



Transcript of onboard media interaction by Prime Minister on May 31, 2013 on return from Bangkok.

May 31, 2013

Prime Minister (Dr. Manmohan Singh): Ladies and gentlemen, I have had two successful visits - first to Japan at the invitation of Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, and then to Bangkok at the invitation of the Prime Minister of Thailand.

I believe both of the statements that have been issued at the end of these meetings have been made available to you. So, therefore, I will not waste your time in recapitulating what is contained in these two statements. If there are any questions that you have to ask, I will be very happy to answer them.

Question: My question is pertaining to your Japan tour. You just described it successful but specifically in terms of forward movement made on civil nuclear deal, is there any possibility of getting it signed with Japan before 2014 Lok Sabha polls?

Prime Minister: There have been discussions with Japan and this visit marked a formal move in that direction. I am hopeful that before long we will be able to put our signatures to a civil nuclear energy agreement with Japan as well.

Question: How do you describe the progress made so far in respect of the Look East Policy especially in the backdrop of your bi-nation visit? What is the progress made so far and are there any emerging new issues to be focused under the policy?

Prime Minister: The Look East Policy of the Government of India is not a new development. When Mr. Narasimha Rao was our Prime Minister, I was the Finance Minister. We charted out the course of action to get closer to Southeast Asian countries particularly ASEAN. Since then this process has been moving forward. ASEAN countries are our strategic partners and there are enormous opportunities of expanding trade ties, expanding investment relations, expanding maritime cooperation, expanding the scope of trade and investment. And now we have reached a stage where large-scale flow of trade and investment is becoming a reality.

We have, for example, the Dedicated Freight Corridor where Japan is helping us; we have Mumbai-Delhi Industrial Corridor where also the Japanese help will be available; the Mumbai-Bangalore corridor also there is a great interest of East-Asian countries like Japan, Thailand and Malaysia. So I am hopeful that this Look East Policy of India is paying rich dividends and the results are going to improve as we move forward.

Question: There is a new Government, a new dispensation in Pakistan and there has been quite a bit of cordiality from the side of Mr. Sharif as far as you visiting Pakistan. Could you give us any guidance on whether you plan to visit there before the end of this year? Also, what sort of outcomes you are expecting before it can be, as you said in your own words, business-as-usual with Pakistan again?

Prime Minister: I rang up Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on the very first day when election results were coming out. I conveyed my congratulations to him and I reciprocated his sentiments that India-Pakistan relations should move forward. I also invited him to visit India, he also invited me to visit Pakistan. There is an invitation from the Government of Pakistan

for me to visit Pakistan. There is no firm decision on either side. No dates have been fixed. But we would certainly like to have good neighbourly relations with Pakistan. It has been consistently our policy that in India-Pakistan relations we should deal with all the outstanding issues. We are committed to resolve them in a peaceful manner. That is also the sentiment which was reciprocated by Shri Nawaz Sharif.

Question: *Jharkhand mein Rashtrapati shasan lage hue paanch mahine ho gaye hain. Yeh kab tak continue karega hum yeh janna chahte hain. Aur nikat bhavishya mein kya vahan chunav sampann honge?*

Prime Minister: *Is baat par vichar ho raha hai. Main is samay is se zyada aur kuchh nahin kehna chahta.*

Question: *Aap 1991 se Rajya Sabha Member hain aur kal aap phir nirvachit hue hain. Iske liye main haardik badhayi deta hun Assam ki janta ke taraf se aur meri taraf se. Yeh North-East ke andar subsidy bahut zyada industrial development ke liye de rahe hain. Jaise subsidized hai, vahan tax holiday hai. Parantu subsidy ka rupaya vahan North-East ke development ke liye koi bhi industry nahin kar raha hai. Toh Central Government kyon action nahin le raha hai vahan par? Yeh bahut bada mamla hai. Ek sau crore ki industry laga kar do sau crore ki subsidy le rahe hain. Toh Central Government ko action lena chahiye jis se ki State ka development ho.*

Dusri, Look East Policy mein North-East ko except ...(Inaudible)...aur kuchh vahan development nahin hua hai. Toh development vahan par Look East Policy mein hona chahiye. Dhanyavad.

Prime Minister: I sincerely hope that the Northeastern States of India will benefit enormously from our Look East Policy. If we improve the connectivity between India, Myanmar and Thailand, I think you can imagine that this would also benefit the Northeastern States of our country.

With regard to the subsidy matter, I do recognize that because of the special problems and the difficulties of connectivity between the rest of India and the Northeastern States, there is need for some items being subsidized. But I do hope that sooner or later industry in the Northeastern States will also learn to stand on its own feet.

Question: *Sir, jab aap Japan aur Thailand ke daure par the usi vaqt aap ko khabar mili ki Assam se aap Rajya Sabha ke liye ek baar phir nirvachit hue hain agle chah saal ke liye. Kya Pradhan Mantri, abhi tak aap is baat par sahmati, ya abhi tak aapne is baat ka khulasa nahin kiya hai ki agar aapko ek baar phir se Pradhan Mantri pad ke liye zimmedari milti hai toh aap usko sveekar karenge?*

Prime Minister: *Dekhiye, jab main ne apne nomination papers bhare the toh usi samay main ne saaf kah diya tha ki this has been my great privilege to represent Assam in the Rajya Sabha since 1991. The people of Assam have given me yet another opportunity to serve them. I am very grateful to them. I have tried in my own way to serve the people of Assam to the best of my ability. I will do so with renewed dedication and commitment.*

Question: *Sir, aapki Mantri Parishad mein nau sthaan khali hain, aur chunav bahut paas, adhikam ek saal ke andar hoga. Toh Mantri Mandal mein vistaar ki ummeed hum log kar sakte hain, aur kab tak?*

Prime Minister: *Dekhiye, Mantri Mandal mein kuchh seetein khaali hain, unko bharne ka vichar kiya ja raha hai.*

Question: Sir, my question actually relates to the world of cricket. One of the biggest news developments that is happening in India today is about match-fixing, is about betting, hawala scandals, all happening in the Indian Premier League where even senior Ministers, politicians are also associated with the game. The BCCI Chief, Mr. Srinivasan, has refused to step down from his position saying he has done no wrong. Do you think it is about time for the Government to intervene?

Prime Minister: I wouldn't like to comment on this issue. This matter, the type of things that you have mentioned are under

investigation and it would not be proper for me to comment on the stage of investigation. I would only hope that politics and sport don't get mixed up.

Question: Sir, in UPA-1, Left deserted you. In UPA-2, Mamata deserted you. For a possible UPA-3, are you planning to reach out to the Left again or you are expecting that Mamata also can join UPA-3?

Prime Minister: In politics there are no permanent allies and no permanent enemies. These possibilities of some people coming in, some people going out, I think have to be accepted as they are.

Question: Sir, in this entire growth versus inflation dynamics, do you think that RBI has been behind the curve? The Finance Minister sometime back did say that he would like to walk alone if the RBI does not listen. What is your comment?
Prime Minister: Monetary policy of the country is decided by the Reserve Bank, and I respect the judgment of the Reserve Bank. But this is also an evolving process. As we get control over inflation, there is more space available to pursue pro-growth policies. And I do believe, in the coming months I think you will see inflation coming under greater control, and the space for growth-promoting activities also increasing.

Question: Sir, if DMK approaches you for support from your 5-member MLA contingent for their lone Rajya Sabha seat, will the Congress respond and support them because they expect so?

Prime Minister: I can't say on behalf of the Congress high command. These are matters which are discussed at the highest level in our party, and it would not be proper for me to pre-judge what stand the Congress party will take.

Question: Some of your major Bills are pending which could not be taken up in the last Session because of disruption of Parliament. And you have given a call in your UPA anniversary meeting to the Opposition for helping the Government to pass those Bills. Will there be a special session or will there be any other effort to pass them?

Prime Minister: We will make all possible efforts to ensure that the essential business is conducted smoothly. And I appeal once again to all political parties to help the Government in this process.

Question: Sir, you have been known to be a very objective person. As you are completing your second term as Prime Minister you have a considerable list of achievements. Can you tell me three regrets which you have?

Prime Minister: I cannot tell you how I feel about the way UPA-2 has moved. I think there has been a great sense of continuity between UPA-1 and UPA-2. But it is unfortunately a fact that the Opposition has become more impatient than ever before. They never expected that we would win the election for UPA-1. But they were doubly disappointed when we won the election for UPA-2.

Therefore, the obstructionist role of the Opposition has increased enormously in recent years. And it is my great regret that some very essential business of the House has not been transacted because of these animosities between the Opposition and the Government.

Question: Prime Minister, the perception persists of divergences and trust deficit between you and Mrs. Sonia Gandhi, and that she nudged you against your wishes to get the resignation of Mr. Ashwani Kumar as Law Minister, and also that you faced a tough situation when CBI Director named a Joint secretary in the PMO as having made changes in the Agency's affidavit to the Supreme Court.

Prime Minister: I can say in all truthfulness that there is no difference of opinion between me and the Congress President. We work together on almost every issue where consultation is needed, I consult the Congress President. And, therefore, this perception that on certain issues there were differences of opinion, there is no truth in that.

Official Spokesperson (Shri Syed Akbaruddin): Thank you very much ladies and gentlemen.

(Concluded)

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