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Title : The Minister of External Affairs laid a statement on Prime Minister's recent visit to Russia.

THE MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS (SHRI S.M. KRISHNA): Madam Speaker, I beg to lay the Statement regarding the main outcomes of the hon. Prime Minister's recent visit to Russia.

The Prime Minister visited Moscow from December 6 to 8 for the Annual India-Russia Summit; these summits have been held regularly since the bilateral relationship was re-energised with the Declaration on Strategic Partnership in 2000. This was the Prime Minister's second visit to Russia In the year 2009, after the visit in June to Yekaterinburg for the multilateral summits of the BRIC (Brazil Russia India China) grouping and the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation).

The Annual Summit marked the culmination of a period of intense high-level engagement with Russia. Rashtrapatiji was in Russia on a very successful State visit in September, 2009. While the Annual Summit remains the principal vehicle to drive the Strategic Partnership, a very effective and robust institutional mechanism is in place to stimulate various aspects of the partnership. I had the opportunity to carry out a detailed review of bilateral relations, as the co-Chair of the Indo-Russian Inter-Governmental Commission, which held its 15th meeting in Moscow in October. My counterpart, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Sergei Sobyenin, visited India last month to prepare further for the Prime Minister's visit. My Cabinet colleagues for Defence, Commerce & Industry and Petroleum & Natural Gas also visited Russia in recent months for discussions on cooperation in specific sectors under their charge. In November, I also had the opportunity to host in Bangalore the ninth trilateral meeting of the Foreign Ministers of India, Russia and China.

During his visit, Prime Minister had detailed talks with his host President Dmitry Medvedev and also with Prime Minister Vladimir Putin. The talks covered a wide range of bilateral as well as regional and global matters. Both Russian leaders expressed a strong desire to deepen the traditional friendship and expand it in different directions.

Prime Minister and President Medvedev released a Joint Declaration between our countries on "deepening the strategic partnership to meet global challenges". This Declaration reaffirms that the strategic partnership between us is a key foreign policy priority for both countries. It also emphasises that the enduring friendship between India and Russia is mutually beneficial, has stood the test of time, and has emerged as a factor of peace and stability in the region and the world. The Declaration reflects the strong coincidence in the views of the two countries on regional and global issues.

The two sides extensively reviewed economic and trade ties. It was felt that trade had lagged behind the potential at a level of around US\$ 7 billion in 2008. The positive news is that despite the global economic downturn, India-Russian trade is expected to grow at about 8 per cent in the calendar year. A target of US\$ 20 billion has been set up for the year 2015. An agreement was signed between the Russian Bank for Development and Economic Affairs (Vnesheconombank) and the EXIM Bank of India, extending a line of credit of 100 million dollars for financing the export of Indian equipment, technology, goods and services to Russia.

In order to give a fillip to business level ties, the Prime Minister and Prime Minister Putin attended a meeting with CEOs of the largest and most dynamic companies on both sides, and discussed ways of promoting trade. The two sides identified enormous opportunities for investments in India in infrastructure development; in the pharmaceutical sector (including the joint development of new technologies in health) and also in telecommunications.

Substantive discussions were also held with the Russian leadership on cooperation in the field of hydrocarbon energy. ONGC (Videsh) Ltd made investments of more than US\$ 2.7 billion in the Sakhalin I project, which have ensured both energy security and profit. Both sides expressed a desire to build upon this cooperation through joint ventures and joint projects in new areas of promise in the Russian North and East for exploration of oil and gas. A Memorandum of Understanding was signed between ONGC and the Russian company Sistema for possible cooperation and joint projects in the oil sector.

The two sides finalised negotiations on an agreement on cooperation in the peaceful uses of atomic energy, and initialled the agreed text during the visit. The Agreement envisages several areas for cooperation, including research & development, construction of nuclear power plants and supply of nuclear fuels.

Russia's desire to intensify R&D cooperation is reflective of India's achievements in nuclear science and technology. Hon'ble Members are aware that cooperation in the field of atomic energy has been continuing with Russia for more than two decades. We have an existing agreement of 1998 for cooperation in the construction of two 1000 MW nuclear power units. In December, 2008, we concluded an agreement for four additional units at Kudankulam. The Government of India has also recently allocated one more site in Haripur (West Bengal) for nuclear power reactors supplied by Russia.

Cooperation in the area of defence remains an important element of the India-Russia relationship. The defence relationship has moved far beyond a simple buyer-seller equation to also encompass joint design and production of defence equipment. The two sides reviewed the status of the ongoing defence cooperation and projects. Three agreements on defence cooperation were signed during the visit. One of these is an agreement extending bilateral military and technical cooperation for ten years beyond 2010. The agreement would facilitate access for our defence forces and defence industry to latest Russian equipment and technology, including for indigenous production. It provides the framework for acquisition, licensed production, upgrades and modernisation of defence equipment as well as the development of new and advanced weapon systems. Another agreement signed relates to after-sales support for the Russian arms and military equipment supplied to India. This agreement would facilitate timely and adequate supply of spares and services for integrated maintenance of Russian-made military equipment supplied to India.

The two sides also discussed the long-standing Indo-Russian programme for cooperation in the space sector. It was decided to step up cooperation based on existing agreements in the flagship GLONASS (Global Navigational Satellite System) programme. Both sides expressed satisfaction at the pace of progress in other joint projects like Chandrayan 2 and YOUTHSAT.

Cultural exchanges and people to people contacts are a key element in the deepening of Indo-Russian relationship. An agreement was signed during the visit, on the programme of cultural exchanges between the two countries for the period 2010 to 2012. The 'Year of India' in Russia has just concluded with more than 150 different events in 2009, following up on the 'Year of Russia' in India in 2008. The scheduled closing ceremony was cancelled as a mark of respect for the victims of the fire tragedy in the Russian city of Perm. Prime Minister expressed the condolences of the people of India for this tragic event.

India and Russia have similar views on regional and international matters. On the situation in Pakistan, both sides expressed concern at the rise in the level of terrorist violence. On Afghanistan, the two sides emphasized the importance of continued engagement of the global community and agreed that drawing facile distinctions between 'good' and 'bad' Taliban could be counterproductive.

On the eve of his departure for Moscow, Prime Minister said that he proposed to discuss with the Russian leadership steps to raise our Strategic Partnership to the next level. It is clear from the outcomes of the visit that the relationship has indeed risen to a higher plane. The momentum imparted to the Strategic Partnership by PM's visit, will be sustained next year by the visit of Prime Minister Putin in March and President Medvedev later in the year for the next Annual Summit.

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