Asia of cooperation will shape this century, says PM Modi in Singapore

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A firm diplomacy and strong messaging was the mantra for Prime Minister Narendra Modi during his three-nation tour to South Asia, particularly during the final leg of his visit to Singapore.

While strategic cooperation is the focus of the visit, technological partnership and cooperation were also big on India's agenda. Therefore, the prime minister spent a substantial amount of time at the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) where he was given a tour on their latest research and was introduced to their star inventions, 'Nadine' and 'Edgar', the two life-like robots (humanoids).

The researchers demonstrated what these innovations could mean in the progress of the sphere of Artificial Intelligence (AI).

While Nadine is a female humanoid companion with a personality of her own and can take on certain social roles, Edgar is a tele-presence robot optimized to project the gestures of its human user.

During the visit, PM Modi was also shown Singapore's first 3D printed eco-car and even a 3D printed toilet. Other displays included healthcare applications, AI-driven games and ageing-in-place technologies.

Interacting with a crowd of over 2400 people at the NTU, Prime Minister Modi hailed technological advancement and innovation calling them 'great leveller' and a "disruption" that is welcome. "If there is no disruption there can be no progress. We must welcome disruption not fear it because it leads to greater talent. Disruption might look bad in the beginning but with time it creates more jobs," he said.

Modi's official engagements began with the ceremonial welcome at the Istana, the office of the President of the Republic of Singapore followed by talks with the Prime Minister of Singapore Lee Hsien Loong.

While the Indian prime minister bore the importance of India-Singapore ties, he also sent out clear signals against 'protectionism' and the need to respect 'rules-based order'.

A total of eight MoUs (Memorandums of Understanding) and agreements were signed between the two countries in the areas of economic, finance, defence, personnel management, policy and planning, cyber security, and nursing.

The most significant of them was the conclusion of second review of the Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) in the presence of both the prime ministers which would improve access for businesses in each other's markets through 'expanded tariff concessions for an additional 30 products and improved rules to provide more flexibility for Singapore exports into India to qualify for preferential tariffs under the agreement", Singapore's Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI) said.
The other important agreement is the naval cooperation. Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong said, “Our defence ties have strengthened, our navies have signed an agreement today on logistic cooperation and will also celebrate 25th anniversary of annual Singapore-India maritime bilateral exercise this year.”

Even as India, China are resetting their frayed ties, Modi emphasised on the need for multinational cooperation rather than competition, stating that there were many destabilising factors, especially in the “Indo-Pacific, where regions are starving for stability”.

“Asia of rivalry will hold us all back; Asia of cooperation will shape this century. We have seen the limits of power and the fruits of cooperation,” the PM said.

In an all-encompassing speech at the Shangri’ La Dialogue, Prime Minister Modi hinted at the growing protectionism that the world is witnessing from countries such as the United States of America and said that solutions can’t be found behind walls of protection but in embracing change. “What we seek is a level playing field for all. India stands for open and stable international trade regime,” the PM Modi said.

“We will also support rule-based, open, balance and stable trade environment in the Indo-Pacific region, which lifts up all nations on the tide of trade and investment,” he added.

(With inputs from Punam Sharma)

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