November 02, 2019

Official Spokesperson, Shri Raveesh Kumar: Friends, this is a special briefing on Prime Minister’s visit to Thailand for ASEAN related summits. This is from 2nd to 4th November. I have with me Secretary (East), Smt. Vijay Thakur Singh. She is joined by Jt. Secretary (Bangladesh, Maldives and also Indo-Pacific), Shri Vikram Doraissamy and Manish, who is Jt. Secretary (South). After the initial remarks by Secretary (East) we will open the floor to questions. Ma’am, the floor is yours.

Secretary (East), Smt. Vijay Thakur Singh: Good afternoon. Prime Minister will be visiting Bangkok from 2nd to 4th November at the invitation of the Prime Minister of Thailand, His Excellency Prayut Chan-o-cha and his visit is for the 16th ASEAN India Summit, 14th East Asia Summit, the 3rd RCEP Summit and related events. The ASEAN related summits are an integral part of our diplomatic calendar.

This will be Prime Minister Modi’s seventh ASEAN-India Summit and sixth East Asia Summit. Last year, you would recall that in January India had hosted the 25th Anniversary Commemorative Summit of Indo-ASEAN and in which all the ten ASEAN leaders had participated. Then the Delhi Declaration was adopted wherein it was agreed to further strengthen and deepen the ASEAN India strategic partnership. Thereafter, in November last year, Prime Minister had, in Singapore, held along with the ASEAN leaders an Informal India-ASEAN Summit. So we had two engagements with the ASEAN last year.

Let me run you through the program in Bangkok. Prime Minister will arrive in Bangkok on the evening of November 2 and his first engagement will be to address the Indian community at the national indoor stadium in Bangkok.

The Indian community in Thailand is about 250 thousand and at the Indian community meeting the Prime Minister would be releasing a commemorative coin, marking the 550th birth anniversary of Guru Nanak Dev Ji and he would also be releasing a Thai translation of the Tirukkural which is the great Tamil classic.

On November 3, Prime Minister will participate in a business event. It is also the golden jubilee of the Aditya Birla Group in Thailand this year. Many of our reputed Indian companies have investments in Thailand and Aditya Birla also has investments there including in sectors like textile fabrics, chemicals etc. Then the second engagement of the Prime Minister would be to join in this ASEAN India Summit which he will co-chair with the Prime Minister of Thailand. The meeting will take stock of the progress made in the ASEAN-India relationship.
Several initiatives of India are under implementation, for example our commitment to offer 1000 PhD scholarships for ASEAN students at IITs, now that is actually under implementation. It was unveiled and its implementation began in September this year when both External Affairs Minister and the Minister for Human Resource Development had jointly launched this initiative. This has a budget of about Rs. 300 crore and if I many say this is the largest human resource development initiative for ASEAN by India and indeed by any of ASEAN’s dialogue partners. So this is something which has been offered to the ASEAN countries.

Then we are also working on the establishment of Centers for Excellence in software development and training in the CMLV countries and that is at a budget of about $8.6 million and that is also being implemented. We are in close consultations with ASEAN partners to identify specific projects under our $1 billion line of credit for our ASEAN country partners.

Strengthening ASEAN and ASEAN led mechanisms, enhancing connectivity whether it is sea, land, air, digital, people to people, deepening our economic partnership, enhancing cooperation in the digital domain including cyber security and improving maritime cooperation are some of the key themes of India ASEAN cooperation.

The next day on 4th of November, Prime Minister has three important engagements. Prime Minister will attend a special lunch hosted by the Thai Prime Minister for the leaders of the East Asia participating countries and the leaders in this platform will exchange views on progressing the global sustainable development agenda. The theme of this has been chosen by Thailand. In fact Thailand under it’s chairmanship is promoting the theme – Advancing Partnerships for Sustainability. So we are also working to support this theme and contributing to the discussions that are taking place. If you look at it specifically Thailand with us co-hosted the India-ASEAN workshop on Blue Economy in September this year in which the focus of discussion was sustainable use of marine resources. So we are working on the sustainability concept with the Thailand.

Separately, we welcome the ASEAN outlook on Indo-Pacific which was put out by the ASEAN and adopted by the ASEAN earlier this year. We see many elements of convergence with our own Indo-Pacific approach and we look forward to working with ASEAN partners on furthering our Indo-Pacific cooperation.

The second engagement Prime Minister has on November 4 is the 14th East Asia Summit. As you would know that the East Asia Summit is a leaders led platform and in that it is a platform where they hold
discussions on various developments in the region and it is also a confidence building mechanism in the region.

If you look at it the East Asia Summit membership is a very broad membership. Its members account for 54 percent of the world’s population and over 58 percent of the GDP. So it is a very important platform where leaders meet and discuss. Much of the success of this platform is also because of the central role that the ASEAN countries play in it and we acknowledge that role that the ASEAN countries play and we always call for the centrality of ASEAN in our Indo-Pacific approach.

The agenda for the forthcoming East Asia Summit is to review the future direction of EAS cooperation and exchange views on regional and international issues. The final engagement of Prime Minister will be the RCEP summit where leaders will review the state of negotiations which are ongoing in Bangkok currently and over the next few days.

In addition, on the sidelines of the summit Prime Minister will also have a number of bilateral meetings which are being worked out. On the evening of November 4th itself Prime Minister will return to New Delhi.

**Official Spokesperson, Shri Raveesh Kumar:** Thank you Ma’am. I now open the floor to questions. Just a small suggestion that please don’t ask whether a meeting with a particular country has been fixed or not, as and when they are fixed we will let you know. So instead of us saying no every time, we will share details as and when they are available.

**Question:** The RCEP negotiations have been on, we believe that the text of RCEP will have to be concluded next week. 25 chapters are under review. What is the status right now? Are we ready to join the RCEP bandwagon?

**Official Spokesperson, Shri Raveesh Kumar:** Thank you. Any other question on this aspect?

**Question:** is there a possibility of RCEP agreement going ahead without India?

**Question:** If all our concerns are not addressed at RCEP would we want the timeline to be shifted?

**Question:** So far how many of Indian concerns have been accommodated in the RCEP negotiation process and what are the issues which India is still pursuing?

**Secretary (East), Smt. Vijay Thakur Singh:** See, the RCEP negotiations have been going on for many years now and India has participated constructively in these negotiations. We believe that RCEP represents a significant economic and trade opportunity for all partners. There are obviously some critical issues still outstanding and efforts are being made to resolve them to provide a fair and a transparent trading environment. These issues are extremely important for our economy and the livelihood of our people. It is therefore imperative that these issues are resolved satisfactorily. India remains engaged to find a resolution of these issues and we expect that there would be greater clarity in that regard after the ministerial talks in the RCEP Summit.
Question: In connection to the Indian farmers are going to agitate nation wide on November 4, so what is the take about this local and domestic farmers nationwide agitation?

Official Spokesperson, Shri Raveesh Kumar: At this stage the questions on RCEP have been answered. If there are developments, you know it is not possible to address specific questions. RCEP and status of negotiations that has been answered by Secretary (East). If there are any further developments in the next few days we will come up with a new statement but there is nothing more to add at this stage.

Question: Any meeting of the quadrilateral group planned during the summit?

Secretary (East), Smt. Vijay Thakur Singh: At the summit level there is no quadrilateral.

Question Contd.: Not at the summit level, at the official level?

Secretary (East), Smt. Vijay Thakur Singh: Yes, at the official level there will be a meeting.

Question: You said there are certain outstanding issues which are imperative to be addressed, they are very important for our economy. Which would be some of those important issues?

Secretary (East), Smt. Vijay Thakur Singh: See, I don’t want to get into that. As I mentioned to you that the negotiations are going on at the moment and at this stage so we would wait for the outcome of the negotiations but as I mentioned to you there are some critical issues which are still outstanding and it is important to resolve them to provide a very fair and transparent trading environment.

Question: Meetings are organized on official level?

Secretary (East), Smt. Vijay Thakur Singh: Yes, official level.

Question Contd.: How many meetings and when?

Secretary (East), Smt. Vijay Thakur Singh: I don’t have the details but it is on the sidelines. There is only one meeting.

Question: Not on the negotiations, do you think RCEP can happen without India?

Secretary (East), Smt. Vijay Thakur Singh: How can I speculate? The negotiations are going on.

Official Spokesperson, Shri Raveesh Kumar: I don’t see any other hand. Ma’am, thank you very much. Thank you all for joining.

(Concludes)