friend of all the countries in the region and we have no major differences with any. We remain convinced that a new paradigm of peace, prosperity and stability will emerge.

Ladies and Gentlemen, before I conclude, let me once again thank you and my Egyptian hosts for the warmth and hospitality extended to me and for the opportunity to experience your deep and ancient civilisation. I shall now be visiting the National Museum across the Tahrir Square; I visited the Pyramids yesterday. I need to pay these visits before I leave Cairo, for without this experience my visit would have been incomplete.

Shukran!

Tahya el sadaka el-Hindeya el-Masreya!



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