

Title: Regarding visit of Defence Minister to Russian Federation.

12.05 hrs.

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES): I undertook an official visit to the Russian Federation from June 26 to 30, 2000 at the invitation of my counterpart, Marshal Igor Sergeyev, Minister of Defence of the Russian Federation. During my visit, I met with the political leadership of the Russian Federation, including President Putin, Deputy Prime Minister Klebanov and Marshal Sergeyev. In addition to Moscow, I also visited shipyards in St. Petersburg where ships and submarines for the Indian Navy are being constructed.

I had detailed discussions with Deputy Prime Minister Ilya Klebanov and the Defence Minister, Igor Sergeyev on June 27. During the meetings, both sides recalled the close friendship that existed between the two countries, which reflected itself in various areas, including in the defence sector. Both sides attached great importance to these meetings as precursors to the forthcoming visit of President Putin to India in October this year. We discussed in detail the various aspects of our bilateral relations and resolved that the forthcoming Presidential visit would mark an important milestone in our relationship....(*Interruptions*)

The important issues taken up included acquisition of new modern weapon systems, platforms and equipment which would significantly enhance the capability of India's Armed Forces and which will have a major force multiplier effect. In this context, we decided to intensify our bilateral cooperation, both in terms of range and depth. We also decided to raise the level of the institutionalised mechanism of defence cooperation between the two countries by setting up a Joint Commission on Military-Technical Cooperation at the level of Raksha Mantri on the Indian side and Deputy Prime Minister on the Russian side. This significant step is aimed at imparting greater impetus to military cooperation between the two countries and to facilitate accelerated decision-making.

Our talks included a detailed exchange of views on regional and international issues. We especially dwelt upon those developments around the world which reflected little or no respect for the principles of international law or the principles of the UN Charter and agreed to work together on such issues. We also focussed upon the menace of international terrorism and religious extremism that have emerged as destabilisers in several parts of Asia and the world....(*Interruptions*)

On June 28, I called on President Putin and held wide-ranging discussions covering bilateral, regional and international issues. The meeting marked yet another event reinforcing the intrinsic strength of India-Russia bilateral relations. During the meeting, greetings from the President and the Prime Minister of India were conveyed. We referred to the air of expectation both in India and Russia on his forthcoming visit to India in October this year. During the discussions, issues concerning international terrorism and its adverse effect on the peaceful socio-economic development of all countries were stressed. There was also a coincidence of assessments by India and Russia on the developments in Sierra Leone and Fiji, where principles of international law and the UN Charter were not being observed. Cooperation between India and Russia and the need to further develop these ties in all sectors was reiterated. The characteristic quality of India-Russia relations was aptly reflected in President Putin's observations when he stated that he was the "greatest friend" of India....(*Interruptions*)

In keeping with the significant bilateral strategic relations and military-technical cooperation, a Protocol was signed on June 29th by Defence Secretary and the First Deputy Defence Minister of Russia in the presence of the two Defence Ministers. The Protocol reflects the will of the two countries to further strengthen their cooperation in the defence and strategic fields. In particular, the two sides resolved to contain and eliminate the scourge of terrorism. The Protocol also covers the wide range of military-technical cooperation as well as that in the field of defence research and development.

â€¦....(*Interruptions*) In St. Petersburg, I visited the Central Design Bureau "Rubin", a highly reputed organisation for the design of naval ships and submarines, including those for the Indian Navy. The next day, June 30, I visited the Baltic Shipyard where frigates for the Indian Navy have been built. I also visited the Admiralty Shipyard, where submarines of the Indian Navy are constructed and refitted....(*Interruptions*)

MR. DEPUTY-SPEAKER: Shri Buta Singh, you are a senior Member. After Papers to be Laid is over, I will give you the floor. Then 'Zero Hour' will start. At that time, I will hear you and you can ask the Government about it.

...(*Interruptions*)

SHRI GEORGE FERNANDES: Overall, I believe that my visit to Russia reaffirmed the traditionally close relationship between India and Russia and clearly reflected the political will of the leadership of the two countries to raise their level of defence and strategic ties to a higher level. The discussions with the Russian political leadership brought about a stronger resolve to contain and eliminate the international scourge of terrorism in all its manifestations and

to further intensify cooperation in the defence and strategic fields, including in the areas of joint production and military research and development. There was commonality of views on a large number of international, regional and sub-regional issues and a reiteration of support to India in its bid for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. There was also appreciation of India's role as a force for stability and peace at the regional and global levels and Russia's determination to aid and assist India in taking its rightful place among the comity of nations.

...(Interruptions)
