

“The universe doesn’t give you what you ask for with your thoughts - it gives you what you demand with your actions.” Steve Maraboli

INTERNATIONAL AND BILATERAL**INDIA AND SEYCHELLES TO ENSURE MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL STEPS REGARDING MILITARY BASE AT ASSUMPTION ISLAND**

India and Seychelles will ensure mutually beneficial steps regarding stalled plans for a military base at the island of Assumption, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday.

The statement is the first from the Prime Minister since the National Assembly of Seychelles last week refused to ratify the naval base that India has been planning to build on Assumption to provide a foothold in the western Indian Ocean.

However, India made it clear that its security and strategic cooperation will go ahead.

The two countries have convergence of views on the geostrategic importance of the Indian Ocean region. He also declared that both sides would intensify cooperation to carry out hydrographical studies of the maritime region and have declared exchange of necessary oceanic maps between two sides.

India also gifted a Dornier aircraft to Seychelles.

“India is ready to finance three civilian infrastructure projects in Seychelles under Special Grant. Government House, New Police Headquarters and the Office of the Attorney General are included in this,” declared the Prime Minister. Defence cooperation has been a major component of relations between the two countries and the aircraft is a "proud testimony of India's devotion and commitment" towards the people of Seychelles.

India and Seychelles share a **"special relationship"** and the **strategic convergence** between the two countries has been built on the foundation of shared values and common aspirations.

India and Seychelles have always been strong security partners. As maritime neighbours, are committed to securing our Oceanic space for sustained development. Securing our seas will ultimately lead to creating a peaceful environment for the progress and prosperity of our two countries and peoples.

Noting that Indian naval ships are regularly deployed to undertake patrol of the extensive Exclusive Economic Zone of Seychelles, Swaraj said India remains committed to support Seychelles through capacity building, especially in the field of maritime security.

India is keen on developing the Assumption Island in the Indian Ocean as a naval base to expand its footprint in the strategically-key region where China has been trying to enhance its military presence. An agreement to develop the island was inked in 2015 between India and Seychelles.

The project will give India a strategic advantage in the Indian Ocean Region.

"India and Seychelles are major strategic partners. We respect the core values of a democracy and share the geo-strategic vision to maintain the peace, security and stability in the Indian Ocean," added Modi.

"Assumption Island project was discussed, we are equally engaged and will work together bearing each other's interests," he said.

India also announced that it has given \$100 million dollars to Seychelles on credit for its defence sector. The two countries also signed six MOUs.

It is not clear how both sides would take the project forward in the absence of a parliamentary ratification.

INDIA-MALDIVES: INDIA CUTS SUPPLY OF ESSENTIAL COMMODITIES TO MALDIVES

Based on the 1981 trade agreement, India exports certain essential commodities to Maldives, whose quantities are notified every year.

These items are exempt from any restrictions or prohibitions on Indian exports during the period of notification.

Till last year, India had allocated largely whatever amount the Maldives government had proposed.

However, in the latest notification, India has lowered the limits on the export of certain essential commodities such as potatoes, onions, and eggs.

The notification with a sharply reduced amount of exports of essential commodities has been issued in a backdrop in the downturn of relations.

According to Article 9 of the bilateral trade agreement, quota allocations shall be finalised by the Indian government “with due regard to the supply availability and the overall need of the Government of the Republic of Maldives”.

Relations between India and Maldives have soured somewhat in recent times. The following are key concerns –

Turbulent Maldivian politics: Maldives under the authoritarian regime of President Abdulla Yameen.

Maldives growing “closeness” with China: Both China and Pakistan stepping up their strategic inroads into the Maldives

Religious radicalization: Maldives is being radicalized by the Saudi funds and influence

ISIS threat: Growing Islamic radicalisation in the tiny island-nation of about four lakh people once known for its tolerant practices has many foreign governments, including India, deeply concerned.

No FTA with India: Maldives and India do not have a Free Trade Agreement. However Maldives and China entered into Free Trade Agreement.

Yameen government asked India to remove its Dhruv advanced light helicopters from Maldives (which India had gifted in 2013). Yameen government has alleged that tensions over the presence of the two Indian helicopters in two strategically important locations in the Laamu and Addu atolls have been growing.

Work permits are not currently being issued to Indian Nationals.

NATIONAL

GOVT. TESTING ‘BIG DATA’ SYSTEM TO AID BANKS ASSESS CREDIT RISKS

The ministry of Electronics and Information technology is testing the credit rating model which will help banks assess credit risks.

The Ministry of Electronics and IT sponsored project include Reserve Bank of India (RBI), Bangalore-based IT firm Processware System and two cooperative banks as partners.

A statistical and machine learning algorithmic model has been developed to predict the probability of default.

A model has been developed to predict different types of frauds in banking sector based on RBI guidelines.

Data from various banks have been used for validating the models.

Further, web-enabled software has been developed.

Benefits:

Help tackle the issue of rising non-performing assets (NPA).

It will enable banks to quantify risks associated with retail loans- for example, gold loans, personal loans and vehicle loans.

The web-enabled software will assist the banks to adopt the models for credit rating, non-performing assets and fraud.

NUTRITION SECURITY

India is lacking in its commitment to tackle undernourishment.

The UN’s State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World report 2017, highlighted the ways to achieve nutritional policy reform.

The global agencies found that food security and better nutrition may be at risk.

The NITI Aayog found that families below the poverty line consumed more cereals and less milk compared to the affluent.

Major highlights of the report:

- Reduction in the reduction in the rate of undernourishment since the year 2000 despite large population facing hunger and poor nutrition.
- The estimate of 815 million people enduring chronic food deprivation in 2016, compared to 775 million in 2014, is depressing.
- The deprivation is even greater among people who live in regions affected by conflict and the extreme effects of climate change.
 - Under-nutrition rates continue to drop, although one in four children is still affected by stunting.

Reasons:

- Impact of downturn
- Many violent conflicts
- Fall in community export revenues
- Failure of agriculture due to floods and drought.

All the above mentioned factors represent a setback to all countries trying to meet Sustainable Development Goal on ending hunger and achieving improved nutrition.

India's efforts at improving access to food and good nutrition are led by the National Food Security Act.

Despite having special nutritional schemes for women and children, 14.5% of the population suffers from undernourishment, going by the UN's assessment for 2014-16.

According to health ministry's data, at the national level, 53% of women are anaemic.

Challenges:

Institutions like The State Food Commissions have not made a big difference.

Distributing nutrition food as a public health measure is still not a political imperative.

OPERATION SAGAR RANI

Operation Sagar Rani was launched by the Food Safety department last year.

It ensures the safety of fish sold in the market and ensures that it was handled hygienically at the handling and distribution centres.

Recently, contaminated fish preserved using formalin (formaldehyde) were seized in Kerala.

Toxic preservatives are being used by people/traders in Kerala who are importing fish from neighbouring States.

Unscrupulous fish wholesalers are using formalin, a toxic and carcinogenic chemical commonly used to preserve dead bodies in mortuaries, to prevent fish from deteriorating during transportation.

PROPOSED WATER AERODROME IN CHILIKA LAKE LIKELY TO FACE GREEN HURDLE

The Airports Authority of India has proposed to set up a water aerodrome in Chilka Lake for starting amphibious aircraft operations in Odisha.

Chilika Lake:

Chilika lake is a brackish water lagoon, spread over the Puri, Khurda and Ganjam district of Odisha at the mouth of Daya River, flowing into the Bay of Bengal.

Largest coastal lagoon in India and the second largest coastal lagoon in the world after The New Caledonian barrier reef in New Caledonia.

It is the largest wintering ground for migratory birds on the Indian Sub-Continent.

The Lake is home to a number of threatened species of plants and animals.

Important facts:

The pre-feasibility study has already been completed for the same.

For nearly six months, in a year Chilka lake turns into a temporary habitat for lakh of migratory and residential birds.

The Chilka Development Authority, the apex regulatory authority for Chilka lake, will submit its opinion about the project.

However, the project will face green hurdles because of the following reasons:

If an aircraft flies at low height, there is every chance of the birds getting hit.

The bird population will be in danger.

The safety of passengers of amphibious aircraft will also be jeopardized.

Noise pollution generated by close to 10,000 boats has already taken a toll on the endangered Irrawaddy dolphins in the lake.

Around 155 endangered Irrawaddy dolphins were spotted in Chilka, which is the single largest habitat of this species in the world.

The Odisha government has decided to regulate boat operation in the lake following the death of six passengers in recent boat tragedy.

This incidence has made life jacket mandatory for tourists and GPS on the boats.
