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Valedictory Address by External Affairs Minister at India-ASEAN Youth Summit, Bhopal(August 18, 2017)

August 18, 2017

Shri. O.P. Kohli, Hon'ble Governor of Madhya Pradesh

Shri Narottam Mishra, Minister of Water Resources, Public Relations, Parliamentary Affairs, Govt. of Madhya Pradesh;

Prof. Sunaina Singh, Vice Chancellor, Nalanda University;

Ms. Jayathma Wickramanayake , UN Youth Envoy;

Representatives from the Indian Youth;

Youth Delegates from ASEAN countries;

Distinguished guests,

Ladies & Gentlemen,

Let me begin by extending a warm welcome to all ASEAN Youth Delegates to India. I am happy to see so many of you having travelled from far to be in India. I am pleased to hear from your representatives that the past few days have been enjoyable and memorable for all of you.

I am sure the Government of Madhya Pradesh and India Foundation have been the perfect host to you during your stay in Bhopal.

This Youth Summit, bringing together youth from 11 different nationalities, is aptly held in India, which is demographically not only one of the most youthful nations, but in the words of Rabindranath Tagore, is a "sea of great human confluence; No one knows at whose call how many streams of humanity in turbulent torrents came from where to get lost in that sea. Here the Aryans, non-Aryans, Dravidians, Chinese, Scythians, Huns, Pathans and Mughals merged into one body."

I would also like to take a moment to extend my appreciation and thanks to the Government of Madhya Pradesh for introducing our Youth to the heart of India, by organizing this event in Bhopal, a place with a distinct syncretic identity, arising from fusion of Hindu, Buddhist, Afghan and Mughal culture over the ages.

Bhopal, with its exotic locales, makes you feel young at heart. It is indeed as the tourism department of Madhya Pradesh says, MP me dil hua bachhe sa, Chote se..chote se bachche sa... And I feel young again, my young friends, as I stand here and speak, reaching out to you.

This month, India is celebrating seventy years of Independence. ASEAN too is celebrating fifty years of its existence. If age is a number, then both India and ASEAN are in their twilight years, but our dialogue partnership, celebrating its 25th anniversary, is young, full of possibilities and excitement.

In retrospect, I feel our commemorative events are not only a stately celebration of structured engagement across political, security, economic and social pillars, but in actuality, a celebration of our youth, with all its high hopes, impossible yearnings & the desire to change the world for the better.

I understand that you would be visiting Sanchi later in the day. Apart from the Gupta Temple, one of the earliest temples marking the evolution of temple architecture, you would be awed by the Stupas of Sanchi, constructed on the orders of Emperor Ashoka to preserve and spread the Buddhist philosophy. Four gateways showcase Gautama Buddha's life through intricate carvings.

And friends, what an extraordinary life it was! Born a Prince, raised a Prince in all worldly comforts, Siddharth steps away from it all - a kingdom all his to claim, a loving wife and son, and meditates to emerge as the Buddha- the Enlightened one. This transformation came when he was young, as young as you all are.

Siddharth himself became the change and as Lord Buddha devoted himself to bring about a change for betterment. Lord Buddha's message is as relevant in the twenty first century as it was two and a half millennia ago. The मध्यम प्रतिपदा, the Middle Path shown by Buddha, speaks to all of us. Its universality and timeless nature runs through ASEAN nations and India as a common thread.

My young friends, we have moved away from the circumstances which compelled our youth to identify themselves with the stoic words Tennyson penned: "ours not to reason why ours but to do and die".

Today, the youth must reason why, debate, discuss and actively participate in shaping the discourse on polity, governance and sustainable development agendas. The process of social inclusion for youth, including participation in decision-making promotes their role as active contributors to society. Youth has immense transformative powers, and youthful energies harnessed and leveraged in the right direction can indeed put the world on course to a more sustainable future.

Lord Buddha said, "नत्तीसंतिपरणसुखं", "there is no higher bliss than peace." Towards attaining this bliss we need to empower our youth who has a critical role in preventing conflicts and ensuring sustainable peace. Youth are agents of change and critical actors in preventing conflict and building peace. Furthermore, when youth are excluded from political, economic & social spheres and processes, it can be a risk factor for violence and conflict. Therefore, identifying and addressing the social exclusion of young people is a must for sustaining peace.

It is heartening that our youth has engaged each other actively in debate and discussions over the past few days on a wide range topics including Innovation and Entrepreneurship, Digital and IT Connectivity, UN Sustainable Development Goals, and on the ways and means to enhance India-ASEAN ties.

I welcome the Youth Declaration which would serve as a reference reflecting the aspirations for a better

tomorrow as we chart a progressive path for our dialogue partnership. It will allow us to factor in the voices of our leaders of tomorrow in the agenda of our leaderships today.

I am confident each one of you as ASEAN Ambassadors will carry your India-experience and happy memories to your families and friends in your countries, and that promoting deeper exchanges, especially, among our youth, will enhance our collective prosperity and well-being.

Let me end with words of Swami Vivekananda, a universal symbol of spiritual unfoldment of the human race and an inspiration not only for the youth, but for everyone.

May his words be an inspiration to you all in your future endeavours: "Arise! Awake! And stop not till the goal is reached"

Thank you.



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