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Statement by President to media at the conclusion of his State visit to Bhutan

November 08, 2014

My State Visit to Bhutan on 7-8 November 2014 has concluded very successfully. As you are aware, I was accompanied by Minister of State for Railways, Shri Manoj Sinha and Members of Parliament Shri Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, Shri Anil Shirole, Dr. Mahendra Nath Pandey and Shri Gaurav Gogoi, as well as senior officials of Government of India.

I was delighted to be back in Bhutan, the abode of happiness. I have travelled many times before to Bhutan in different capacities and my association with this beautiful country dates back to the early eighties when I began my public career. Through these past decades, I have always worked for stronger, enhanced relations between our two countries. I am privileged to be a friend of Bhutan.

I was deeply touched by the warmth of the reception I received and happy to see a festive atmosphere across the country. I am grateful to the thousands of people, especially school children, who lined up on the way from Paro to Thimphu and welcomed me waving India and Bhutan flags. I am impressed by the remarkable progress made by Bhutan in improving the quality of life of its people while preserving cultural identity.

The main purpose of my visit was to further strengthen our multi-faceted relations and consolidate our ties. In keeping with our longstanding historical and civilizational linkages and strong people to people contacts, we have extremely close ties, based on shared values as well as commonality of interests and objectives.

I discussed all issues of mutual interest, including those of bilateral and regional importance, with His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, the King of Bhutan, His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Fourth King and Prime Minister Tshering Tobgay. I was honoured to have had the opportunity to address Bhutanese leaders, officials, professionals and intellectuals on the subject of India-Bhutan relations.

Our mutual security interests are closely intertwined. Our border security cooperation in the past has been excellent. Both sides have reiterated their determination not to allow their territory to be used by interests inimical to the other.

India is proud to be a privileged partner in Bhutan's advancement and growth. We will fulfill all our commitments to Bhutan's ongoing 11th Five Year Plan in a timely manner. I am happy that our assistance is being effectively utilized in important sectors like education, roads and bridges,

agriculture, health, cultural preservation and hydropower . I launched the School Reforms Programme, one of the prestigious education initiatives of the Royal Government of Bhutan for which India will provide assistance of Rs. 348.7 crores. I also launched the project for upgradation/ double laning of the Northern East West Lateral Highway project in Bhutan which is being implemented with our assistance of Rs. 463.3 crores. This upgraded highway will be a key communication link between the Far Eastern districts and cities of Western Bhutan.

The three ongoing India-assisted hydropower projects in Bhutan totaling 2940 MW are progressing satisfactorily and their construction will be completed in 2017-18. With four more JV-model HEPs that have been agreed upon, we would be harnessing 6476 MW capacity of hydropower by 2022-23 .I laid the Foundation Stone for the construction of Bhutan's first Power Training Institute for which we are providing support of Rs. 33.7 crores . We have also offered to extend technical and human resource assistance for starting the training programmes in this Institute .

Education was a focus area of the visit. Bhutan became a signatory to the MoU on Nalanda University, agreeing to be a part of our international collaboration to rejuvenate the Nalanda University .In addition, three more MoUs were signed between the Royal University of Bhutan and English and Foreign Languages University, Hyderabad ; between the Royal University of Bhutan and National Innovation Foundation under the Department of S&T; and between the Royal Civil Services Commission and Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad.

India is the principal destination of higher education for Bhutanese students. Keeping this in my mind, I announced the doubling of Ambassador's Scholarship to Rs.2 crore/ annum for Bhutanese students to pursue their higher education in Indian Universities and institutes .

Building on our extensive assistance in capacity building across various sectors, we agreed to strengthen our training programmes in the areas of agriculture, food processing and post-harvest technologies.

Let me conclude by saying that India and Bhutan are close neighbours living in harmony with each other, coordinating their approaches in line with each others' needs and concerns. Our relationship serves as a model to the rest of South Asia and the world.

This visit is one of my most memorable visits abroad. I am confident that our bilateral relations will continue to grow from strength to strength.

Thimphu

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