

## **COUNTRY STATEMENT**

**To be presented at the 69th session of  
UNESCAP**

**30<sup>TH</sup> APRIL, BANGKOK, THAILAND**

**Theme Topic: Opportunities to build  
Resilience to Natural Disasters  
and Major Economic Crises**

1. Mr. Chairperson, Madam Executive Secretary, Excellencies, distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen; it is a pleasure and a privilege to be participating in the 69<sup>th</sup> Session of UNESCAP.

2. India values ESCAP and is pleased to host and support the Sub Regional Office of ESCAP in New Delhi covering the South and South-West Asia region. We are pleased to see that the Office has quickly become operational and active after its opening in December 2011 and has begun assisting the

member states with its capacity building activities.

3. I believe that resilience is a timely theme for our discussion in view of high vulnerability and growing incidence of natural disasters and economic shocks in the region. True, that we cannot stop natural disasters and foresee major economic crises, but in both cases, we can surely protect people just by putting a strong and visible structural framework of preparedness and mitigation measures.

4. In view of the global and economic crisis experienced by the entire global community India's focus of recent reforms and policy measures is on returning the Indian economy to its high growth trend and rebuilding its macroeconomic policy space to address current and future shocks.

5. India had prioritized key macroeconomic reforms. India also maintains a measured approach to the management of the capital market with strong incentives for Foreign Direct Investment and other long-term investments while closely regulating the highly volatile short-term debt or Foreign Institutional Investments. The policy space available at the onset of the global financial crisis was used to minimize the impact of recession in developed countries on economic growth through stimulus efforts directed at expanding schemes such as National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NAREGA) across the country so as to protect the vulnerable groups of population.

6. India is highly vulnerable to disasters. Over half of its landmass is earthquake prone, 12 per cent of its land is vulnerable to flooding



and erosion. Around three quarters of its coast (i.e. 5700 km) is vulnerable to cyclones and tsunamis and nearly 70 per cent of its cultivatable land is vulnerable to drought. A study has estimated that India faces losses of up to 2 per cent of GDP due to natural disasters.

7. To enhance its resilience, India's Disaster Management Act, refocused disaster management from a relief-centric to a more holistic approach covering many multidimensional aspects from disaster risk reduction to reconstruction and rehabilitation. The Disaster Management Act led to formation of a number of key institutions at the national and state levels. At the national level, India's National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) is headed by the Prime Minister and its work is supported by the

National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM) and the National Disaster Response Force (NDRF). This strategy has been replicated at the state and district levels with the implementation of state and district disaster management authorities throughout India.

8. My Government through implementation of Policy interventions and various schemes/welfare activities/supply chain of food grains in the country with regard to Food & Public Distribution of food grains ensures social as well as economic protection and maintains food security among vulnerable population and builds resilience to national disaster and major economic crises.

9. Under the Country Programme Action Plan (CPAP) 2008-2012 signed between the Government of India and the UN World Food

Programme (WFP), my Government has made allocations of 1,65,065 MTs food grains during 2008-2011 to the United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP) for its utilization in WFP assisted/supported projects to ensure food security among vulnerable population in India.

10. To ensure food security in the country, the Government has been providing food grains at highly subsidized prices to the targeted population through State Governments/Union Territory Administrations under the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS) and Other Welfare Schemes (OWS) such as Mid-Day Meal Scheme, Wheat Based Nutrition Programme, Rajiv Gandhi Scheme for Empowerment of Adolescent Girls (RGSEAG) – Sabla, Annapurna, Emergency Feeding Programme, etc.



11. To further strengthen the efforts to address the food security of the people, my Government is seriously considering new food security legislation.

12. This holistic, multi-disaster strategy along with increased investments on innovations has been effective in achieving real reductions in risk in the face of economic and disaster-related shocks. Recent data from the ESCAP South and South-West Asia Development Report showed that India's disaster and economic risk index values were far below Asia-Pacific and global averages. This is despite it being higher than average disaster vulnerability and high exposure to shocks.

13. At the community level, disaster management is implemented across all programmes and departments, from policies

on disaster resistant rural housing, to disasters actions for public health systems and food security, to incorporating gender perspectives of disaster risk reduction and disasters-related impacts of climate change<sup>1</sup> and including disasters management across education curricula

14. An agreement among SAARC member countries on Establishing the **SAARC Food Bank** has since been ratified by my Government.

15. Building regional resilience helps in building capacity to shape global actions. The current economic situation with slowdown in developed countries, reduced demand for exports from developing countries and volatility in commodity markets affect the women folk most because they do not have

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stable jobs and lose their jobs in the first instance. In general, smaller economies have fewer productive capacities and are expected to face higher challenges in adapting to changed conditions than more diversified economies when affected by shocks of the same magnitude.

16. Economic complexities lead to less productive assets and reduction in bank loans. This also affects women more because poor women who form Self Help Groups in developing countries may face less availability of bank loans for their programmes. Therefore, building of resilience on macro economy, community supply chain and exposures to critical sectors will be helpful for these poor women especially, in the rural areas. Women form the nucleus of the family, community, society and nation and

any effort to enhance the status of women directly contributes to nation building.

17. ESCAP's theme study notes the need for risk management approaches to critical infrastructure, the review of guidelines and the importance of technology and innovation. This echoes actions that India has already been implementing and will continue to do so.

18. Regional cooperation for addressing disaster risks and increasing resilience to economic and other shocks is essential. India has led activities in various areas through regional institutions such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to increase economic resilience and policy coordination and in focusing on disaster risk reduction through the SAARC Disaster Management Centre, located in New Delhi. India has also engaged in various

bilateral disaster management activities with numerous countries including China, Nepal, Russia and USA. For furthering regional cooperation in the area of disaster risk reduction, India is also partnering with ESCAP supported institution RIMES (Regional Integrated Multi-Hazard Early Warning System for Africa and Asia). India hosted in June 2012 the first meeting of RIMES ministerial council that led to finalization of RIMES Master Plan. India has committed a contribution of US\$ 7 million in support of implementation of the master plan particularly to implement technical assistance and capacity-building projects for neighbouring countries. Another important step taken to enhance region's resilience to economic shocks through regional cooperation is a swap arrangement of US\$ 2



billion established recently by the Reserve Bank of India for SAARC countries to provide liquidity support in times of crisis.

19. Mr Chairman, Asia and the Pacific region need to use its knowledge and capacity in a cooperative and coordinated manner. India supports ESCAP initiatives that promote regional cooperation and coordination for increased resilience to disasters and economic shocks. The regional cooperation is the only effective way of addressing these vulnerabilities as well.

20. India has been a firm believer in regional cooperation and integration of the region. Way back in March 1947, as the country was preparing to attain Independence, the first visionary Prime Minister of our nation, Pt. Nehru had hosted the Asian Relations Conference, even before India became

independent. Welcoming the leaders from different countries from the continent, Pt Nehru had said, and I quote, **'the time had come for us, peoples of Asia, to meet together, to hold together and to advance together'**. Ever since then, India has always remained committed to the idea of regional cooperation and has played an active role in promoting it.