



External Affairs Minister's remarks at the launch of the 2nd India-China Media Forum, Beijing

February 01, 2015

Your Excellency, Mr. Jiang Jianguo, Director of the State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China.

Your Excellency, Vice Minister of the SCIO, Mr. Zhou Mingwei,

Your Excellency, Mr. Ashok Kantha, Ambassador of India to China,

Distinguished members of the Media,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very happy to address this august gathering of eminent opinion makers of the two largest Asian societies here in Beijing today. At the outset, let me express my deep appreciation to H.E. Mr. Jiang Jianguo, Director of the State Council Information Office for the outstanding arrangements made for the second India-China Media Forum.

The Media Forum was envisaged as a platform to encourage appreciation and build understanding of each other's societies in our respective media. As our strategic and cooperative relationship deepens in the bilateral domain and expands in regional and international cooperation, it is vital that or people have a good understanding of each other's interests and viewpoints.

This is more so as the media in each country has its own national characteristic. I would, therefore, like to express my strong confidence that this second meeting of such an important forum would build further on the 2013 event and contribute to a stronger India-China media relationship.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, My visit to China takes place against the backdrop of a new Government in India that came into office after general elections last May. This is a Government with a decisive mandate propelled by the aspirations of a young, vibrant and enterprising generation. Even in the last eight months, it is already evident that drastic transformations are underway in my country that will accelerate our journey to modernity.

A number of key initiatives addressing a wide range of ambitious goals are unfolding. They provide new opportunities for cooperation insofar as our key international partners are concerned. Where China is concerned, this is very evident in the frequency of our high-level exchanges and the widening of our already substantive bilateral agenda.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has three successful meetings with President Xi Jinping, the most important of course being during President Xi's visit to India last September. He has also had occasion to interact with Premier Li Keqiang.

I myself have had the privilege of engaging my counterpart Foreign Minister Wang Yi, who incidentally was the first Foreign Minister we invited to India after our assumption of office. We expect that the momentum that has been set in the last few months would not only be kept up but accelerated even further at various levels.

A critical change in nature of our bilateral ties over the last few decades has been its growing economic dimension. China is today our largest partner in trade in goods. The two economies are moving to invest each other. Serious discussions on enhancing connectivity have been initiated. On that foundation, we are now seeking to take our economic cooperation to a qualitatively new level.

The 'Closer Development Partnership' agreed upon during President Xi's visit symbolizes that determination. A particularly significant new area of collaboration is in railways. This includes heavy haulage, speed upgradation, station development and capacity building.

Another major thrust is in establishing industrial parks in two Indian states that would contribute to the 'Make in India' initiative. We will make it easier for Chinese companies to do business in India and expect that similar encouragement would be given to our companies to expand their business in China.

Important relationships with key neighbors require strong and broad-based support of the people in all countries. It is only logical, therefore, that we have invested our energies in strengthening people-to-people contacts. During this visit, I expect to take that area forward in many ways.

Tomorrow, we will be launching the '2015: Visit India Year' in China. Tourism is an effective vehicle to promote people-to-people understanding and our two Governments have agreed that we need to make stronger efforts in that regard. You are also aware that the India-China Cultural Exchange Initiative agreed on during President Xi's visit is currently underway.

Another recent development worth noting is the establishment of our first sister-province ties between Gujarat and Guangdong. But, what is of special resonance in my country is the understanding to open an additional route through Nathula for the Kailash Manasarovar Yatra.

Our relationship today has reached a level where we have interactions in fields that could not have been imagined some years ago. We have made considerable progress in establishing and expanding defence contacts and exchanges, including across our border. They contribute to the maintenance of peace and tranquility there, a pre-requisite for the further development of our relationship. On the boundary question, my Government is committed to exploring an early settlement.

Relations between India and China have grown beyond their bilateral and regional dimension and today cover the entire international spectrum. We are partners in G-20, BRICS and BASIC, among other groupings. During this visit, I will also be participating in the meeting of the Foreign Ministers of Russia-India-China group.

As both our countries play a larger international role, our contacts and dialogues must commensurately grow. As the two major civilizational powers of Asia we should have confidence in each other, to build on our shared interests. I expect discussions during this visit to contribute to this objective.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi told President Xi in Fortaleza in July last year that India and China were two bodies with one spirit. During his visit to India later that September, President Xi alluded to the civilizational links nurtured by inspiring personalities and the far reaching influence of Buddhism.

Our two countries have age old ties. Ancient scholars of our civilizations have played critical role in building of these ties. Chinese monks Fa Hsien and Xuan Zang and many other braved many difficulties to travel to India in search of knowledge. Similarly, Indian monks Kashyap Matanga, Dharmaratna and many others travelled to China to spread knowledge.

It is important for us to revive the Xuan Zang spirit among Chinese scholars and journalists and Kumarjiva spirit among Indian scholars and journalists. This year we are celebrating as the Visit India Year in China. Next year will be the Visit China Year in India. This is the most appropriate opportunity to boost our ties.

To initiate a new century of mutual learning to enrich our respective civilisations and to realise the dream of an 'Asian Century', I would suggest a six-point template for us to build our relations on:

- A. Action- oriented approach
- B. Broad-base bilateral engagement
- C. Convergence on common regional and global interests
- D. Develop new areas of cooperation