



**Press Information Bureau  
Government of India  
Prime Minister's Office**

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**Prime Minister's address at Asian Ministerial Conference on Disaster Risk Reduction**

Distinguished dignitaries on the dais,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I welcome you all to New Delhi for this landmark conference, the first after the adoption of the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction.

I commend the national disaster risk management agencies, their governments in the Asia-Pacific region, the United Nations, and other stakeholders for coming together for this important cause.

Friends,

2015 was a momentous year! Apart from the Sendai Framework, the international community adopted two other major frameworks to shape the future of humanity:

- the Sustainable Development Goals,
- and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change.

The spirit of inter-connectedness, highlighted in the film, is the hallmark of these global frameworks. The success of each one of these depends on the success of the other two. Disaster Risk Reduction has a pivotal role in supporting adaptation to climate change as well as sustainable development. It is in this context that this conference becomes timely and relevant.

Friends,

Over the last two decades, the world, and especially our region has undergone many changes – most of them positive. Many countries in our region have transformed their economies and become engines of global economic growth. Hundreds of millions of our people have been lifted out of poverty. The Asia-Pacific region has been a global leader in more ways than one.

But we must not take this progress for granted. There are challenges as well. Over the last twenty years, more than eight hundred and fifty thousand people died from disasters in the Asia-Pacific. Seven of the top ten countries in the world in terms of number of deaths due to disasters are in the Asia-Pacific.

I have seen for myself the human suffering caused by disasters. I witnessed the Gujarat earthquake of 2001, and later, as Chief Minister of the State, I worked with my people to support post-earthquake recovery. It was distressing to see the suffering of the affected people. But I was also inspired by their courage, ingenuity and resolve to recover from the disaster. In my experience, the more we relied on people's own leadership, the better were the outcomes. This was not limited only to owner driven reconstruction of houses, but also to construction of community buildings. For example, when we entrusted the community the task of reconstructing a school, the earthquake-resistant building was completed in time, at a lesser cost, and the savings were returned to Government. We need to support such initiative and leadership through policies and practices.

Friends,

We in Asia have learnt from disasters. A quarter century ago, only a handful of Asian nations had national disaster management institutions. Today, over thirty Asian countries have dedicated institutions leading disaster risk management efforts. After the Indian Ocean Tsunami of 2004, the five worst affected countries brought in new laws for disaster risk management. In a couple of days, we will observe the first International Tsunami Awareness Day. This would be an occasion to celebrate the huge improvements we have made in tsunami early warning. In December 2004, the Indian Ocean Tsunami caught us unprepared, and there was no warning. We now have a fully functional Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning System. Along with its Australian and Indonesian counterparts, the Indian National Centre for Ocean Information Services is mandated to issue regional tsunami bulletins.

The same goes for improvements in cyclone early warning. In India, if we compare the impact of cyclone events in 1999 and 2013, we can see the progress we have made. Similar progress has been made in many countries. For example, after the 1991 cyclone, the Government of Bangladesh launched a large community-based cyclone preparedness programme. It led to a significant reduction in loss of lives from cyclones. It is now recognized as a global best practice.

Friends,

This is just the beginning. There are daunting challenges ahead. The Asia-Pacific is rapidly urbanizing. Perhaps within a decade more people in the region will live in cities than in villages. Urbanization will pose greater challenges for disaster risk management, by concentrating people, property and economic activity in smaller areas, many of them in disaster prone locations. If we do not manage this growth, in terms of both planning and execution, the risk of economic and human losses from disasters will be higher than ever before.

In this context, let me outline a **ten-point agenda** for renewing our efforts towards disaster risk reduction:

**First**, all development sectors must imbibe the principles of disaster risk management. This will ensure that all development projects - airports, roads, canals, hospitals, schools, bridges – are built to appropriate standards and contribute to the resilience of communities they seek to serve. Over the next couple of decades, most of the new

infrastructure in the world will come up in our region. We need to ensure that we build it to best available standards of disaster safety. This is a smart strategy, which pays off in the long term.

All our public expenditure must take into account risk considerations. In India, the 'housing for all' programme and 'smart cities' initiative represent such opportunities. India will work with other partner countries and stakeholders to build a coalition or centre for promoting disaster resilient infrastructure in the region. This will help generate new knowledge for hazard risk assessment, disaster resilient technologies and mechanisms for integrating risk reduction in infrastructure financing.

Second, work towards risk coverage for all – starting from poor households to small and medium enterprises to multi-national corporations to nation states. Currently, in most countries of the region, penetration of insurance is limited to only middle and upper-middle income groups. We need to think big and also think innovatively. States have an important role in not just regulating but also encouraging coverage for those who need it the most. In India, we have taken bold steps to ensure financial inclusion and risk insurance for the poorest. The Jan Dhan Yojana has brought millions of people into the banking system. The Suraksha Bima Yojana provides risk insurance to millions who need it the most. We have launched the Fasal Bima Yojana, which will provide risk cover to millions of farmers. These are the basic building blocks of resilience at the household level.

**Third**, encourage greater involvement and leadership of women in disaster risk management. Women are disproportionately affected by disasters. They also have unique strengths and insights. We must train a large number of women volunteers to support special needs of women affected by disasters. We need women engineers, masons and building artisans supporting reconstruction, and women self help groups assisting livelihood recovery.

**Fourth**, invest in risk mapping globally. For mapping risks related to hazards such as earthquakes we have widely accepted standards and parameters. Based on these, in India, we have mapped seismic zones, with five as highest seismic risk and two as low risk. For disaster risk related to other hazards such as chemical hazards, forest fires, cyclones, different types of floods, we need to evolve similar globally accepted risk categories. This will help us ensure that we have a common understanding of the nature and severity of disaster risks in different parts of the world.

**Fifth**, leverage technology to enhance the efficiency of our disaster risk management efforts. An e-platform that brings together organizations and individuals and helps them map and exchange expertise, technology and resources would go a long way in maximizing our collective impact.

**Sixth**, develop a network of universities to work on disaster issues. After all, universities have social responsibilities too. Over the first five years of the Sendai Framework, we should develop a global network of universities working together on problems of disaster risk management. As part of this network, different universities could specialize in multi-disciplinary research on disaster issues most relevant to them. Universities

located in coastal areas could specialize in managing risks from coastal hazards, and the ones located in the hill cities could focus on mountain hazards.

**Seventh**, utilize the opportunities provided by social media and mobile technologies. Social media is transforming disaster response. It is helping response agencies in quickly organizing themselves, and enabling citizens to connect more easily with authorities. In disaster after disaster, affected people are using social media to help each other. We must recognize the potential of social media and develop applications for all aspects of disaster risk management.

**Eighth**, build on local capacity and initiative. The task of disaster risk management, particularly in rapidly growing economies, is so huge that formal institutions of the state can at best be instrumental in creating the enabling conditions. Specific actions have to be designed and implemented locally. Over the last two decades, most community based efforts have been confined to disaster preparedness and contingency planning for the short term. We need to expand the scope of community based efforts and support communities to identify local risk reduction measures and implement them. Such efforts reduce risk and create opportunities for local development and sustainable livelihoods. Localization of disaster risk reduction will also ensure that we make the most of traditional best practices and indigenous knowledge.

Response agencies need to interact with their communities, and make them familiar with the essential drill of disaster response. For example, if a local fire service visits one school in its area every week, it would sensitize thousands of children over a period of one year.

**Ninth**, ensure that the opportunity to learn from a disaster is not wasted. After every disaster there are papers and reports on lessons learnt that are rarely applied. Often the same mistakes are repeated. We need a more vibrant and visual system of learning. The United Nations could start an international competition of documentary films that record disaster events, their scale, and relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and recovery afterwards.

Post-disaster recovery is an opportunity to not just 'build back better' in terms of physical infrastructure, but also in terms of improved institutional systems for managing risk. For this we need to put in place systems that can quickly provide risk assessments. India will work with partner countries and multilateral development agencies to establish a facility for technical support to post-disaster reconstruction of houses.

**And finally**, bring about greater cohesion in international response to disasters. In the aftermath of a disaster, disaster responders pour in from all over the world. This collective strength and solidarity could be enhanced further if we work under a common umbrella. The United Nations could think of a common logo and branding under which all those who are helping with relief, rehabilitation and reconstruction operate.

Friends.

Armed Forces protect nation states against external security threats. But to deal with disasters, we need to equip society with the right education.

We have to wholeheartedly embrace the spirit of Sendai, which calls for an all-of-society approach to disaster risk management.

In India, we are committed to walk the talk on the implementation of Sendai Framework. In June this year, India's National Disaster Management Plan was released which is aligned with the priorities set out in the Sendai Framework.

In our effort to build disaster resilience, we stand shoulder to shoulder with all the nations of the region. Regional and International Cooperation has an important role in providing an added push to our efforts.

Last year in November, India organized the first-ever South Asian Annual Disaster Management Exercise. In the spirit of regional cooperation, India will soon launch the South Asia Satellite. The capabilities of this satellite and other space-based technologies can support the full disaster risk management cycle – risk assessment, risk mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery. India is ready to make its space capabilities available to any country for purposes of disaster risk management.

As we implement the Sendai Framework, we would welcome new opportunities for regional and international collaboration.

I am sure, this conference will energize our efforts and the outcomes of the conference will provide a solid blueprint for collective action.

Thank you.

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