

Foreign Secretary's Speech at the Russian Diplomatic Academy, Moscow (February 17, 2021)

February 18, 2021

H.E. Mr. Alexander Yakovenko, Rector of the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs,

Other Ambassadors present here, Mr. Venkatesh Varma, Ambassador of India to the Russian Federation

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen!

It is my pleasure to interact with the young diplomat-trainees of the renowned Russian Diplomatic Academy in Moscow, which is as I have just learned 150 years old, - a distinguished world-class institution which has trained generations of Russian diplomats for more than 80 years. It has produced world-class diplomats than anywhere in the world. I have interacted with diplomats here, I have been fortunate to meet and be friends with a very large number of diplomats, I know the calibre of the diplomats that your country produces. I am also aware of the fact that this program is being organised when there are so many restrictions. My special thanks to the Rector Ambassador Yakovenko for hosting this event, despite the difficulties associated with the Covid-19 pandemic situation.

I take this opportunity to convey my felicitations to the diplomatic fraternity of Russia on the 'Diplomats Day' that was recently celebrated on 10 February. The professional expertise and language skills of Russian diplomats are well known. We have a road in New Delhi named after the legendary Russian Ambassador to India, Late Alexander Kadakin, who was fluent in Hindi and other Indian languages. You talked about the many languages that Indian diplomats speak and Mr. Kadakin was one of them. I was very happy to see that a number of Russian diplomats at the Foreign Ministry were also fluent in hindi. I am very happy to see that they have given so much importance to our language. We also celebrate diplomats day on 9 October. My address today in this august house is also provided for in the existing

Agreement on Mutual Cooperation between the Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Service (New Delhi) and the Russian Diplomatic Academy.

Given the significance we attach to the India-Russia Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership, it is only fitting that Moscow is the destination for my first visit abroad in 2021. I have not travelled much during Covid times, restricted only to essential ones, to only neighbouring countries. This visit is very important from our point of view. It is very critical that we work on maintaining our relations, notwithstanding the impediments of Covid 19. In this context, I recall that the only outgoing Ministerial level visits from India during March-September 2020, while the Covid-19 pandemic raged and disrupted everyday life, were those of our External Affairs Minister and Defence Minister had travelled twice to Moscow last year on two occasions.

Earlier today, I had excellent meetings at the Russian Foreign Ministry, with Mr. Morgulov, where we reviewed our bilateral relations, including forthcoming high level exchanges. We also discussed India-Russia cooperation in multilateral forums and exchanged views on issues of regional and international importance. I just called on Mr. Lavrov and it was an opportunity to listen to him. He spoke on Russia India relations, that it is very close, very special, very privileged, and strategic, so these were his words and for me this was very instructive to listen to a personality like him. I did tell him that I was in the United Nations, I was Minister Council in our delegation when he was in the PR, and it was a very high point in our relationship between delegations in the UN, in cooperation within UNSC, where India currently is non-permanent member for a two year term.

The year 2020 marked the 20th anniversary of the establishment of the India-Russia Strategic Partnership and the 10th anniversary of its elevation to a Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership. As described by Foreign Minister H.E. Mr. Sergey Lavrov recently, the India-Russia relationship is truly "very close, very strategic, very special, and very privileged". It is almost unique in the annals of diplomacy. Notwithstanding radical changes in the global geo-political landscape, our long-standing and time-tested partnership has grown from strength to strength.

Since 2014, President Putin and Prime Minister Modi have met each other 19 times. Last year, despite the Covid-19 pandemic situation. This itself shows that importance that we attach to our relationship. The long-term convergence of interests, sensitivity to each other's core concerns, mutual respect and trust shared by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Vladimir Putin and growing people-to-people contacts are key drivers of our bilateral partnership. Defence, energy, space and civil nuclear cooperation have been its traditional pillars. Our political ties have been bolstered by regular annual summits at the level of our leaders. Prime Minister Modi and President Putin had 4 telephone conversations.

Our two countries have exhibited tremendous resilience following the Covid-19 outbreak. The pandemic has taught us that such challenges can be addressed only through common efforts and of course India and Russia are already cooperating in this direction on not only technical issues but also collaboration is also in the area of vaccines. The Sputnik V is currently undergoing tests in India. It has three testing levels and I think the authorisation is at the earliest possible stage after which we will jointly manufacture this vaccine and distribute it in different parts of the world. Russia has very successfully introduced the vaccination program. India has to ramp up our level of vaccination but we have also made vaccine available to different countries, to Latin America, to Gulf countries, Caribbean this is the commitment of India's PM that vaccines are accessible and affordable to whole humanity.

Covid 19 has been a major impediment in economic growth. economies all over the world have been very adversely affected by the crisis by the pandemic. But I am happy to say that we are looking at very significant recovery. According to the IMF the Indian economy will grow over 10 per cent this year. We expect India to regain the status of the fastest growing large economy in the world. As I have already mentioned regarding vaccine, India is home to a robust vaccine industry, with 60% of the world's vaccines made in India.

In terms of security and defence ties, we have strong military and military-technical cooperation. We see increasing interest of Russia to get into joint production, joint R&D, joint manufacturing, with Indian companies and a lot of this is evident in the defence sector as well as in the civilian sector. I will speak more on that.

If we speak of military cooperation, even though we had Covid restrictions we had on 24 June 2020, a 75-member Indian contingent took part in the military parade in Moscow to mark the very important 75th anniversary of victory in World War-II.

In terms of joint manufacturing, one of main areas is technical collaboration, we have seen Russian steel in India, production of high quality lamps for use of municipalities and we see a lot of interest in railways, in waterways sector. the two countries are cooperating in manufacture of the "BrahMos" missile system and licensed production in India of SU-30 aircraft and T-90 tanks are standout examples of our cooperation with Russia. In our January 26 parade this year, a lot of exhibits were Russian made. that is the measure of cooperation that we have in defence sector. We also plan to begin the manufacturing of AK-203 rifles, through an India-Russia joint venture in India, involving full technology transfer.

India-Russia trade, amounting to US\$ 10.11 bn in FY 2019-2020, is far below the potential. Last year there was a slump but we are finding ways of reviving it. Both countries have set the bilateral trade target at US\$ 30 billion by 2025. One of the steps taken to enhance trade is the commencement of negotiations in August 2020 for the India-EAEU Free Trade Agreement. The operationalisation of a "Green Corridor" and a Bilateral Investment Protection Arrangement are likely to encourage bilateral trade and investment, respectively. Use of national currencies in bilateral trade settlements will also reduce cost and time as well as risk of held-up payments.

The oil and gas sector has been a flagship sector of our commercial cooperation. We have been looking out for ways how we can diversify our economic exchanges going beyond the traditional areas and this is one of the important sectors is development of the Russian Far East. Our PM had visited Far East in 2019 and had announced 1 billion dollar credit line and it is one of the main areas of our cooperation. India is looking at investment in new areas such as coking coal, timber, LNG, there is a huge potential there. We have already started a shipping line between Vladivostok and Chennai, is the Eastern sea board of India. We are looking at a significant trade route which was never there, a new route between our two countries. Earlier today, when I called on Lavrov, we spoke on how we can expand this. We of course have a Consulate in Vladivostok but since it is an important area of our friendship we will have to see how to make it larger and more effective that can take care of interests of both countries.

Indian companies have significantly invested in Russia. India's investment in the Sakhalin-1 project was one of our earliest public sector investments abroad. Till date, Indian oil and gas companies have

acquired stakes in 5 Russian companies/projects at a value of about US\$ 15 bn. Rosneft was the leader of a consortium of investors that, in 2017, acquired a 98% stake in India's Essar Oil at a cost of US\$ 12.9 bn. We are seriously into process of privatizing many of our oil majors and some are having very serious discussions with Russian companies to see if some of these stakes can be acquired by Russian companies. We are looking at long-term arrangements for the supply of coking coal from Russia for Indian steel plants. An "India Energy Centre" will be opened in Moscow next month.

It is important to diversify and expand the India-Russia trade basket. There is interest in taking forward cooperation in railways, transport and logistics, civilian ship building and repair, inland waterways, pharmaceuticals and medical devices, minerals, steel, chemicals, including petrochemicals, ceramics, agro-industry, timber, high technology and scientific research. Our companies are actively exploring investments in Russia in energy, minerals, infrastructure and healthcare. As diplomats we should not be looking at what is traditional but try to do which is new, which adds momentum to the relationship.

The Covid-19 pandemic revealed several choke-points and vulnerabilities in global supply chains. In the case of our two countries, this has allowed us to analyse where India and Russia can stand together to overcome over-dependence and over-reliance on certain economies. While Covid-19 presented its physical connectivity challenges, we organised more than 40 sector-specific business engagements in the video-conference format in 2020. We should continue our efforts to overcome traditional barriers to trade while also exploring new areas of economic engagement.

We have prioritised the International North-South Transport Corridor and the Eastern Maritime (Chennai-Vladivostok) Corridor as alternatives to the limited and expensive traditional routes. These will help overcome the logistical challenges posed by geographical distance. We are also exploring trilateral contact with partner countries like Japan and the first Track-II Dialogue on "India-Japan-Russia Cooperation in the Russian Far East" was held in January 2021 in the virtual format. It has identified potential areas for trilateral cooperation.

As an observer country in the Arctic Council, India is also interested in greater engagement with Russia in the Arctic region. We are active participants in the "International Arctic Forum" being organised by Russia and look forward to Russia's chairmanship of the Arctic Council in 2021.

From earth, I now turn to space – a frontier in the exploration of which India and Russia have worked closely and meaningfully for over five decades. The launch of India's first two satellites, "Aryabhata" and "Bhaskara-1", from Russian soil remains a legacy of our friendship. Sqn. Ldr. Rakesh Sharma was the first Indian to travel to outer space on board the Soyuz T-11 spacecraft in 1984. Currently, 4 astronauts and 2 flight surgeons from India are undergoing training in Russia as part of "Gaganyaan", India's human space flight programme expected to be launched in 2022.

Cooperation on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy is an important aspect of our strategic partnership, and the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project (KKNPP) is a cherished joint project. We have agreed to commission 12 Russian-designed nuclear reactors in India in the coming years.

No geopolitical discussion today can be complete without a mention of "Indo-Pacific". Indo-Pacific signifies the seamless interface of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. For India, it is the vast maritime space stretching from the western coast of North America to the eastern shores of Africa. We see this as a free, open,

inclusive region, which embraces us all in a common pursuit of progress and prosperity. We would like to work closely with Russia under ASEAN and East Asia Summit, of which both are members. Over 50% of global trade traverses this maritime domain. It is also home to over 60% of the world's population and the global GDP and hence the security, stability, peace and prosperity of Indo-Pacific region is vital for the world.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his speech at the Shangri La Dialogue in Singapore in 2018 described our Indo-Pacific vision in one word "SAGAR" (Ocean)- an acronym for "Security and Growth for All in the Region". In 2019, at the East Asia Summit in Bangkok, Prime Minister Modi took the idea of SAGAR further and announced the "Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative" to support the building of a rules-based regional architecture resting on 7 pillars: maritime security; maritime ecology; maritime resources; capacity building/resource sharing; disaster risk reduction and management; science, technology and academic cooperation; and trade connectivity/ transport.

I have, so far, outlined India-Russia cooperation in three strategic geographies – Eurasia, Indo-Pacific and the Russian Far East, and the Arctic. These are key emerging theatres of geopolitics that all of you, as young diplomats, will be engaged with through your careers. Russia is crucial to all three regions, and India and Russia will agree much more than they will disagree on the strategic direction, the inherent and necessary multi-polarity, and the security and prosperity of these regions. In fact, a multipolar world and multipolar Asia are not possible without India and Russia.

An issue in our neighbourhood that merits our close attention and coordination is the situation in Afghanistan, which is currently going through a critical phase. Our two countries closely cooperate on Afghanistan both bilaterally and also within the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group and other formats.

India and Afghanistan share millenia old relations. India has a multi-sectoral development policy under which we support the building of dams, transmission lines, roads, bridges, schools, hospitals, etc in Afghanistan. India has so far, committed more than US\$ 3 billion in Afghanistan and our developmental projects are spread across all the 34 provinces of Afghanistan.

India welcomes and supports all efforts aimed at an early and inclusive Afghan-led, Afghan-controlled and Afghan-owned reconciliation in Afghanistan, one that preserves the gains of the last 2 decades and ensures the welfare and well-being of Afghanistan and of other countries in the region. The rise in violence and targeted killings of Afghan activists is not conducive to the ongoing peace process. We have advocated immediate and comprehensive ceasefire since talks and violence cannot go hand in hand.

India and Russia have a long history of working together in international and multilateral organisations, including the UN, SCO, BRICS and G20. We share a deep convergence of interests in multilateral organisations, marked by respect for each other's sensitivities. As India takes on the chairmanship of BRICS and RIC this year, we look forward to fruitful cooperation with Russia.

Our two countries regard the establishment of the multi-polar global order in international relations as a reflection of natural and inevitable process of evolution of inter-state relations in the 21st century. We believe that there is a need to reform the United Nations and in particular, the United Nations Security Council to make it more representative of contemporary realities and to respond more effectively to emerging challenges and threats. Covid 19 is right time to see at the emerging challenges now. we dont

have traditional challenges, we have now new challenges, epidemics, natural disasters. We are thankful for Russia's strong support to India's candidature for a permanent seat in a reformed United Nations Security Council. This year, India joined the UN Security Council as a non-permanent member for the 8th time. We would like to thank Russia for its support to India's election. We have been working in the UNSC in close coordination with Russia.

India and Russia maintain intensive counter-terrorism cooperation in bilateral and multilateral formats. We strongly believe that there can be no justification whatsoever for any acts of terrorism, whether based upon ideological, religious, political, racial, ethnic or any other reasons. We are convinced that the unprecedented spread of this threat requires decisive collective response on part of the entire global community, without double standards and selectivity, in accordance with international law and the UN Charter. All countries should work together to disrupt cross-border terrorist networks and their financing. We call for early conclusion of negotiations on the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism to strengthen the global counter-terrorism normative and legal framework to combat this scourge of terrorism.

India recognises that a holistic approach is required to tackle climate change. Rapid expansion of renewable energy resources is at the centre of our climate strategy. Our PM attaches great importance to climate change. We expect to install 220 GW of renewable energy capacity by 2022, which will exceed our target of 175 GW. The Ujala scheme – a national drive to use LED lamps – is reducing CO2 emissions by 38.5 million tonnes every year. Our Smart Cities Mission is working to help 100 cities in India to become more sustainable and adaptable to the challenges of climate change. We are also building next-generation infrastructure such as mass transit systems, green highways and waterways.

At the global stage, we have co-founded mechanisms like the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) that are working on creating global low-carbon pathways. The ISA provides a dedicated platform for cooperation among solar-resource-rich countries to help achieve the common goal of increasing the use and quality of solar energy. The CDRI is a partnership of national governments, UN agencies and programmes, multilateral development banks and financing mechanisms, the private sector, and knowledge institutions that aims to promote the resilience of new and existing infrastructure systems to climate and disaster risks. India would be happy to welcome Russia into the ISA and CDRI families.

Perhaps the most important bonds of friendship, however, are the people-to-people contacts between our two countries. The strong political will to have closer relations is equally matched by a strong public sentiment in both countries. More than 15,000 Indian students are enrolled in various technical institutions in Russia, particularly for the study of medicine. Different aspects of Indian culture, including yoga, Ayurveda, Indian cuisine, dance forms, cinema etc., continue to remain popular in Russia. With growing affinity between the two countries, there is a renewed interest in Indology in Russia. A new India and a new Russia are rediscovering each other through initiatives such as the Ganga-Volga Dialogue of Civilization held in New Delhi in January 2020. There was active support from our Russian friends for events organised as part of the celebration of Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary, including President Putin's contribution to a special volume of tributes by world leaders.

The philosophical traditions of India and Russia have impacted each other for centuries. The exchange of letters between Mahatma Gandhi and Leo Tolstoy on non-violence, truth and the human spirit continue

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to inspire us even today and are a subject of academic discourse in both countries. In line with our emphasis on greater engagement with Russia, we intend to have an agreement on the exchange of 5 diplomats per year between India and Russia for short-term training courses. We also intend to step up our cooperation through Buddhist centres of learning and philosophy.

My very best wishes to our young friends and colleagues present here today. You are entering the world of diplomacy at a critical stage in international politics. This is a time of great dynamism as well as great uncertainty, with a trend towards multi-polarity and global re-balancing. Russia will definitely play its traditional and destined role as a major power and strategic actor. You are embarking on a long and exciting journey; one which India will walk in step with you.

I would once again thank Rector Yakovenko for his invitation to address the Diplomatic Academy. I would like to wish success to the alumni of this great and prestigious institution in further strengthening the India-Russia Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership.