

Russia is valued and time-tested partner: Jaishankar

MOSCOW, Dec 27 (ANI)

EXTERNAL Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday called Russia India's "valued and time-tested" partner. He said India and Russia have benefited enormously from the relationship that the two nations share and added that the developments in various sectors, including trade, investment and military technical cooperation showcase a good sense of importance that New Delhi attaches to its ties with Moscow.

On being asked about his earlier remarks about India-Russia ties, he said, "I think I must have been reacting to how I was asked that particular question and I know that is not your intent. For us, Russia is a very valued partner. It's very time-tested partner. It's a relationship from which both India and Russia have benefited enormously and my presence here today and the fact you know all



India's Foreign Minister S Jaishankar (L) with Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov hold a joint press conference following their talks in Moscow, Russia on Wednesday. (AP/PTI)

the developments that I have pointed out including our growing trade, investments, our military technical cooperation, our connectivity projects. I think all of this will give you a good sense of the importance and the value that we attach to the relation-

ship." Appreciating the India-Russia trade, which is at an all-time high, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said that the negotiations for a Free Trade Agreement between India and the Eurasian Economic Union will resume in January next year.

Russia supports India's candidacy for permanent member of UNSC

MOSCOW, Dec 27 (PTI)

RUSSIA on Wednesday said it supports India's aspirations to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council and also praised India's deft handling of the contentious issues at G20 Summit as a "true triumph" of its foreign policy.

The Security Council has 5 permanent and 10 non-permanent members. India has long been seeking a permanent membership at the UNSC, strongly calling for reform of the United Nations in line with the changing realities of the world.

TENSION IN RED SEA

BY GIRISH LINGANNA

THE United States-led multinational naval force to safeguard and secure sea traffic in the Red Sea against attacks from Houthi rebels seems to be greatly weakened even before it started operating fully. Just a few days after the launch of "Operation Prosperity Guardian (OPG)," France, Italy, and Spain backed out and this, when the force was expected to consist of warships from over 10 countries.

Washington was almost pushed into forming the coalition. In early November, a US destroyer intercepted multiple missiles launched from Yemen. However, the United States behaved as if things were normal and did not publicly proclaim its involvement in confronting the Houthi. As long as the Houthi failed to hit Israel, the US could claim that the situation hadn't turned urgent.

However, when the continuous Houthi attacks on ships passing through the Suez Canal endangered global seaways, the US had to intervene. It's highly likely that the White House didn't have an immediate detailed plan for getting involved in the Gaza conflict, but the choice to send naval and air forces to the region, capable of facing any potential enemies, was a wise military decision.

The White House was involved in diplomacy. The US and Iran sent indirect messages to each other, stating they didn't want conflict. Iran said it didn't know that Hamas planned to attack Israel on October 7. The US did not make this an issue. In response, Iran influenced Hezbollah in Lebanon to hold back.

All these helped reduce tensions. The Houthi, who are often seen aligned with Iran, just like the Hezbollah, however, chose to strike in the Red Sea. They called on Israel to stop its military actions in Gaza and fired long-distance missiles towards Israel and targeted US Navy destroyers in the Red Sea. Both moves failed when the missiles and drones were intercepted and destroyed. The US Navy believed its two destroyers would manage the situation adequately and expected a couple of more ships to arrive in time. But when tankers and container ships began to be attacked almost every day, it became clear the situation was getting out of hand. Many of the largest shipping companies changed routes, avoiding the Suez Canal and taking the longer, more costly, path around Africa. This involved an extra expense of \$700 for each container ship.

Considering that only ships carrying goods from Asia to Europe were affected, the extra cost amounted to an enormous \$2 billion every month. This extra expense will be transferred to end-users, resulting in higher prices. Moreover, the extended travel time would lead to delays in distribution, shortages, and overall economic disruption, which will impact all countries.

The markets called for action, and the US hoped to form a strong group of up to 20 countries for "Operation Prosperity Guardian" (OPG). However, this optimism quickly dissipated as many countries declined to participate. The Pentagon believed that China, which relies heavily on open sea lanes for its exports

to Europe, would join the coalition as it already had a task force, including a destroyer and a frigate, in the western Indian Ocean.

But Beijing wasn't interested in "Operation Prosperity Guardian" as also major Arab navies of countries located along the Red Sea, such as that of Saudi Arabia and Egypt. They preferred not to get involved in a conflict with another Arab country. The US understood and remained confident that it would still be able to get enough ships for the operation. Meanwhile, France, Italy, and Spain said their navies will participate only if the mission is led by the European Union or NATO. The US currently has support from the United Kingdom, Norway, the Netherlands, Greece, Canada, and Australia.

Most of these countries already have ships in the Indian Ocean or in the eastern Mediterranean. This would allow Operation Prosperity Guardian to begin quickly and start escorting commercial ships before the New Year. The first response from the shipping industry was on Sunday when Maersk, a major Danish shipping company, declared that its ships would start passing through the Red Sea again, but only with Operation Prosperity Guardian's protection.

Bottom-line is, even with various countries involved, Operation Prosperity Guardian will involve more than just guiding ships through the southern Red Sea. There are indications that the situation might escalate significantly, potentially leading to a new conflict involving key regional players. (IPA)

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President Putin invites PM Modi to visit Russia

MOSCOW, Dec 27 (PTI)

PRESIDENT Vladimir Putin on Wednesday invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to visit Russia next year as External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar called on the Russian leader at the Kremlin.

"We will be glad to see our friend, Mr. Prime Minister Modi in Russia," Putin told Jaishankar.

Jaishankar, who is here on a five-day official visit to Russia, earlier met with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov.

During a joint media appearance along with Lavrov after their talks, Jaishankar said he was confident that Prime Minister Modi and President Putin will meet for an annual summit next year. In his opening remarks earlier, Jaishankar



said that the two leaders have been in frequent contact.

The summit between the Prime Minister of India and the Russian President is the highest institutional dialogue mechanism in the strategic partnership between the two sides.

So far, 21 annual summits have taken place alternatively in India and Russia. The last summit took place in New

Delhi in December 2021.

Putin also said that the trade turnover between Russia and India is growing, particularly on account of crude oil and high technology areas.

"Our trade turnover is growing, for the second year in a row at the same time and at a steady pace. The growth rate this year is even higher than in the last year," he said.

On Tuesday, Jaishankar held a "comprehensive and productive" meeting with Deputy Prime Minister Denis Manturov on the bilateral economic cooperation during which they witnessed the signing of some "very important" agreements related to the construction of the future power-generating units of the Kudankulam nuclear power plant in Tamil Nadu.

It's my dream

To turn 2 crore SHG women *lakhpatis* : PM



BHOPAL, Dec 27 (PTI)

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday said he wishes to turn 2 crore females associated with self-help groups (SHGs) into 'lakhpati' women in the country.

During an engaging virtual interaction with beneficiaries

of various Government programmes in Dewas district of Madhya Pradesh as part of the ongoing 'Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra', Modi sought the help of a woman in his endeavour.

"I want to make 2 crore women associated with self-help groups into lakhpati
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