

MODI SKIPS NAM SUMMIT AGAIN

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: NAM and its relevance

Making history: Jawaharlal Nehru with Indonesian President Sukarno at the inaugural NAM summit in Belgrade in 1961. THE HINDU ARCHIVES

Vice-President M. Venkaiah Naidu will represent India at the 19th Non Aligned Movement (NAM) summit in Baku, Azerbaijan on October 25 and 26, marking the second time in a row that Prime Minister Narendra Modi will give the summit a miss.

Mr. Modi's absence indicates a decisive move away from past practice at the 60-year-old organisation that India was a founding member of, by the NDA government. In 2016 as well, India was represented by then Vice-President Hamid Ansari at the NAM summit in Venezuela.

"Long-held assumptions and alignments rooted in the legacies of colonialism and the ideology of the Cold War are making way for new configurations and partnerships," External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said in a statement at the NAM ministerial meet in Baku on Wednesday. However, he maintained that "India remains committed to the principles and objectives of the Non Aligned Movement, including our long-standing solidarity and support for the Palestinian cause."

When asked, External Affairs Ministry officials denied that the government's decision to send Vice-President Naidu represented a "downgrade" of India's representation at the 120-member movement, which began with the "Bandung Process" in 1956 by India, Indonesia, former Yugoslavia, Egypt and other countries. Since it was inaugurated in 1961, the Indian Prime Minister has always attended the NAM summit, except in 1979, when Chaudhury Charan Singh was the caretaker PM and hence missed it, and in 2016.

"It may not be possible for PM [Modi] to attend all multilateral events, given the huge demands on his time," said a senior official, pointing to the fact that in the past, Prime Ministers attended the UN General Assembly regularly as well, but PM Modi has not followed that tradition either and spoken at the General Assembly only on three occasions.

In his statement at Baku, Mr. Jaishankar spoke about the importance of reforming international structures at a time when "multilateralism is undoubtedly under strain", and called for the expansion of the UN Security Council. Mr. Jaishankar said that the NAM summit must resolve to fight terrorism "collectively" and "across all fronts", and advocated the finalisation of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) that India had proposed in 1996.

"The growing linkages between terrorist groups and cross-border operations, including terror financing networks, and the spread of hateful ideologies through modern communication technologies have left no country untouched by this scourge," he added.

Pakistan President Arif Alvi, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina and Nepal PM K.P. Sharma Oli are expected to attend the summit, Azerbaijani media reported.

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