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RM'S address at 'VII Moscow Conference on International Security'

Raksha Mantri Smt Nirmala Sitharaman, who is on three-day visit to Russia to attend 'VII Moscow Conference on International Security' from 03 to 05 April 2018, addressed the II Plenary Session of the Conference on the theme titled 'Global Security in a Polycentric World' covering aspects related to current global defence, security and strategic scenario on April 4 in the Russian capital.

Raksha Mantri stated that for India, cooperation with Russia is vital in ensuring stability and security in our shared Eurasian neighbourhood, especially in addressing the menace of terrorism. She also spoke about terrorism in the region, persistence of instability in Afghanistan, rising threats to security in the wider Asia Pacific region, non-traditional security challenges such as climate change, food and energy insecurity, financial instability and the need for cooperation amongst the countries to address these issues.

Following is the full text of the address delivered by Raksha Mantri Smt Nirmala Sitharaman at the Seventh Moscow Conference on International Security (MCIS) on "Global Security in a Polycentric World"

"Mr. Moderator,

Your Excellencies Defence Ministers and other dignitaries,

Distinguished delegates.

It is a pleasure to address the Seventh Moscow Conference on International Security. I thank Defence Minister General Sergei Shoigu for the invitation.

At the outset, I compliment the organisers of the conference for the excellent arrangements made. The programme of the Conference covers several areas of contemporary relevance.

The theme of this session addresses a key aspect of the current global defence, security and strategic scenario. It is appropriate that we are discussing this subject in Moscow. Russia has re-established its role and influence in global strategic and defence matters.

Russia has also established new partnerships, even as it continues to build ties with older friends and allies. At the same time, relations between Russia and some countries are now beset with serious differences. This has created a complex dynamic. Either way, the solution to the key challenges we face today require Russia's active involvement.

I welcome the statements by Defence Minister Shoigu and other Russian leaders in the opening session stressing Russia's intent to explore all possible avenues for dialogue and a constructive approach to resolving differences.

For us in India, Russia has been and remains a long-standing friend and partner with whom we share a Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership. India and Russia have just concluded a year of commemorative events to mark the 70th Anniversary of diplomatic relations. Over these seven decades, India and Russia have built a relationship of mutual trust and confidence in a range of areas, especially defence.

We therefore welcome Russia's growing global engagement and remain keen to continue consultations and coordination with Russia on international and regional issues. For India, cooperation with Russia is vital in ensuring stability and security in our shared Eurasian neighbourhood, especially in addressing the menace of terrorism. We also seek a cooperative relationship with Russia for broad based and mutually beneficial economic growth and development in the region.

The problems confronting the international community today cannot be solved by any one country or group of countries.

The issues facing us today require an inclusive approach within broader and consultative frameworks. It is in this context that I offer my comments today on the theme of this session, namely, 'global security in a polycentric world'.

Distinguished delegates,

A key facet of the prevailing international situation is the continued and rising unpredictability in relations between major powers. This is both unprecedented and a matter of concern.

The current deterioration of ties between Russia and the West is a reflection of this trend. We also see the manifestation of this instability at the manner in which major powers as well as other influential actors have sought to address a range of regional issues and conflicts.

At a fundamental level, such divergent approaches indicate wider diffusion of power in the international system, in particular the rise of Asia. This is a positive development in which India also seeks to play its due role.

However, it is essential that we manage such profound changes keeping in mind the need to balance change and stability.

Specific and concrete efforts must be made to work towards enhancing mutual confidence. We need to avoid perspectives that seek to enhance narrow gains while undermining the larger good.

In the economic sphere, we need to guard against protectionism. Barriers to movement of skilled labour and the closing of borders are unlikely to address the issues involved.

We also need to ensure that benefits of growth continue to flow to less affluent regions. We cannot achieve stability by devising new ways to perpetuate affluence and keeping parts of the world in relative deprivation.

The role of Asia will be central in this process. For the near future, Asian economies will remain the drivers of global growth.

However, violent conflict in parts of West Asia, persistence of instability in Afghanistan and rising threats to security in the wider Asia Pacific region are threatening the gains made over the past few decades of growth and development in Asia.

In particular, the rise of extremist, fundamentalist and terrorist groups needs to be addressed urgently. Violent activities of these groups are also opening up newer sectarian fissures which pose longer term challenges to stability within and across borders.

The situation in Afghanistan remains of concern. There is no choice between a political process and dealing effectively with the forces of terrorism and violence in that country. A policy of zero tolerance towards terrorism is essential if we are to sustain the gains made. We must also, in the face of newer provocations and terrorism, persist with efforts to consolidate capacities of the Afghan government and security forces.

India is committed to supporting the emergence of a secure, stable and peaceful Afghanistan. We believe this is achievable with the continued commitment of the international community. India will continue its assistance and support to the people of Afghanistan. Even as we do as much as we can, we are keen to work with all partners that share similar objectives.

The scourge of terrorism remains a primary international security challenge. Terrorists are reinventing themselves in newer and more dangerous manifestations. The radicalisation of young minds using new technologies and social media networks, the trend of lone-wolf attacks and the continuing patronage of some irresponsible states to terrorist groups, need to be addressed in a comprehensive manner.

Efforts to establish a territorial base in West Asia by terrorists have been dealt a body blow. This was possible because broad objectives of all players, in particular the major international actors, were in alignment. This has been a silver lining in an otherwise challenging global scenario. It highlights the possibilities for greater cooperation in addressing the shared challenges we all face.

Further efforts are necessary to ensure that there is no re-emergence of terrorism in the region and prevent its spill-over onto the wider region by returning terrorists. Better information sharing and intelligence exchanges are essential to address the threat. Cooperation in this effort can provide the basis for collaborative steps on other issues of mutual interest.

We should also resolutely resist attempts by some states to retain influence through terrorist proxies. We in India are well aware of such nefarious designs. Efforts by states to continue training, funding or ideological support to terrorist groups for their narrow objectives should be repulsed effectively, using forceful methods where necessary.

The resurgence of territorial disputes in the maritime domain is another concern. Maritime territorial disputes are extremely complex. We need to ensure that such issues are managed effectively and solely through peaceful means.

The past few decades of growth have transformed the Indo-Pacific region into the most dynamic engine of the global economy. We need to ensure that the prosperity of the Asia-Pacific region is not put at risk through unilateral actions that can undermine regional peace and stability.

The rights of freedom of navigation and over-flight as well as unimpeded commerce should be ensured. For India, this is vital to sustain its own economic engagement with the Indo-Pacific region for mutual benefit.

The efforts to reduce tensions in the Korean peninsula need to be taken forward. India has long pointed to linkages between proliferation in that region to the detriment of our own security environment.

There is also scope for cooperative approaches to address the growing salience of non-traditional security challenges such as climate change, food and energy insecurity, financial instability and the disruptive effects of technology. Effective management of such threats, including cyber-security, as well as meeting humanitarian assistance and disaster relief requirements are areas where established and rising powers can work together for the broader benefit of all.

Overall, the current international scenario has laid bare the challenges posed by great power competition. At the same time, it has illustrated the potential benefits of cooperative approaches.

In a multi-polar world we will therefore need to work to broaden areas of convergence and minimise differences. There is no scope for expansionism, unilateral approaches or for beggar thy neighbour policies.

We must also continue to seek inclusive frameworks for dialogue and cooperation that involve all responsible stakeholders, whether bilaterally, regionally or multilaterally.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

India is playing its due role in maintenance of regional and international peace and stability. India's continued economic rise over the past few decades has helped lift millions of its citizens out of poverty. The government is keen to enhance transparency, inclusion and growth, and to leverage innovation and the potentialities of the digital economy in this effort.

In our region, we have worked to share the benefits of our own growth by seeking to elevate the economic trajectory of our neighbours.

With our renewed emphasis on regional connectivity, continued focus on our Act East policy and strong efforts to expand engagement with countries in our extended neighbourhood ranging from West Asia, the Gulf and Africa as well as the wider Indian Ocean Region, India is today creating a dynamic network of international partnerships.

Economic and diplomatic engagement with the Eurasian region is a key priority for India. Building on our strong ties with Russia, we are strengthening our linkages with Central Asian countries. We continue to manage the complexities in the India-China relationship even as we seek to make progress within the framework of a broader developmental partnership. India is also working with ASEAN countries and other partners to build a regional architecture that is open, balanced and ensures sovereignty and security of all countries.

Defence and security cooperation is an increasingly important aspect of India's regional and global engagement. We are developing a range of military to military ties, sharing best practices, building capacities through training as well as cooperating on defence industry and R&D for mutual benefit.

Our efforts are making considerable progress. I am confident that India's partnerships will contribute to a more stable and peaceful environment, spur greater economic development and establish India's role as a factor for growth and stability in our region and beyond.

India will continue to work closely with Russia and other international partners on all issues of mutual interest, both bilaterally as well as in broader frameworks such as BRICS, SCO and other forums. Effective cooperation between India and Russia will be a key factor in enhancing regional and global security in future.

Thank you!"

SRR/NAo/DK/Rajib