

One country's terrorist cannot be another's martyr: Full text of Rajnath Singh's speech at SAARC m

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In a stinging indictment of Pakistan over its efforts to "eulogise terrorists as martyrs", Union Home Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday said in Islamabad that "mere condemnation of terrorist attacks is not enough".

Home Minister Rajnath Singh

Speaking at the SAARC Interior Ministers'™ conference in Islamabad, Rajnath came down heavily on Pakistan for adopting a dual stand on the issue of eliminating terrorism.

There were reports, however, of Pakistan blacking out his speech as media, including Pakistani and Indian private TV news channels, were reportedly barred from covering it at the SAARC meeting.

The only channel that was allowed to cover the speech was Pakistan's state-run PTV which did not air it.

Here is the full speech of Home Minister Rajnath Singh at the SAARC meet in Islamabad earlier today:

"At the outset, I congratulate H.E. Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan Saheb for his election as the Chairperson of this Meeting. I also take this opportunity to sincerely thank the Government of Pakistan for excellent arrangements made for hosting this Meeting, and for the outstanding hospitality extended to me and my delegation.

Right from the formation of our government more than two years ago, India has reaffirmed that good relations with our neighbours are our highest priority. Under our "neighbourhood first" policy, we have spared no effort in further building our engagement, and working together with our partners in the region, to secure peace and prosperity for our people. I have come to this meeting with the same purpose.

I recall that under this Forum, we last met before the Eighteenth SAARC Summit that was held in Kathmandu in November 2014. At that Summit, our leaders committed to deepen regional integration for peace, stability and prosperity in South Asia. With 30 years of SAARC's™ existence, today the need is more than ever that we take regional cooperation to a level that realizes the aspirations and expectations of our people.

Our vision for the region, as outlined by Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modiji at the Eighteenth Summit, rests on the pillars of trade, investments, wide-ranging development cooperation, contacts between our people " and, all through seamless connectivity. We have accordingly carried forward the initiatives announced by Prime Minister. I am also happy to note that we have implemented the India business card scheme, which would facilitate eligible business leaders in their visits to India.

It is vital that the South Asian environment has necessary conditions for achieving greater regional prosperity, connectivity and cooperation, if our efforts to these objectives are to succeed. However, we are witness to mounting threats and incidents that endanger our region's™ peace and stability. Terrorism remains the biggest challenge and threat to our peace. South Asia continues to be deeply affected by this malady, as witnessed most recently in cowardly terrorist attacks in Pathankot, Dhaka, Kabul and other places. Merely strong condemnation of such terrorist attacks is not enough. We must harden our resolve to eradicate this menace and also take serious steps to this end.

It also needs to be ensured that terrorism is not glorified and is not patronized by any state. One country's terrorist cannot be a martyr or freedom fighter for anyone. I also speak for the entire humanity- not just for India or other SAARC members " in urging that in no circumstances should terrorists be eulogised as martyrs. Those who provide support, encouragement, sanctuary, safe haven or any assistance to terrorism or terrorists must be isolated. Strongest possible steps need to be taken not only against terrorists and terrorist organisations but also those individuals, institutions, organisations or nations that support them. Only this will ensure that the forces engaged in promoting the heinous crime of terrorism against humanity are effectively countered.

The will and the mandate of international community against proscribed and wanted terrorists and their organisations must also be respected and implemented. If we are to rid ourselves of terrorism, we will have to genuinely believe that attempts to distinguish between "good" and "bad" terrorists are misleading. No type of terrorism or support to it can be justified on any grounds whatsoever. Immediate and effective action is required against all those who support or encourage international terrorism in any way, whether they are state actors or non-state. Only then justice will be ensured for the victims of terrorist attacks such as in Mumbai and Pathankot. We must have the approach of "zero tolerance" against any type of terrorism.

In our common fight against terrorism, implementation of the SAARC Regional Convention on Suppression of Terrorism and its Additional Protocol becomes crucial. This also includes ensuring effective measures so that those committing terrorist acts do not escape prosecution and punishment, and are extradited or prosecuted.

The menace of terrorism is greatly amplified by the misuse of digital technology. In our effort to tackle terrorism, we should look into all possible avenues of cyber-crime, its linkages with the terrorist world, and how these could be dealt with. Attention and efforts need to be devoted to ensure that social media and other modern technology is not misused for misleading especially the youth or promoting terrorism in any way.

I am happy that all SAARC members have supported our proposal to hold the second Meeting of the High Level Group of Eminent Experts to Strengthen the SAARC Anti-Terrorism Mechanism from 22-23 September 2016 in New Delhi. I thank all of you for this and hope that the meeting will achieve its objectives.

I would also draw the attention of my esteemed colleagues to the need for immediate ratification of the SAARC Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters. We have not been able to benefit from the Convention, as some Member States are yet to ratify it. I would urge remaining Member States to consider ratifying the Convention at the earliest.

Trafficking of drugs and its abuse is a grave challenge which has an immeasurable adverse impact. It is a problem which is connected with all types of organized crime. Today, drug business generates the highest illegal fund flows. Trafficking of drugs, coupled with the problem of increasing circulation of fake currency, feeds into supporting terrorism and can create economic de-stabilization in our region. Towards implementation of the Regional Convention on Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances, we have offered our full support and cooperation by way of capacity building and training programmes. There is also a felt need to achieve the full potential of the SAARC Terrorist Offences Monitoring Desk and the SAARC Drug Offences Monitoring Desk.

Safety and security of women and children will determine the well-being and strength of our nations. It is timely and relevant that SAARC has accorded due priority to this area of cooperation, since new threats are emerging with increasing access to information technology and the changing nature of global economy. In India, we have taken a number of new initiatives such as the "Track Child" national portal and "Operation Smile" to rescue children. We shared our experience at the Ministerial Meeting of the South Asia Initiative to End Violence Against Children, which we were privileged to host recently. Our Prime Minister had launched the flagship "Beti Bachao Beti Padhao" programme. It has rapidly expanded and has started contributing to ensuring the survival, protection, education and

empowerment of the girl child.

Since this august forum also discusses our cooperation against corruption, I would like to mention that achieving greater transparency and good governance is a cornerstone of our policy. To give just one example, through our financial inclusion scheme Jan Dhan Yojana that leverages world's largest biometric Unique ID system Aadhar, and Direct Benefit Transfers, we have been able to transform our services delivery to ensure that benefits of public schemes reach the grass-root levels.

In a few months, leaders of the region would come together in this city of Islamabad for the 19th SAARC Summit. It is my hope that we would be able to demonstrate to our leaders concrete progress in areas of our mutual concern and interest that I mentioned in brief. Mr. Chairman, the time for us to act is now.

With these few words, I express my gratitude to you and all my esteemed colleagues.â€•