

Press Statement
by
H.E. General Prayut Chan-o-cha,
Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Thailand,
on his visit to the Republic of India
17 June 2016

Your Excellency Mr. Prime Minister Narendra Modi,
Members of the Press,
Distinguished Guests,

I am highly pleased to be visiting the Republic of India upon the invitation of Prime Minister Modi. I would like to thank the Indian government for the warm welcome extended to me and my delegation. India is a land with an ancient civilization that was the cradle of Buddhism, spreading from India around the world, including to Thailand. The close friendship between Thailand and India is built upon our historical ties which stretch from ancient times up to the present day with the corresponding “Act East” policy of India and “Look West” policy of Thailand. India has now become an Asian superpower which will play an important role in the political, economic and social affairs of the region and of the world. Besides, India’s industrial development, IT technology and progress in research have attained international recognition, which is a reflection of the success of the government’s policy of development under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi.

During my discussion with Prime Minister Modi, we both agreed on celebrating the 70th anniversary of our diplomatic relations by organizing year-round activities with the main activities falling on 1 August 2017. Such an occasion is an apt moment to review our relations as well as to discuss the direction of Thai-Indian relations. This will allow us to elevate our relations towards an even stronger partnership.

In terms of our economic ties, Prime Minister Modi and I feel that we can enhance the partnership between Thailand and India by setting a higher target for bilateral trade. The expedition of the conclusion of a Thailand-India Free Trade Agreement will have a significant part in increasing bilateral trade. Prime Minister Modi stated that he would support investment from the Indian private sector in Thailand. I, in turn, will encourage Thai investors to seek out prospects in India in support of the Make in India and Smart Cities schemes. I am therefore pleased with the 1st Thai-Indian Business Forum and other business

activities which have created new networks for the mutual benefit of our two private sectors.

I am delighted that projects by the Thai private sector have won acclaim from the Indian government and public, including the construction company of new airport terminals by a Thai construction company in Ahmedabad, Gujarat State and in Calcutta, which have been praised for their appearance and convenience. Further evidence of this comes in the form of Thai food outlets which have gained popularity among Indians.

Prime Minister Modi and I discussed the topic of connectivity, especially through the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway and BIMSTEC highways, which will facilitate trade and transportation between our two countries with Thailand acting as the gateway that links India to Southeast Asia and the Dawei Deep Sea Port serving as an access point from Chennai. We also discussed our respective roles in driving forward negotiations for RCEP, which, if successful, will become the largest free trade zone in the world, encompassing a population of over 3 billion, and our roles in expediting the creation of a BIMSTEC free trade zone.

In the field of security, our cooperation has been close and cordial. In March, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Defense visited India and discussed a wide variety of issues including defense cooperation between armed forces, intelligence sharing, counter-terrorism and cyber security. The relevant agencies of our two sides continue to coordinate in this area to bring about tangible results that will benefit the security of our region.

Cooperation in the area of tourism, culture, religion and education are areas in which progress is most clearly visible. The interaction between our two publics is an important tool in ensuring our relations remain dynamic. Prime Minister Modi and I affirm the need to promote two-way tourism, the figures for which are highly impressive, by employing the religious dimension. Prime Minister Modi gives importance to this and Thailand stands ready to support India's initiative for Buddhist Circuit tourism in India and neighbouring countries.

In the area of educational cooperation, the Thai private sector has donated 900,000 baht towards the "Thailand Fund for Nalanda University" as a study and research grant for academics and students in the field of "Buddhist Studies, Philosophy and Comparative Religion." Moreover, both countries intend to enhance our cultural cooperation. Many Thai educational institutions have set up centres for Indology and we hope that there will be an opportunity to

promote Thai studies in India in order to improve knowledge and understanding between our two peoples.

In terms of development cooperation, I informed the Indian side of the Sufficiency Economy Philosophy and the methods for developing the country of His Majesty the King of Thailand, which is an alternative form of sustainable development for local communities. These methods might be beneficial to other countries if applied in a contextually appropriate manner.

Today, Prime Minister Modi and I were joint witnesses to the exchange of 2 MoUs, namely 1) the Thai-Indian Executive Programme of Cultural Exchange 2016 -2019 and 2) the MoU between Chiang Mai University and Nagaland University. Furthermore, I welcome the signing of the MoU between Kasikorn Bank and India's Axis Bank during this trip, which will lead to a partnership that will offer services and support for businesses involved in bilateral trade and investment between Thailand and India.

The Thai delegation and I are very glad that tomorrow we will travel to Bodh Gaya to venerate the site of the Buddha's enlightenment. I will preside over a prayer and meditation ceremony beneath the Mahabodhi tree, where the Buddha attained enlightenment, as a form of merit making on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Accession to the Throne of His Majesty the King of Thailand and on the occasion of Her Majesty the Queen of Thailand's 7th cycle birthday on 12 September 2016 at the Mahabodhi Temple in Bodh Gaya. The delegation and I will also be presenting alms and offerings to monks at the Thai Temple of Bodh Gaya.

I would like to thank the Indian Government once again for your hospitality and I would also like to reaffirm my invitation to Prime Minister Modi to pay a visit to our country.

Thank you.

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