

Growth, connectivity key to India's foreign policy thinking: S Jaishankar

Synopsis

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NEW DELHI: New energies and additional resources have been devoted in the past three years for ensuring that India's immediate neighbours are also beneficiaries of its growth story, Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar today said.

The senior MEA official was addressing a gathering here at the 'Consultation on Asia-Africa Growth Corridor: The Way Forward' hosted by city-based think-tank RIS (Research and Information System for Developing Countries).

"Growth and connectivity are today very central to India's foreign policy thinking. The approach of 'sabka saath, sabka vikas' (collective action, inclusive growth) is as much a belief in international relations as it is in the domestic development.

"It is already being reflected vigorously in our 'Neighbourhood First' policy. In the last three years, new energies and additional resources have been devoted to ensuring that our immediate neighbours are also beneficiaries of our growth story. That must have been evident yesterday in the outcomes of the visit of the Nepal Prime Minister," he said.

Across South Asia, one can see today transformational initiatives in energy, road and rail connectivity and infrastructure building, Jaishankar said.

"As they are realised, their contribution to the emergence of a larger regional cooperative architecture would be increasingly appreciated. Significantly, we are today working closely with a number of other international players whose approach is similar in this regard," he added.

The Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) is an economic cooperation agreement between the governments of India and Japan.

The AAGC Vision Document was released during the annual meeting of African Development Bank held in May 2017 at Ahmedabad. The action plan envisaged in the Vision Document is likely to assume significance in view of the forthcoming visit of Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe to India in September 2017, the RIS said.

The Vision Document of the AAGC envisages it as "people- centric sustainable growth strategy, details of which would be evolved through a process of detailed consultations across Asia and Africa, engaging various stakeholders," Jaishankar said.

"As we set about fashioning the AAGC, it is only natural that it would reflect how we each look at the world. Today, there is much common ground among the nations of the region and it is that shared perspective that brings us together in this joint endeavour.

"We would naturally like the initiative to be based on universally recognised international norms, good governance, rule of law, openness, transparency and equality. There must be a strong sense of local ownership that can only happen with consultative project designing, transfer of technology and encouragement of skills" he said.

No less important is ensuring of financial responsibility, so that there is no encouragement of unsustainable debts. "Our activities must fully conform to balanced ecological and environmental protection and preservation standards. And, I am compelled to add, respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity," he added.

Given these broad principles, it is a matter of satisfaction that the four components of the AAGC are -- development and cooperation projects; quality infrastructure and institutional connectivity; capacity and skill enhancement; and people-to-people partnerships, he said.

India's own approach to development cooperation and international partnerships have these elements at their heart, Jaishankar said.

"India's activities in the maritime space to its south have complemented those on the land. An integrated approach towards the Indian Ocean has allowed us to think in a more interconnected manner with East Africa as much as with the Pacific islands," Jaishankar said.

The senior MEA official also said that India's approach has been to not only "teach people to fish but even encourage them to identify the fish in question".

"To make this succeed, we must think bigger than what we can do for each other. We must actually be there for each other, whether it is natural disasters, man-made ones or medical emergencies. That has been India's recent record in Yemen and Nepal, in Sri Lanka and Seychelles," he added.

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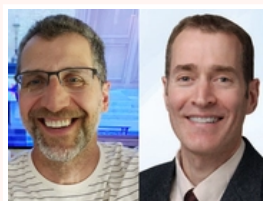
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