

Statement by Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh at Plenary Session of the First IBSA Summit

13/09/2006

Your Excellency President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva,
Your Excellency, President Thabo Mbeki,
Distinguished delegates,

It is always a pleasure and privilege to be with friends. We are, indeed, fortunate to count Brazil and South Africa among our closest friends. I am, therefore, personally very happy to be here today with the Presidents of both countries for the first IBSA Summit.

We thank you President Lula for hosting us in this enchanting green landscaped city of Brasilia. We also thank you for your gracious hospitality and for the excellent arrangements that have been made for our meetings.

The holding of this historic Summit confirms the success of our three year-old experiment and that there is, indeed, a shared vision that unites our three countries committed to sustained and sustainable development in the framework of a democratic polity.

The idea of IBSA is without precedent. Three countries, from three different continents, coming together to consult and coordinate on global issues of common concern. They are also collaborating in ways that strengthen their respective national efforts to address the formidable developmental challenges that we all face.

Despite the geographical distances that separate our countries, there is much that we have in common. All three of us belong to the developing world. We are pluralistic and multi-cultural societies. We are the largest democracies respectively on each of our continents and these values bind us in a unique way. Our three countries are committed to economic growth, with social equity and inclusion. We also accept the responsibilities that come with the role that is expected of us by the international community in this increasingly inter-dependent world that we live in. It is these commonalities that provide the basis and the foundation for the success of our innovative venture.

The utility that IBSA brings to the world community is evident in the leadership that our three countries have provided to the G-20 in WTO trade negotiations. While success still eludes us in the Doha Round, we can derive satisfaction from the role that we have played in facilitating coalition building on difficult trade matters.

The Joint Declaration that will be issued at the end of the Summit is an impressive document that reflects our common vision on a wide range of political and economic, regional and global issues of common interest. It is a bold and comprehensive agenda of cooperation and if implemented in earnest will propel this grouping of ours to a position where its voice will be heard and heard effectively in international affairs. It will also develop the kind of institutional and business linkages in important sectors of our cooperation such as energy, sustainable development, trade, transportation and science & technology that will impart new momentum and substance to our trilateral cooperation. On Nuclear Energy, I appreciate the fact that IBSA has lent its support for forward looking approaches to enhance international civilian nuclear cooperation.

We have, very correctly, decided that the benefits of our trilateral cooperation should not be limited to our three countries. The IBSA Facility for Alleviation of Poverty and Hunger is a pioneering initiative for South-South cooperation. It is unique for three major developing countries to come together and establish replicable and scaleable projects in other developing countries.

The success of IBSA can demonstrate, perhaps more vividly than through any other measure, the feasibility of the South-South cooperation that goes beyond the conventional areas of training and exchange of experts.

We should expand the idea of IBSA from a project of three Governments to one involving more intensively the peoples and the civil societies of our three countries. This would require a greater emphasis on people-to-people contact, on cultural and educational exchanges and on the promotion of trade and tourism amongst our three countries.

For this vision to be converted to reality, we need to address the critical question of connectivity. The growth of trade, and of people-to-people contact, can reach its full potential only if the movement of goods and people across our three countries is further facilitated. We have an MOU on Air Services, and an Agreement on Maritime Transportation has also been concluded. These agreements need to be operationalized. We also need to consider ways by which the linkages amongst our three countries can lead to India becoming a hub to Asia, Brazil an entry point to Latin America and South Africa a springboard for Africa.

In conclusion, I would like to say for all three of our countries that there is value in investing in IBSA, and that it is a vision we must pledge together to realize. Let us do what President Kubitschek, who was responsible for the construction of this beautiful capital city of Brasilia, had said "50 years of progress in five".