

Russian President Vladimir Putin visits India

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Addressing a joint press conference with Putin, Manmohan Singh also stressed on the time-tested ties with Russia and said that despite a sea change in the global scene, Moscow remained "indispensable to the core of India's foreign policy".

Expanding civil nuclear cooperation, Russia's growing importance for energy security of India and bringing trade and investment in tune with political and strategic ties were the key themes of Putin's visit.

A Memorandum of Intent (MOI) for the construction of additional nuclear power plant units at Kudankulam in Tamil Nadu and Russian designed nuclear plants at new sites was signed at the stately Hyderabad House in New Delhi by Anil Kakodkar, Secretary in the Department of Atomic Energy, and Sergey Kirienko, Director of the Federal Atomic Energy Agency of Russia.

A Joint Statement on the promotion of peaceful uses of nuclear energy was also adopted.

The statement espouses nuclear energy as a safe and clean source of energy and reaffirms the "willingness of India and Russia to expand bilateral civilian nuclear energy cooperation by broadbasing cooperation covering both power (fission and fusion energy) and non-power applications" of nuclear energy.

Russia has attached no extra conditions for civil nuclear cooperation except saying that India would undertake to keep nuclear facilities and fuel supplied by Russia under the safeguards of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) during the entire period of their use as per the safeguards agreement New Delhi negotiates with IAEA.

Russia also announced that it would work with the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) to modify its guidelines for opening the doors of global civil nuclear commerce with India.

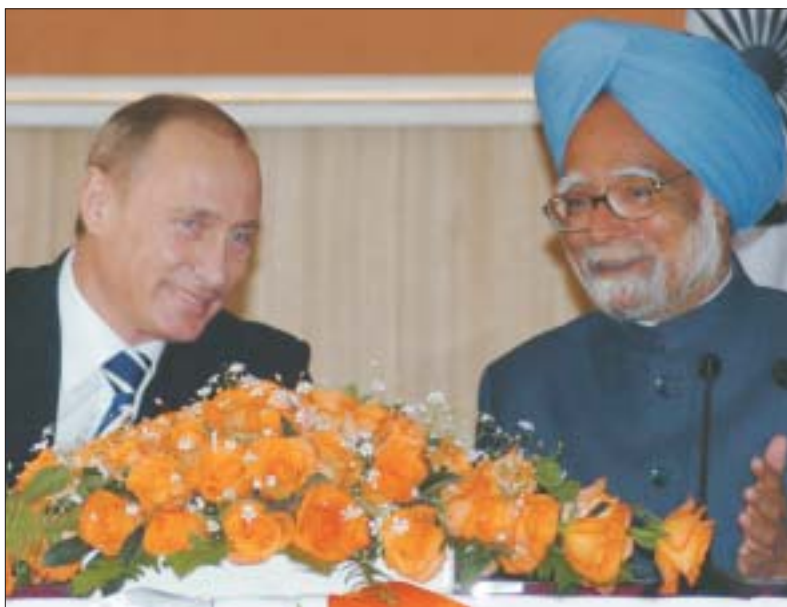
A bilateral agreement on cooperation in the construction of four additional power units at Kudankulam, where Russia is currently helping to build two units, will be signed later.

Two agreements were signed on Indian access to the Russian Global Navigation Satellite System GLONASS for peaceful purposes, as well as access to its radio frequency system.

Another agreement was reached between the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Russian Federal Space Agency on jointly launching Yuthsat satellites.

Cultural synergy and cooperation found expression in two pacts on a programme of cultural exchanges and on holding the 'Year of Russia in India' in 2008 and the 'Year of India in Russia' in 2009.

Military ties have also moved from the buyer-seller relationship,



Prime Minister Manmohan Singh and President of the Russian Federation Vladimir V. Putin at a joint press interaction in New Delhi on January 25.

strong" candidate for an expanded U.N. Security Council.

The two sides also agreed to enhance direct dialogue between their oil and gas companies. The Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) and Russian oil major Rosneft have signed a memorandum of understanding on setting up two joint study groups to expand cooperation in this sector.

ONGC Videsh, the overseas arm of the Indian oil major, has invested over \$2 billion in the Sakhalin-I oil block in Russia. Moscow is keen on Indian investment in the Sakhalin III oil and gas project and the development of the Vankor oil and gas fields in Russia's Far East.

India and Russia also appeared close to an agreement on jointly developing a fifth generation-stealth fighter, even as they declared their intent to co-produce a multi-role transport aircraft (MTA) that has both military and civilian applications.

"Sometime ago, India showed interest in the project. India has informed us that the final choice has been made," Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov said through an interpreter at a joint press conference with his Indian counterpart A.K. Antony after the sixth meeting of the Inter-Governmental Commission on Military Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-MTC).

"As of now, we can open our contractual works with respect to India's accession to the project," Ivanov added.

One interpretation of Ivanov's statement is that India has expressed its interest in the project, first mooted three years ago, but is studying the costs involved. This is all the more so in the light of India's own efforts to design a fifth-generation jet that would be one step ahead of the Sukhoi SU-30MKI, currently the most advanced fighter in the Indian Air Force's (IAF) inventory.

The two countries signed an inter-governmental agreement and a general contract for the licensed production in India of the RD-33 engines that power the frontline MiG-29 fighters of the IAF. They discussed Russia's offer of the advanced MiG-35 jet to meet the IAF's requirement of multi-role combat aircraft. The RD-33 engine also powers the MiG-35. ■

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