



# Country Statement of India at the 9th meeting of Heads of Governments of SCO dealing with the prevention and elimination of emergency situation

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Following is the Country Statement of India at the 9<sup>th</sup> meeting of Heads of Governments of SCO dealing with the prevention and elimination of emergency situation, made by the Union Home Minister Shri Rajnath Singh at Cholpon- Ata in Kyrgyz Republic today:

"India warmly congratulates Mr Almazbek Atambayev, the President of Kyrgyz Republic and Minister Boronov for the excellent arrangements for this ninth meeting. I am told that the Experts Group meeting yesterday was also held with a great sense of camaraderie and purpose to develop a comprehensive agenda for prevention and elimination of emergencies.

As a new member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, we are happy to note that the area of cooperation identified for this meeting is timely and appropriate.

Over the period 1996 to 2015, the SCO countries have lost 300,000 lives to natural disasters. The economic losses from disasters are also extremely high and cascading. We are all exposed to a range of natural and man-made hazards. Natural events like earthquakes, floods, storms, landslides, epidemics etc are the major killers. The frequency and intensity of hydro-meteorological hazards is likely to rise in view of the climate change. If we do not make our communities, our capital assets, our economic activities resilient, disaster losses will continue to rise. For us in SCO nations, mitigating these risks is central to ensuring that our economic growth, our human development is sustainable.

In an interconnected world, risk reduction is no longer merely a local activity. Actions in one part of the world affect risks in other parts of the world. Even when there is no obvious link between disasters in two distant geographies, underlying challenges in preventing disasters are common across the world. Therefore, we must continually learn from each other, innovate, and push the envelope so that we can build a safer world for ourselves and for the generations to come.

Nearly 40% of the humanity lives in our countries. We represent some of the fastest growing economies. If we are able to prevent and reduce the impact of disasters and emergencies, it will have huge global benefits as well. None of the global targets on reducing disasters losses - whether they are enshrined in the Sendai Framework or Sustainable Development Goals - can be met by 2030, unless they are achieved by the SCO countries. International cooperation in this area is therefore important for all of us.

In India, we are making concerted efforts to reduce preventable deaths and other losses. We are analyzing the patterns of disaster mortality and taking focused, steps.

Our effective handling of two major cyclones- Phailin and Hudhud in the recent past is the direct outcome of over a decade of policy initiatives, enhancement of early warning capabilities, advance preparation, training and capacity development. In these two disasters, loss of lives was reduced to 45 persons compared to nearly 10,000 lives in the 1999 Odisha cyclone alone. In other words, in little over a decade, we have been able to reduce the loss of lives to less than 1% in comparison to that of the past.

In addition to reduction in cyclones related mortality, we have taken urgent steps to reduce deaths related to extreme temperatures. Working across the entire chain of stakeholders - meteorologists, disaster managers, public health officials, municipal bodies, construction site managers, water and power supply departments - we have improved heat wave early warning protocols and their application at the local level. This has helped us achieve significant reduction in heat wave-related deaths: from more than 2,000 in 2015 to 250 in 2017.

For low-frequency, high-impact events such as earthquakes, reducing mortality-risk would be a long-term endeavor; but we have already made the beginning. Among other things, we have made improvements in risk-resilience arrangements at the national and local levels to ensure a safer-built environment. Our National Disaster Management Plan launched in 2016 addresses these systemic issues. In addition to the National Plan, all our states and 90% of our districts have completed their disaster management plans.

India believes that cooperation on prevention of disasters and emergencies within the SCO framework will give added impetus to our domestic efforts. At the same time, there are useful lessons from our work in India that other SCO member states can benefit from. Within the overall framework of cooperation, I would like to highlight three specific themes for your consideration:

First in the list is cooperation on reducing earthquake-related losses. Over the last twenty years, earthquakes have taken lives of more than 200,000 people, which accounts for two-thirds of disaster related mortality in SCO countries. We must develop concrete cooperation activities to reduce the losses in future.

In this regard, a joint Urban Earthquake Search and Rescue exercise will be very useful in improving our collective preparedness. When the Search and Rescue teams engage in a joint exercise, they not only build a common understanding of internationally recognised procedures to coordinate in emergencies, they also build personal acquaintances and friendships that come in handy when they have to respond together. India offers to host a joint exercise on Urban Earthquake Search and Rescue in 2019.

In addition, a meeting of technical experts can be organised to facilitate exchange of knowledge and experiences on earthquake-resistant building construction, model building codes and standard processes for ensuring compliance. This can help address the medium and long term issues for reducing earthquake losses.

Secondly, we can work on regional cooperation for making our infrastructure disaster-resilient. Over the coming decades, investment in infrastructure in the SCO countries will be the driver of sustainable development. It is important to ensure that this infrastructure is resilient to the impact of disasters. Within the SCO framework we should exchange knowledge, experience and expertise on making infrastructure resilient through better understanding of risks, standards of design, and stronger technical capacities.

Finally, we need cooperation in the area of early warning systems for extreme weather events. The SCO member states may have very different climate and weather systems but the underlying processes for forecasting adverse weather events, anticipating their impacts and issuing early warnings remain the same. A technical meeting of representatives of our meteorological services will be a very beneficial first step to foster collaboration in this area. The meeting can be structured around specific components of a comprehensive end-to-end severe weather early warning system. In this regard, India offers to host a meeting of the meteorological services of SCO countries in early 2019.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate that in achieving our common goals in preventing disasters and emergencies, India is willing to stand shoulder to shoulder with other SCO nations and explore all possible avenues of collaboration.

We have invested heavily in developing international collaborative initiatives:

- We have established the Tsunami Early Warning System for the Indian Ocean Rim Countries
- We have deployed our National Disaster Response Force in other affected countries for response operations
- We have hosted joint bilateral exercises with SAARC and BIMSTEC countries
- Last year we hosted the Asian Ministerial Conference for Disaster Risk Reduction
- And in May this year we launched the South Asia Geostationary Communication Satellite that will improve communication, weather forecasting, etc. among the South Asian countries

We will work with the same level of commitment under the SCO framework and offer to host the next meeting of this Forum in India in 2019. We are indeed looking forward to moving hand in hand with all of you and extend my invitation to heads of SCO Member State to attend the next meeting in India.

I am sure that the deliberations over the last two days will lay a strong foundation for our collective understanding and cooperation towards management, mitigation and reduction of disaster risks.

With these words, I thank our esteemed host once again and extend a warm invitation to all of you to visit India.

Thank you."

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