



## Ministry of External Affairs

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# Statement by Prime Minister prior to his departure for Seychelles, Mauritius and Sri Lanka

March 10, 2015

I am keenly looking forward to my three nation tour of Seychelles, Mauritius and Sri Lanka on March 10-14. We have a strong, multifaceted and important relationship with each, and they all occupy a very important place in our foreign policy.

My visit to the three Indian Ocean Island countries reflects our foreign policy priorities in India's immediate and extended neighbourhood. India attaches paramount importance to strengthening relations with this region, which is vital for India's security and progress.

My first destination will be Seychelles. India's relationship with Seychelles has been built on the foundation of mutual trust and shared values. My visit to Seychelles will be the first Prime Ministerial visit to Seychelles since 1981. I am keenly looking forward to my meeting with President James Michel, a great friend of India.

On March 11-12, I will be in Mauritius. I am honoured to have been invited to be the Chief Guest at the Independence Day celebrations in Mauritius on 12 March, a date special to all Indians because Mahatma Gandhi began his Dandi March on the same date in 1930. My visit to Mauritius will aim to strengthen our age-old civilizational ties with "Chhota Bharat".

I am honoured to be invited to address the National Assembly of Mauritius. I will be participating in the joint commissioning of Indian-built Offshore Patrol Vessel Barracuda, and in the beginning of construction works for the building of World Hindi Secretariat.

I look forward to discussing with Prime Minister Sir Anerood Jugnauth ways in which we can further deepen our strategic partnership. I also look forward to meeting the entire political leadership of Mauritius, which has provided unstinting support for this relationship.

My visit to Sri Lanka will be the first standalone Prime Ministerial visit to Sri Lanka since 1987. This will be our second Summit in a month's time since the visit of President Maithripala Sirisena to India last month.

I see this visit as an opportunity to further strengthen our relationship in all its dimensions – political, strategic, economic, cultural, and above all, people to people contacts.

This visit is also part of my objective of maintaining frequent contact with our neighbouring countries. I am delighted with the opportunity to visit one of our most important neighbours.

I look forward to discussing our bilateral relations with President Maithripala Sirisena and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe. I am also looking forward to meeting other political leaders of Sri Lanka. We will work together to forge a new partnership between our countries.

I am deeply honoured to be invited to address the Parliament of Sri Lanka. My programme also includes some of the most important symbols of our timeless relationship. I will be visiting the Mahabodhi Society in Colombo, and travel to Anuradhapura, Talaimannar and Jaffna, and interact with the cross-section of society. In Jaffna, I will be laying the foundation stone for the iconic Jaffna Cultural Centre that will come up adjacent to the historic Jaffna Public Library.

I am confident that my visits to all three countries will reinvigorate our relations with them in this all-important region we call home – the Indian Ocean.



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