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by



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on

“The Indo-Pacific: From Principles to Partnership”

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The Indo-Pacific: from principles to partnerships

Distinguished guests, good afternoon and thank you for your invitation.

It is good to be here at a time where New Zealand needs less of an introduction than might usually be the case.

The many millions of Indian cricket fans who have watched your team tour our country over the past two months will know all too well that New Zealand is geographically remote from your country. But the reality is that our two countries are closer and more connected than you might think.

The most dynamic link between us is in our population. Those of you who have spent the past few days watching the first test from Wellington will have seen the reality of this first-hand. The thousands and thousands of Indian faces in the Basin Reserve crowd are as likely to have been cheering for Ajaz Patel and the Black Caps as for Virat Kohli and the visitors.

Five percent of New Zealand's people now identifies as being of Indian origin: that's one in every twenty New Zealands. Hindi is our fifth most spoken language.

That diaspora has made seriously impressive achievements across all parts of New Zealand society. Indian New Zealanders have made prominent contributions in all fields of endeavour: from business to the judiciary; politics to sport.

Indian New Zealanders are represented in our national Parliament, with three current sitting MPs and a number of others having served at one point in time in nearly every major political party. Two of our Indian origin MPs, one present and one former, are part of our delegation on this trip - Priyanca Radakrishnan and Mahesh Bindra.

The most accomplished of Indian New Zealanders include Sir Anand Satyanand, a renowned jurist and former governor general of New Zealand, who has been honoured formally by the governments of both our countries; and Dame Sukhi Turner, the first Indian New Zealander elected mayor of a major New Zealand city.

Our common status as democracies is another important connection. India is the world's largest democracy. Less well known is that New Zealand is among the world's oldest, with an unbroken democratic record dating back more than one hundred and sixty five years. Just as Indians rightly feel proud of your historic "tryst with destiny" in 1947; New Zealanders are also singularly proud of one of our own constitutional firsts – the first country where women achieved the vote in 1893.

Our history and traditions have shaped us both: legacies of indigenous populations and immigration, now with modern governments leading diverse populations. From our shared Commonwealth heritage we have inherited an array of familiar parliamentary conventions and traditions.

Democracies can be untidy and unwieldy. Democracy is, as has famously been observed, the worst system of government apart from all others that have been tried from time to time. At their heart, democracies derive their strength from the sovereignty and consent of individual voters. It is a system which for decades has underpinned peace and order in both our countries as well as delivering profound growth and development.

Our democratic traditions have also underpinned how we engage with the world. Our systems, grounded in the sovereignty of the individual and the rule of law, instinctively desire the same things for sovereign nations. And it is precisely from our democratic status and values that we derive our credibility, trust and influence in world affairs.

Of course, we have had our differences, which have always been respectfully if robustly expressed. One thing our foreign policies share in abundance is a stubborn independent streak. For both of us, this tends to manifest in strong support for international law and the UN charter; in the expectation of a voice at decision-making tables relevant to our interests; and in the support of peace, development and multilateralism which is grounded in respect for the sovereignty of states.

The geographical differences between us are immediately evident. Yet with the emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a strategic concept we find ourselves increasingly linked by what we have in common.

At its heart, the Indo-Pacific is maritime. And we are both responsible for vast areas of great Oceans on which our security and prosperity depend. For India, 95 percent of your trade by volume and well over half your energy is transported via the Indian Ocean. For New Zealand, the Pacific Ocean is likewise vital to our strategic interests and fundamental to our identity.

Our great oceans also face similar strategic challenges, with growing pressure on multiple fronts.

Economic resilience, distance to market, and creating employment opportunities remain a real challenge for island states in both oceans.

Human development, particularly health and education for remote populations, are key areas where government services are often stretched.

Transnational crime is putting pressure on law enforcement agencies across the region.

Climate change continues to have a major impact on our regions, as coasts erode, rivers salinate, sea levels rise, and fish stocks decline.

In addition, strategic competition is at levels that we have not seen for decades.

Like India, New Zealand has direct interests in the Indo-Pacific's security:

We trade with the world.

Our defence interests include our contribution over more than 70 years to the security of the seas and the capacity of all to use them. In the Pacific, our Search and Rescue area stretches over 1/6th of the world's surface, from the Equator to Antarctica. And our various naval deployments in the Gulf of Aden over the past ten years underline the contribution New Zealand has also made in the Indian Ocean.

New Zealanders travel to every part of the world and we welcome people from all over the world to our country. This brings enormous benefits, but also risks, as the ongoing coronavirus outbreak continues to underscore.

The terrorist attacks in India and New Zealand in February and March last year, and the Easter terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka, were stark reminders that no country is disconnected from poisonous extremist ideologies or their appalling consequences.

Like India, our massive Ocean interests expose us to the most pressing security and development concerns of Island countries. Eclipsing all of these is the threat of climate change, which has been identified by Pacific Leaders as the number one threat to Pacific peoples.

The emergence of the Indo-Pacific terminology recognises these common interests. It unites New Zealand and India in a shared strategic geography as well as a shared commitment to a stable, peaceful, open and secure region.

This is reflected in the alignment of our Indo-Pacific policies. Like many in the region we welcomed Prime Minister Modi's remarks to the Shangri La dialogue in 2018 where he affirmed India's commitment to a "free, open, and inclusive" Indo-Pacific region – one based on the consent of all, not on the power of the few" and characterized by respect for international law, including freedom of navigation and overflight.

New Zealand's own Indo-Pacific policy echoes and endorses these principles. Like India, we also want to see an Indo-Pacific that is open and inclusive; that is committed to transparency; that respects sovereignty; that adheres to international law; that upholds

freedoms of overflight and navigation; where markets are open; and that is grounded in ASEAN centrality.

We also know that safeguarding these principles and responding to the security concerns of our region will require collective action. New Zealand has welcomed ASEAN's release of its Indo-Pacific Outlook, which has reaffirmed ASEAN's role as a regional convenor at the geographical centre of the region. And we are seeking to reaffirm and reinvigorate our strategic partnership with ASEAN, building on our legacy as its second-oldest dialogue partner. We work closely together in ASEAN's architecture, especially at the East Asia Summit.

India's stated commitment to a proactive and stabilising leadership role in this region is therefore both appropriate and welcome.

The visit this week by President Trump has underlined New Delhi's role as a centre of global discussion and active participation in mediating an evolving world order. India's convening power was also demonstrated in the last month with the latest iteration of the Raisina Dialogue. A forum which brings perspectives from the region and the world.

New Zealand's perspective is unsurprisingly concentrated in the Pacific. Just as the Indian Ocean matters hugely to India, the Pacific matters hugely to New Zealand. It is where we wield the most influence, and where we can have the most positive impact.

New Zealand's foreign policy update, our Pacific Reset, has as its long-term goal a stable, prosperous and resilient Pacific. Our policy approach recognised the complexities of the Pacific context: the asymmetries at play in a time when larger players are renewing their interest; the attendant element of strategic competition; and the speed and intensity of the interests at play.

We have operationalised this through significant increases in development assistance; strengthening and broadening our diplomatic footprint; a new defence policy statement and the procurement of new maritime surveillance capabilities to promote regional security, while also contributing to reinforcing the international rules-based order.

But alongside increasing our investment and ambition, our approach has been grounded in maturing our partnerships with Pacific Island Countries to support their independence and sustainable social and economic resilience. We have 'reset'. But there is much more to be done, and so we must also look ahead.

We need to continue to encourage best practice and transparency in development cooperation, and ensure that the geopolitical environment does not detract from Pacific priorities, or risk regional security.

We need to keep working on deepening political partnerships across the region and with other partners. Our partners often look to us, for insight, collaboration, and cooperation on engaging in the Pacific context.

Above all, we need to put our principles into action, maintaining the ethos of partnership and respect that has underpinned New Zealand's engagement to date. We encourage others to listen and respond to the priorities of Pacific partners when engaging in the Pacific. And we are committed to showing the same respect for other partners' sovereignty and priorities when we engage with them in other parts of the Indo-Pacific. We know India seeks to take a similar approach.

In that context, New Zealand welcomes India's commitment to the Pacific Islands region. We recognise India's long-standing cultural, historical and human ties across the region and its contribution to Pacific security priorities. This includes India's signing on to the Paris Agreement and its determination to increase investment in renewable energy and solar power generation in the Pacific, as reflected in Prime Minister Modi's undertakings to Pacific leaders.

That contribution underlines the leadership role India can play across the region. New Zealand wants to see India take a greater role in international political structures that support global security and regional economic governance.

New Zealand has supported India's bid for a permanent seat in a restructured UN Security Council.

But we also see commensurate leadership responsibility in respect of global economic governance. Threats to the rules-based multilateral trading system should concern us all. New Zealand has been active in supporting WTO reform efforts – but we need all countries to engage in these to preserve the stability and predictability that has been critical to our shared economic prosperity and security.

In the same way, we remain committed to building the economic architecture required for the Indo-Pacific. New Zealand spent great diplomatic and political effort in ensuring that the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans Pacific Partnership was completed. In doing so, its members have reaped significant benefits.

We therefore also strongly encourage India to become a full participant in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). New Zealand respects India's wish to seriously consider the terms of its engagement. But the blunt reality is that India's absence from the region's economic architecture is in neither our economic nor our strategic interests. We want India to be a foundation member of a rules-based grouping committed to regional trade and development. And if India wishes to be a key player in the region, securing an enduring and influential voice in the region's economic and trade architecture will be essential.

Building on our shared interests is already showing promise. In addition to the alignment of our Indo-Pacific policies, our visit here will support a number of practical outcomes. This includes an Air Services Agreement; enhanced customs cooperation; a commitment to greater collaboration in multilateral forums such as the UN Security Council and various business deals underlining the economic connectivity between our countries.

But there is more we can do in the wider relationship. That's why, as part of our visit here, we are launching a refreshed New Zealand – India strategy for investing in the relationship.

As our remarks today have underlined, we have an excellent foundation on which to build. The strategic reality of our shared Indo-Pacific region reinforces that New Zealand and India are closer than we might think and that we are embarked on a shared journey.

Thank you.
