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Media Statement by the President en route from Moscow to Delhi on conclusion of his visit to the Russian Federation (May 11, 2015)

May 11, 2015

Distinguished Media Representatives

Ladies and Gentlemen

I have just concluded a successful visit to Russia from 7-11 May, 2015. I was accompanied on this visit by Shri Manoj Sinha, Minister of State for Railways and senior officials including Secretary to the President, Foreign Secretary, Secretary (Higher Education), Ministry of Human Resources Development and Secretary, Department of Science and Technology. A delegation from leading academic institutions in India, including Vice-Chancellor of Delhi University, Directors of IITs in Delhi, Mumbai and Chennai, Indian Statistical Institute, the Institution of Engineers and the National Institute of Biological Sciences also accompanied me on this visit.

My visit was at the invitation of the Russian President H.E. Mr Vladimir Putin, who had invited me, as well as several other world leaders, to the 70th Anniversary of Victory Day which commemorates the triumph of the Russian people in World War II, or the Great Patriotic War as it is known in Russia.

The role played by Russia in defeating the forces of Nazism and Fascism, in particular the heroic contribution of the Russian people, is widely recognized. Though we were yet to win our independence, India played an significant role in World War II. Thousands of our countrymen had paid the ultimate sacrifice while numerous others were wounded or maimed. For India, this was thus an occasion both to commemorate the bravery and indomitable spirit of the Russian people and equally to remember the sacrifices of Indian soldiers in the most defining struggle of the 20th Century. For the first time ever, an Indian Army contingent from the Grenadiers took part in the impressive military parade held on the 9th of May in the Red Square in Moscow.

By joining the commemorative events related to the War and the terrible human suffering that it caused, India has reiterated its solemn commitment to peace and our resolve to avoid war and conflict. We also re-affirmed our abiding solidarity with Russia on this important and historic occasion which holds deep significance for the Russian people.

My visit also reflects the importance that India places on its strategic partnership with Russia. India-Russia relations have stood the test of time. I held a substantive bilateral meeting with the Russian President on 9th May. We reviewed progress on bilateral issues as well as steps to further enhance

and deepen our relations. We also discussed the rapidly evolving global political, security and economic scenario. President Putin reiterated his strong commitment to further enhance ties with India, which are marked by an exceptional level of mutual trust. We are happy at the progress achieved in terms of implementation of the measures agreed upon at the last Annual Summit in Delhi in December 2014. There is forward movement on defence, nuclear energy and space cooperation. We have made tangible progress in our economic and commercial cooperation in sectors ranging from hydrocarbons, fertilizers, diamonds and agricultural products. We are also working towards early finalization of the Joint Study Group on the CECA between India and the Eurasian Economic Union. Both countries are also committed to operationalisation of the International North South Transport Corridor, which would connect India with Russia through Iran and the Caspian Sea.

I was pleased to receive an honorary doctorate from the prestigious Diplomatic Academy in Moscow. The Academy has established itself as an important centre of learning, including by training Russian diplomats for over eight decades. Their decision to confer a doctorate on me was a manifestation of the deep empathy of the Russian people for India, which is reciprocated fully by the people of India. In my address to the Academy, I conveyed our assessment of the India-Russia relationship as one of deep friendship and mutual confidence that would not be affected by transient political trends. Russia has been a pillar of strength at difficult moments in India's history. India will always reciprocate this support. Russia is and will remain our most important defence partner and a key partner for our energy security, both on nuclear energy and hydrocarbons.

Education was a major focus area of my visit. As you are aware, Russia has proven strengths in higher education, especially in the sciences and technical fields. India is seeking to further develop this important sector to serve our national development goals. I addressed a meeting of senior educationists and heads of universities from India and Russia at the prestigious Moscow State University, an institution which has the distinction of having produced 17 Nobel and Fields Medal winners. We established a Network of Indian and Russian Universities to institutionalize cooperation between universities and institutions of higher learning in the two countries. Seven institution level MOUs were also signed. The Agreement signed between our Department of Science and Technology and the Russian Science Foundation would further encourage young researchers in both countries to work on innovative research projects by providing funding on a competitive basis.

I inaugurated 'Namaste Russia', the biennial cultural Festival of India in Russia, on 10th May. Last year we had hosted the Festival of Russian Culture in India. Cultural interactions have always been a significant aspect of the India-Russia relationship. The annual Festivals in each other's country have emerged as a leading platform for people of both countries to experience cultural representations of our two ancient civilizations. I also addressed members of the Indian community in Russia, who are a living link between our two countries, and exhorted them to continue their efforts to strengthen and diversify India-Russia relations. It was a matter of satisfaction for me to pay my tribute at the statue of Rabindranath Tagore at the Friendship Park in Moscow on the occasion of his birth anniversary on 9th May accompanied by the strains of Rabindra Sangeet sung by Russian students.

One of the highlights of the visit for me was the opportunity to interact with Russia's leading Indologists. Their work has benefitted the understanding of India both in Russia and the wider world and deeply enriched our bilateral interaction at the civilizational level. I lauded their successful efforts, despite the constraints, to achieve insights into classical and contemporary India. I reiterated India's commitment to further encourage Indological studies in Russia. ICCR will organize a regional

conference on Sanskrit and Indology in Russia. Support for the Indian Chair in the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Social Sciences from ICCR will also be continued for another two years.

The visit allowed me an opportunity to interact with other world leaders, including President of the Czech Republic, Vietnam, Mongolia, Palestine, China, Kazakhstan and the UN Secretary General. I held a bilateral meeting with the President of Serbia H.E. Mr Tomislav Nikolic. We agreed that the time had come to move our bilateral relations to a higher level, based on the legacy of political understanding from the days of Nehru and Tito and the tremendous degree of mutual goodwill between our people. I have extended an invitation to President Nikolic to visit India to carry forward our discussions.

I wish to thank President Putin and the government of Russia for the warm hospitality extended to me and my delegation during the visit. I was impressed by the scale and grandeur of the Victory Day celebrations and happy to witness the outpouring of solidarity and national unity of the Russian people on this solemn occasion.

During my long decades in public life, I have interacted with the leadership of Russia in many capacities on key issues such as the Rupee-Rouble Agreement to defence and civil nuclear cooperation. I have known President Putin for over 15 years, and have had the pleasure of receiving him twice in Delhi since I assumed office. I am glad to have had this opportunity to renew my association with President Putin as well as other leaders during this visit, which was my first to Russia as the President of India, and to convey the good wishes of the people of India to him personally and to the friendly people of Russia.

Overall, this was a most memorable visit, which has helped deepen our strong and mutually beneficial relationship with Russia. India remains deeply committed to enhancing our special and privileged strategic partnership with Russia in the days ahead.



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