

Russia

India, Russia seek thrust in trade

By Vladimir Radyuhin 10-11

MOSCOW, MAY 15. The Russian Prime Minister, Mikhail Kasyanov, has pledged full support to efforts to impart a new thrust and dynamism to trade and economic links between India and Russia and remove existing bottlenecks.

The External Affairs Minister, Yashwant Sinha, called on Mr. Kasyanov ahead of the annual session of the Indo-Russian Inter-Governmental Commission (IRIGC) on trade, economic, scientific and technological cooperation, which opened in Moscow today.

The commission is co-chaired by Mr. Sinha and the Russian Minister for Industry, Science

and Technology, Ilya Klebanov.

Mr. Kasyanov shared Mr. Sinha's view that Indo-Russian trade and investment ties were far below their potential and that economic and commercial cooperation needed to be expanded to become the core of the strategic partnership between the two countries.

Mr. Sinha sought the Russian Prime Minister's cooperation in addressing three major areas of concern to both Indian and Russian business sectors: improving transport links, ensuring faster clearance of goods and expanding contacts between banking sectors. The External Affairs Minister also stressed the need for creating a flexible and friendly visa regime.

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Russia

Russia-NATO defence pact for Europe

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, MAY 13. Russia and NATO have agreed to jointly build a missile-defence shield for Europe. A Russia-NATO council meeting at Ambassadors' level in Moscow on Tuesday approved the first phase of a cooperation programme to deploy a non-strategic anti-missile defence in Europe, the Itar-Tass news agency said quoting the

NATO Secretary-General, George Robertson. Speaking at a news conference after the meeting, Mr. Robertson described the missile-defence project proposed by Russia, as "maybe the flagship programme in the NATO-Russia council," whereas a year and a half ago it was "one of the most divisive issues."

The NATO chief said Russia and the Atlantic alliance had worked together on "an agenda

of solid concrete and productive cooperation," which covered the fight against terrorism, peacekeeping operations, and the evaluation of threats of proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear. The Russian Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov, said the Russia-NATO Council, set up a year ago should strive to "achieve a security architecture of the Euro-Atlantic type" with a stress on terrorism.

multilateral arrangement. He called for a Russia-NATO dialogue on Afghanistan in the context of the alliance's growing peacekeeping role in post-war reconstruction of Afghanistan. Russia's relations with NATO, strained over the alliance's expansion into Eastern Europe, improved rapidly after Moscow backed Washington in its post-11/9 global war on terrorism.

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Russia expands North-South trade route

8/11

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, NOV. 7. Russia is working hard to increase traffic along the North-South transport corridor, a Russian Minister said.

In addition to a container terminal in the Caspian Sea port of Olya opened last month, Russia is building an even bigger terminal in Makhachkala. The Olya Port terminal near Astrakhan can handle 20,000 TEU containers per year, whereas the Makhachkala Port will be able to handle 30,000 TEU containers by the end of the current year, the Deputy Transportation Minister, Chinghiz Izmailov, said.

Both terminals are part of an ambitious project launched by Russia, India and Iran three years ago to build a sea-and-land transport route from Asia to Europe. Goods leaving Cochin and Mumbai are shipped through the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf to the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas, where they are loaded onto trucks and trains and hauled to Anzali, Iran's port on the Caspian Sea, then carried by sea to Russian ports, where goods are fanned out to their destinations in Russia and Western Europe.

Russia is also building a 50-km railway that will link the Caspian Port of Olya with the national rail network by 2005. To encourage cargo carriers to use the Olya facilities the Russian Government has cut port calling tariffs by 45 per cent, Mr. Izmailov said.

"Much depends now on the activity of Indian and Russian trade partners," the Deputy Transportation Minister told *The Hindu* in the run-up to the Prime Minister, A. B. Vajpayee's visit to Russia next week. He urged the two countries to set up a joint carrier company to operate the route. "It would obviously make sense if Indian and Russian companies give thought to establishing an international consortium for container shipment along the North-South Transport Corridor."

Russia flexes its muscles

By Vladimir Radyuhin

Reference to pre-emptive use of force is a new element in Russia's defence strategy. It sends a clear warning to the U.S. to accept Russia's dominant role in the former Soviet states.

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SIX MONTHS after the United States led the war against Iraq, Russia has come up with a tough response to Washington's new interventionism, vowing to use military force to uphold its strategic interests, and unveiling plans for an all-round defence build-up.

A new defence policy paper prepared by the Defence Ministry makes it clear that Russia is putting enhanced emphasis on military power in reaction to the U.S. President, George W. Bush's doctrine of using military force against sovereign nations without U.N. mandate.

"Attempts to dilute the role of the U.N. Security Council and the growing practice of using armed forces on the basis of national decisions are viewed as a dangerous trend that could create a serious threat to Russia's political and military interests," the defence paper said.

Russia is also concerned over NATO's continuing "anti-Russian" thrust and plans to redeploy military bases from Western Europe to the newly admitted members in Eastern Europe, as well as to the former Soviet Baltic republics of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, which are to join NATO next year. This will put NATO aircraft within a three-minute flight of St. Petersburg.

Russia "expects the alliance to remove all direct and indirect anti-Russian elements from its defence planning and political declarations made by its members," the Russian defence policy paper warned. If, however, NATO retains its "offensive military doctrine", this will prompt a "thorough reformation of military planning", and a "change of Russian nuclear strategy".

The new defence concept presented in Moscow last month says Russia is ready to use military force to defend its interests in the former Soviet states. "The CIS is an extremely important security zone for Russia," the Russian Defence Minister, Sergei Ivanov, said explaining Moscow's new defence policy. "Russia retains the right to preventive use of military force, including in the CIS countries," the defence chief said. Russia could deliver pre-emptive strikes not only if threatened militarily, but also if faced with attempts "to limit Russia's access to regions that are essential for its survival, or those that are important from an economic or financial point of view."

Reference to pre-emptive use of force is a new element in Russia's defence strategy that was absent from the military doctrine adopted in

2000. It sends a clear warning to the U.S. to accept Russia's dominant role in the former Soviet states. The U.S. intrusion into Russia's traditional turf worries Moscow more and more. What began as temporary American military presence in Central Asia endorsed by Russia to facilitate the anti-terror war in Afghanistan, far from winding up, is expanding today. In addition to airbases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, the U.S. is helping Kazakhstan set up a naval base on the Caspian Sea close to the Russian border and is seeking to lease three military bases in Tajikistan. Washington is stepping up military-technical assistance to former Soviet states in Central Asia, conducts regular war games with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan under NATO's Partnership for Peace programme, and has launched officer training programmes for Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

Control of energy resources is the main driving motive behind American push into Central Asia and the Caucasus. Earlier this year Washington openly, if unsuccessfully, pressed Georgia and Azerbaijan to turn down tie-up proposals from the Russian natural gas monopoly, Gazprom, on the grounds that they may jeopardise U.S.-lobbied pipeline projects in the region. Washington has signed a defence cooperation pact with Georgia, is helping Azerbaijan boost its naval power in the row with Iran over the sharing of Caspian oil fields, and has offered military assistance to Armenia. It has also warned Ukraine not to join a single economic zone with Russia, Kazakhstan and Belarus.

Following up on the publication of its new defence concept, Russia opened an airbase in Kyrgyzstan last week, which will enable it to quickly deploy large air and ground forces in the region. This is the first military base Russia has set up abroad since the collapse of the Soviet Union 12 years ago, but not the last one, Russian officials said.

"We have closed down our bases in Cuba and Vietnam, but have boosted and will further boost our presence in the Commonwealth of Independent States," Mr. Ivanov said stressing that Russia maintained military presence in 10 out of 12 CIS

countries. He reminded the U.S. that it had promised to shut down military bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan after the operation in Afghanistan has been completed.

"We did not object [to the bases], but set a condition that they operate only as long as it takes to stabilise the situation in Afghanistan," Mr. Ivanov told a NATO conference in Colorado Springs, U.S. Russia's new assertiveness towards the former Soviet republics is part of a broader revision of its defence doctrine post-9/11.

"We are against this policy [of pre-emptive strikes without the U.N. approval]. But if this practice continues to be asserted in international relations, Russia retains the right to act in the same way," the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, said in an interview to Al-Jazeera TV last week.

Russia is also reviving the concept of nuclear deterrence. During a high-profile visit to the Federal Nuclear Centre in August the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, said that nuclear weapons "are have been and remain the basis of Russia's security" and asserted that Russia "must and will remain a great nuclear power."

The new defence policy calls for deploying newest land and submarine-based strategic missiles to replace the old missiles as they are decommissioned, for upgrading the nuclear-capable long-range bombers, the Tu-160s, and increasing funding for the development of more sophisticated missile systems.

Speaking at the presentation of the defence paper, Mr. Putin announced the impending deployment of "dozens" of the Soviet era's most powerful missiles, the SS-19 "Stiletto" armed with six nuclear warheads each. The mothballed missiles would be put on duty to phase out the aged missiles and would remain in service till the mid-2030s.

"Their capability to overcome any anti-missile defence is unrivalled," the Russian leader stressed. Russia is also developing a "fundamentally new missile system", which will take 10 to 15 years to build, according to the Strategic Rocket Forces Commander, General Nikolai Solovtsov.

There is also a provision for a gradual restructuring from a conscript to an all-volunteer army, creation of

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mobile "units of permanent readiness," and development of high-precision conventional weapons, reconnaissance, targeting and automatic command and control systems.

Russia has declared that the strength of its armed forces will now depend on the tasks assigned to them. "The armed forces build-up and military planning will henceforth be geared to geopolitical needs and defence sufficiency, rather than to the available potential," the new defence doctrine said. Contrary to earlier plans, there will be no further troop reductions from the current level of 1.1 million servicemen.

For the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has projected a global role for its armed forces as "the factor in preventing the final collapse of the system of international relations based on international law." "It is the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation that can ensure global stability in the broader sense of this term," the paper said.

At the same time the defence policy paper ruled out an all-out confrontation with the West.

"A global nuclear war and large-scale conventional wars with NATO or another U.S.-led coalition have been excluded from the spectrum of the most probable conflicts for which the Russian Armed Forces prepare." This has opened the way for "substantive reductions in the nuclear and conventional arms without jeopardising the security of the nation."

The paper hailed military-to-military contacts with NATO and called for development of a "strategic partnership" with the U.S. on the basis of "strict adherence to international law and the primacy of Russia's national interests." However, it is not the new *detente* but the resurgence of the military factor in international relations that has inspired Russia's defence policy revision.

"Contrary to the many predictions that prevailed in the early 1990s, the significance of military force has not decreased in the post-bipolar world," the defence paper said. "On the contrary, the beginning of the 21st century has seen the military force assume increased role in promoting the countries' political and economic interests amid a severe crisis of global security institutions."

This admission marks the final parting of the Russian leadership with the illusion that the end of the Cold War would also signal an end to great-power rivalry.

Putin avoids Iraq at meet

Putrajaya (Malaysia), Oct. 16
(Reuters): Faced with a hall full
of Muslim leaders, Russian
President Vladimir Putin avoid-
ed mentioning the hottest sub-
ject of all — Iraq.

Instead, in a private telecon-
ference during the Islamic sum-
mit in Malaysia, he agreed with
French President Jacques
Chirac and German Chancellor
Gerhard Schroeder to support a
controversial UN resolution on
Iraq's reconstruction drafted by
the US. Schroeder broke the
news in Brussels, saying the Eu-
ropean trio would vote for the
resolution, but would give no aid
to Iraq because of the inadequa-
cy of the US proposals.

The Organisation of the Is-
lamic Conference (OIC) summit
opened today with emotions run-
ning high over the occupation of
Iraq and the Israel-Palestinian
conflict.

But despite being the Islamic
world's biggest issues, the 57-
member body struggles to have
influence on either, and its hopes
of the UN taking the central role
in Iraq will be dashed if the US
resolution goes through.

Host Prime Minister Ma-
hathir Mohamad, soon to retire



Vladimir Putin at the Islamic
summit in Putrajaya,
Malaysia. (AFP)

and making his valedictory ap-
pearance at an OIC summit, de-
clared that over 50 years of fight-
ing had accomplished nothing
for the Palestinians. But the Jew-
ish people enjoyed the influence
of a world power, Mahathir said.

Yet faith could lead Muslims
to victory at the negotiating
table, the veteran Southeast
Asian leader said. "The Quran
tells us that when the enemy
sues for peace we must react po-
sitively," he told the summiteers,
adding that his words would not
be popular.

Hand over power to Iraqis, says Putin

New York: Warning that Iraq could become a "new centre" of all "destructive elements", Russian President Vladimir Putin has asked the US to quickly restore sovereignty to Iraqis and secure a new UN resolution clearly defining how long international forces would remain there.

The invasion of Iraq had "created a terrorist haven" which did not exist previously and the country could "become a new centre, a new magnet of all destructive elements," Mr Putin said in an interview to *The New York Times* published on Monday.

He said a "great number of members of terrorist organisations" have been drawn into the country since the fall of Saddam Hussein and now "the coalition forces received two enemies at once — both

the remains of the Saddam regime, who fight with them, and those who Saddam himself had fought in the past — the fundamentalists."

The Russian president, *The Times* said, did not identify the militants entering Iraq, but he said they came "from all the Muslim world".

Mr Putin, who held talks with his US counterpart George W. Bush in Camp David last week, said differences clearly remain on the Iraq issue and ruled out sending Russian troops to the war-ravaged country as of now.

He said the US should move to quickly restore sovereignty to Iraqis and to secure a new UN resolution clearly defining how long international forces would remain there. Unless that is done, the US could face the possibility of a prolonged violent and ultimately futile war like the one that mired the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, Mr Putin said. PTI



V. Putin

Rebuilding Russia's global role

By Vladimir Radyuhin

Constructive engagement is the watchword of Mr. Putin's doctrine... He has skilfully used Russia's geopolitical and economic position to enhance its strategic value for the West.

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AFTER A decade of swings, zigzags, grandstanding and global retreat, Russia is firmly reasserting itself as a key player on the world stage, even if it is no longer a superpower. The credit for this unquestionably goes to the President, Vladimir Putin, whose vibrant and pragmatic foreign policy won him the applause of the world community last month, when 45 leaders of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, the European Union, China and India gathered in St. Petersburg to celebrate the 300th anniversary of Mr. Putin's hometown. The U.S. President, George W. Bush, took the occasion to unveil a "new strategic relationship" with Russia despite their recent rift over Iraq, the E.U. set up a partnership council with this country, and at Evian two days later, Russia, for the first time, was accepted as a full member of the Group of Eight.

When Mr. Putin took over from his erratic predecessor, Boris Yeltsin, three years ago, Russia's foreign policy was hardly in any better shape than its economy, which had been ruined by 10 years of mismanaged pro-market reforms. The NATO was advancing to Russia's doorstep, and Moscow was fast losing influence in its own former Soviet backyard.

Mr. Putin began by matching Russia's foreign policy reach with its reduced economic potential and drawing up a pragmatic foreign policy agenda geared to the pursuit of two main objectives: external security and integration of Russia into global economy to speed up economic revival.

Mr. Putin's foreign policy doctrine may be described as "multilateral bipolarity." It is based on the recognition of two global realities. One is that despite the U.S. winning the Cold War, the world remains bipolar insofar as the U.S. and Russia are the only two countries capable of wiping out each other with their nuclear missiles. Mr. Putin is determined to keep it that way, seeing to it that even if Russia's defence budget is only a fraction of America's, the country's nuclear arsenals are upgraded and new strategic weapons developed to counter the missile shield the U.S. plans to deploy over its territory.

The other reality underlying Mr. Putin's doctrine is that for all its military, economic and political might, the U.S. cannot, and should not, be allowed to, run the world as a "my-way-or-the-highway" cowboy. His doctrine calls for dynamic pursuit of bilateral and multilateral ties on all azimuths to restrain U.S. unilateral-

ism and promote a multipolar world.

"If unilateralism becomes the norm of international life, it will lead to chaos and catastrophe," Mr. Putin said in a recent interview. He sees the United Nations as "the only universal organisation that can solve issues of a global nature," the relevance of which has only increased in the new international environment. Even though the U.N. failed to stop the U.S. from attacking Iraq, Moscow can feel partially vindicated now that Washington has been forced to seek the U.N.'s help in overcoming chaos and violence in post-war Iraq.

Constructive engagement is the watchword of Mr. Putin's doctrine, not least because Russia has no resources for confrontation and will not be able to rebuild its economy fast enough in a hostile environment. He has skilfully used Russia's geopolitical and economic position to enhance its strategic value for the West in such key areas as fight against terrorism, energy security, and non-proliferation. The September 11 attacks on the U.S. gave Mr. Putin a perfect chance to put his new foreign policy to work. By boldly accepting U.S. bases in Central Asia and lending critical support to the U.S.-led military campaign in Taliban-ruled Afghanistan, he weakened the Islamic threat to Russia's soft underbelly in the south. He made the U.S. neo-conservative leadership review its policy from neglect and confrontation to cooperation with Russia, and won recognition of the conflict in Chechnya as part of the war on international terrorism.

The terrorist attacks helped Mr. Putin awaken Western interest in Russia as an alternative source of energy to reduce the dependence of the U.S. and Europe on Arab oil, especially after he promised to increase Russian oil supplies to the West in the event of regional conflicts breaking out as a result of the war on terror. During Mr. Putin's visit to London earlier this month, the two sides signed a multi-billion-dollar deal to build a gas pipeline from Russia, which holds the world's biggest reserves of natural gas, to Britain. The project will strengthen Russia's position as the main energy supplier to Europe. Plans are afoot to build a pipeline from Siberia's rich oilfields

to the northern port of Murmansk to ship 1.6 million barrels of oil a day to the U.S. This will make Russia the third largest foreign supplier to the U.S. following Canada and Saudi Arabia, a supplier that does not belong to OPEC at that.

Steadily expanding the cooperative agenda with the U.S., Mr. Putin has managed not to spoil relations with Washington even while openly opposing it on the war in Iraq. However, George W. Bush's continued crusade against the "axis of evil," which also includes Iran and North Korea, poses new challenges for Russia. Moscow has refused to break off its contract with Iran for the construction of a nuclear reactor at Bushehr despite pressure from Washington and has opposed U.S. pressure tactics in dealing with North Korea. Russia and the U.S. are also locked in fierce rivalry for control of energy-rich Central Asia and the Caspian Sea. Mr. Putin will have to walk the razor's edge between standing up for Russia's national interests and maintaining the cooperative relationship with Washington. Moscow has promoted the concept of building an "arc of stability" stretching from Europe through the Caucasus and Central Asia to China and South East Asia as an answer to "the arc of instability" that Washington has drawn from the Caribbean Basin through Africa to South and Central Asia and across to North Korea as justification for assuming the role of a global cop. "The arc of stability" is to be based on entwined regional security arrangements that should preclude domination either by the U.S. or China.

In Europe, Russia, while still opposed to NATO expansion, is patiently building cooperation with the Atlantic Alliance on the anti-terror and peace-keeping agenda. Next year, Russia and NATO plan to hold two dozen joint military exercises. Mr. Putin has promised intelligence, transport and logistic support to NATO as it takes over from the U.S. the peacekeeping operation in Afghanistan. For its part, NATO has accepted Moscow's proposal to look into possibilities of jointly building a European missile defence. At the same time, Russia has supported a plan to set up a European Security and Defence

Union, complete with its own rapid reaction force, which is being pushed by France and Germany — Europe's main power brokers — who, like Russia, strongly opposed the U.S.-led war in Iraq. This should help shape up a new security architecture in Europe, in which NATO's role will be diluted.

In Central Asia and the Caucasus, Russia has wrapped up a full-fledged military alliance with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Armenia and Belarus and is establishing military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Jointly with China, Russia in May put final touches to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, designed to become part of Mr. Putin's "arc of stability" and a counterbalance to growing U.S. presence in the region.

Relations in the Russia-U.S.-China triangle in the region is another major concern for Mr. Putin as he is trying to ensure that growing relationships with both Washington and Beijing enhance Russia's security and prevent them from playing off each other against Russia. China is Russia's strategic partner and co-founder of the Shanghai group. At the same time, Russia faces a potential threat from overpopulated China to its badly depopulated vast expanses of Siberia and the Far East, and will need massive U.S. investment in the region to counter the threat.

India is Russia's only partner with which it has no clash of interests and which could underpin many security arrangements crafted by Moscow. Joint naval war games in the Indian Ocean this summer have added a new dimension to the strengthening strategic partnership between the two countries. Russia-India-Iran cooperation in Afghanistan, in building a North-South transport corridor from Asia to Europe, and in a possible gas transportation project is becoming an important factor of regional security. Russia is also actively cultivating political cooperation in the Moscow-Delhi-Beijing triangle, which could become a major pillar of stability in Asia.

In the final analysis, success for these geostrategic plans hinges on whether Mr. Putin succeeds in rebuilding fast Russia's economic and military power. Encouraged by the average economic growth of 6.4 per cent over the past three years, he has this year announced the ambitious goal of doubling the country's GDP by 2010. Under Mr. Putin's helmsmanship, Russia seems well on its way to re-taking its place under the sun.

Handwritten signature and initials: "Hasan" and "MS" in a circle.

Putin begins state visit to U.K.

By Hasan Suroor

LONDON, JUNE 24. Vladimir Putin today became the first Russian President in nearly 130 years to be accorded a full state visit when he arrived here at the invitation of the Queen to a welcome fit for a king, signalling an end to the frostiness that had crept into British-Russian relations over Iraq, the Russian President.

The last time a Russian leader was given this honour was in 1874 when Tsar Alexander II visited Britain, and though since then several Russian heads of state, including Mr. Putin, have come here regularly they were not treated as guests of the Queen. In contrast to his last visit when he stayed in a hotel, this time Mr. Putin is staying at Buckingham Palace.

In a display of pomp and ceremony, Mr. Putin was driven to Buckingham Palace in a stage carriage in the company of the Queen as tourists watched and took photographs of the 'historic' event. But there was also anger in the air with civil liberties' groups denouncing him for human rights 'abuses' in Chechnya and urging the British Government to hold him to account for his government's actions in the region.

"This must be at the heart of



POMP AND CEREMONY: The Russian President, Vladimir Putin, and Queen Elizabeth II during a ceremonial welcome in London on Tuesday. — AFP

discussions between President Putin and Tony Blair," said Amnesty International's Kate Allen accusing Russian security forces of 'serious' human rights violations in Chechnya.

In an open letter to Mr. Blair, Human Rights Watch said that as one of Russia's "most important partners" his intervention could make an "important difference in the lives of thousands of Chechens". It said the human

rights situation was steadily 'worsening' despite growing international concern over the Russian military crackdown in Chechnya, and claimed that a number of "mass graves" of the Chechens allegedly killed by Russian security forces had been discovered.

Oil contracts

Mr. Putin, who had a very public disagreement with Mr.

Blair over Iraq during the British Prime Minister's recent visit to Moscow, is expected to mend fences in a bid to get a slice of oil and building contracts in post-war Iraq. More importantly, he wants Britain and America to honour the Russian contracts with the Saddam Hussein regime.

"We will be insisting that some of those projects do go ahead. We think it is quite justified in terms of current international law. We have every reason to count on the support of international legal bodies," he said in hard-hitting remarks ahead of his visit.

Mr. Putin had strongly opposed the invasion of Iraq and rebuked Mr. Blair publicly at a press conference in Moscow over the British-U.S. failure to find any weapons of mass destruction, but of late both leaders have been trying to play down the issue.

Mr. Putin said it was possible to have differences without allowing them to damage mutual relations. The West Asian peace process and Russian cooperation with Iran's nuclear programme are among the issues likely to be discussed during Mr. Putin's four-day visit whose highpoint would be a major agreement on British investment in Russia's energy sector.

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IRAN NUKE PLAN / RUSSIA EXERTS PRESSURE

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June 21, 2003

Teheran may have to sign protocol

By Atul Aneja

MANAMA, JUNE 21. With Russia deciding to halt supplies of nuclear fuel, Iran may now have no option but to sign a new inspections protocol with the International Atomic Energy Agency aimed at preventing it from making atomic weapons.

Russia has reportedly decided to hold further atomic fuel supplies as part of an international effort to discourage Iran from making nuclear weapons.

The IAEA board of governors that met in Vienna earlier this week urged Iran to sign an additional protocol to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty. Under the terms of the new agreement, inspectors from the IAEA would have the legal right to carry out surprise inspections of Iranian nuclear facilities, suspected of manufacturing nuclear weapons.

The Russian move to halt supplies, analysts say, is not with the intent of punishing Iran. Instead, by encouraging Iran to play by international rules, Moscow wishes to

rescue its lucrative commercial nuclear energy partnership with Iran.

Russia and Iran are building a nuclear power plant at Bushehr. But Russia is under intense U.S. pressure to terminate its nuclear collaboration with Iran, which Washington suspects is making nuclear weapons.

An IAEA certification of nuclear weapons free Iran, under the terms of the new protocol, will therefore lift all international pressure and clear Moscow's path for openly collaborating with Teheran in the civilian nuclear energy field.

Keen to assuage U.S. concerns that Iran should not have atomic weapons, Russia has declared that it would soon sign an agreement with Iran to buy back the spent fuel resulting from the operation of the Bushehr plant, which can be chemically treated to yield weapons grade nuclear material.

Iran's Islamic Republic News Agency (IRNA) quoted the Russian Atomic Energy Minister, Alexander Rumyantsev, as saying that the first consignment of spent nuclear

fuel could return to Russia in eight to 10 years' time.

The first reactor at the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant is expected to go on stream by 2005.

While Iran has not opposed signing the new protocol, it is nevertheless linking it to the lifting of the western nuclear energy blockade to which it has been subjected. Iran argues that as a signatory to the NPT, it is entitled to modern nuclear technology, so long as it does not make nuclear weapons.

The IAEA during its deliberations had also urged Teheran to open the Kelaye Electric Company in Teheran for inspections. But on Saturday, the head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organisation, Chohamreza Aghazadeh, expressed his reluctance to do so.

"We've had no problem concerning environmental samples, but we've been telling the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) that this location is a non-nuclear location," Mr. Aghazadeh told state televi-

Russia's new look-Asia policy

By Vladimir Radyuhin

MOSCOW, JUNE 15. The Russian Foreign Minister, Igor Ivanov's current Asian tour, which includes visits to Pakistan, India and Cambodia, is part of Moscow's new look-Asia policy.

The trip is in continuation with a series of steps taken by Russia recently to forge closer economic and security relationships across a vast region from Central Asia to South East Asia in response to America's new push for global dominance.

The main focus would be on India and China. Last month, Russia conducted its first naval war games with India and framed a wide-ranging cooperation agenda with China during its new leader, Hu Jintao's visit to Moscow. Jointly with China Russia also moved to turn the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation into a full-fledged regional security body which is tipped eventually to extend its mandate beyond Central Asia by inducting India and Iran. Simultaneously, Russia an-

nounced plans to boost military presence in Central Asia by setting up permanent military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

Along with building bilateral ties with India and China, Russia is actively promoting trilateral cooperation with them. The idea figured prominently during Mr. Putin's twin trips to Beijing and Delhi last December and is expected to make further headway this year. It is significant that the Prime Minister, Atal Behari Vajpayee's first meeting with Hu Jintao took place in St. Petersburg during the city's 300th anniversary celebrations earlier this month. Triangular interaction will be on the agenda of the Russian Foreign Minister's talks in Delhi on Tuesday, less than a week before Mr. Vajpayee goes to China.

Close views shared by Russia, India and China on international issues provide a basis for continuing trilateral dialogue among them and for upgrading its level, Russia's Deputy Foreign Minister, Alexander Losyu-

kov, said ahead of Mr. Ivanov's trip to South Asia.

From Delhi the Russian Foreign Minister will go to Phnom Penh for a regional security meeting with the Association of South East Asian Nations, which also come in the orbit of Moscow's look-East policy. Helped by a wave of anti-Iraq war feelings Russia has recently secured defence deals with Indonesia and Malaysia for the supply of Sukhoi fighter planes, which may have major security implications for the region. In Phnom Penh, Mr. Ivanov will sign a declaration with ASEAN on partnership for peace and security. Moscow's proactive policy in Asia has coincided with Washington's post-Iraq plans to re-deploy U.S. forces around the world and establish new military bases along the arc of instability, part of which stretches from South and Central Asia to North Korea. In contrast to the U.S.-drawn arc of instability Mr. Putin last year formulated the concept of building an arc of stability from Europe to Asia.

Russia firm on diplomatic solution: Putin

ANDREI SHUKSHIN

Moscow, March 7 (Reuters): Russian President Vladimir Putin told US and British leaders hours ahead of a new UN Security Council meeting today that Moscow was determined to press for a diplomatic solution to disarm Iraq.

A Kremlin spokesman said Putin spoke overnight by telephone to US President George W. Bush, who later told a news conference the US intended to press within days for a UN vote authorising the use of force against Iraq. "The Russian side stressed its consistent position in favour of a peaceful solution to achieve the goal set by the international community in relation to Iraq," the spokesman said.

"It was stressed that all means exist for such a solution and these could be strengthened and augmented if

UN inspectors require it."

The spokesman said Bush had requested the conversation with Putin, who was on a working holiday at a Black Sea resort.

Putin later spoke for more than an hour to British Prime Minister Tony Blair, Washington's most stalwart ally. Blair said today he would be prepared to strike Iraq even if some of the Security Council's five permanent members — which include Russia — vetoed a new resolution authorising military action. "Russia sees a peaceful, political and diplomatic solution to the Iraqi problem as fully reflecting the real state of affairs," a Kremlin spokeswoman quoted Putin as telling Blair immediately before the UN Security Council session began in New York.

Foreign ministers of Russia, Germany and France said this week they would not allow any UN Security Council resolution

authorising force against Iraq to pass.

Russian deputy foreign minister Georgy Mamedov said today Russia would consider a new resolution only if it paved the way for a political solution.

"If we are talking about a sincere attempt to find a political solution in the difficult current environment, we are ready to closely look at all proposals on the table," he said.

British foreign secretary Jack Straw said yesterday his government was prepared to discuss new proposals acceptable to a majority of Security Council members.

The call between Bush and Putin coincided with US Senate ratification yesterday of a treaty reducing the nuclear arsenals of the US and Russia. The US hopes the vote will help win support from Moscow on Iraq. Mamedov welcomed ap-

proval of the treaty signed last year in Moscow by Putin and Bush and praised the document as a landmark.

But he said Senate ratification would have no impact on Russia's position on Iraq.

Russian deputy foreign minister Alexander Losyukov told Interfax Moscow had prepared contingency plans to evacuate Russians from Iraq through Iran once hostilities broke out.

Democrat opportunity

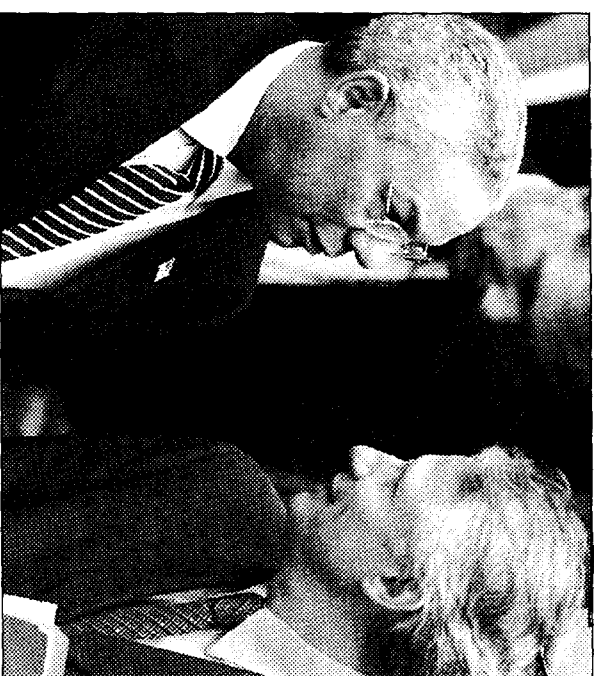
In New York, House of Representatives minority leader Nancy Pelosi today said the Democratic Party lost an opportunity five months ago to avert the massive military buildup toward war against Iraq by failing to take a unified stand.

Pelosi, a liberal California Democrat who voted against the October 2002 congressional resolution to back a possible US-led

war, told a foreign policy think tank that Republican President George W. Bush "is too far down the road and I don't think he's turning back."

"If the Democrats had spoken out more clearly in a unified vote five months ago in opposition to the resolution, if the people had gone on to the streets five months ago in these numbers in our country and around the world, I think we might have been in a different place today," Pelosi said in response to a question after a speech at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York.

US Senate minority leader Tom Daschle of South Dakota and Republican Richard Gephardt of Missouri, Pelosi's predecessor as the top Democrat in the House, voted for the resolution. Daschle said yesterday it was premature for the US to go it alone and invade Iraq.



US secretary of state Colin Powell (left) and French foreign minister Dominique de Villepin at the UN on Friday. (AFP)

Putin calls for Indo-Pak talks

Press Trust of India

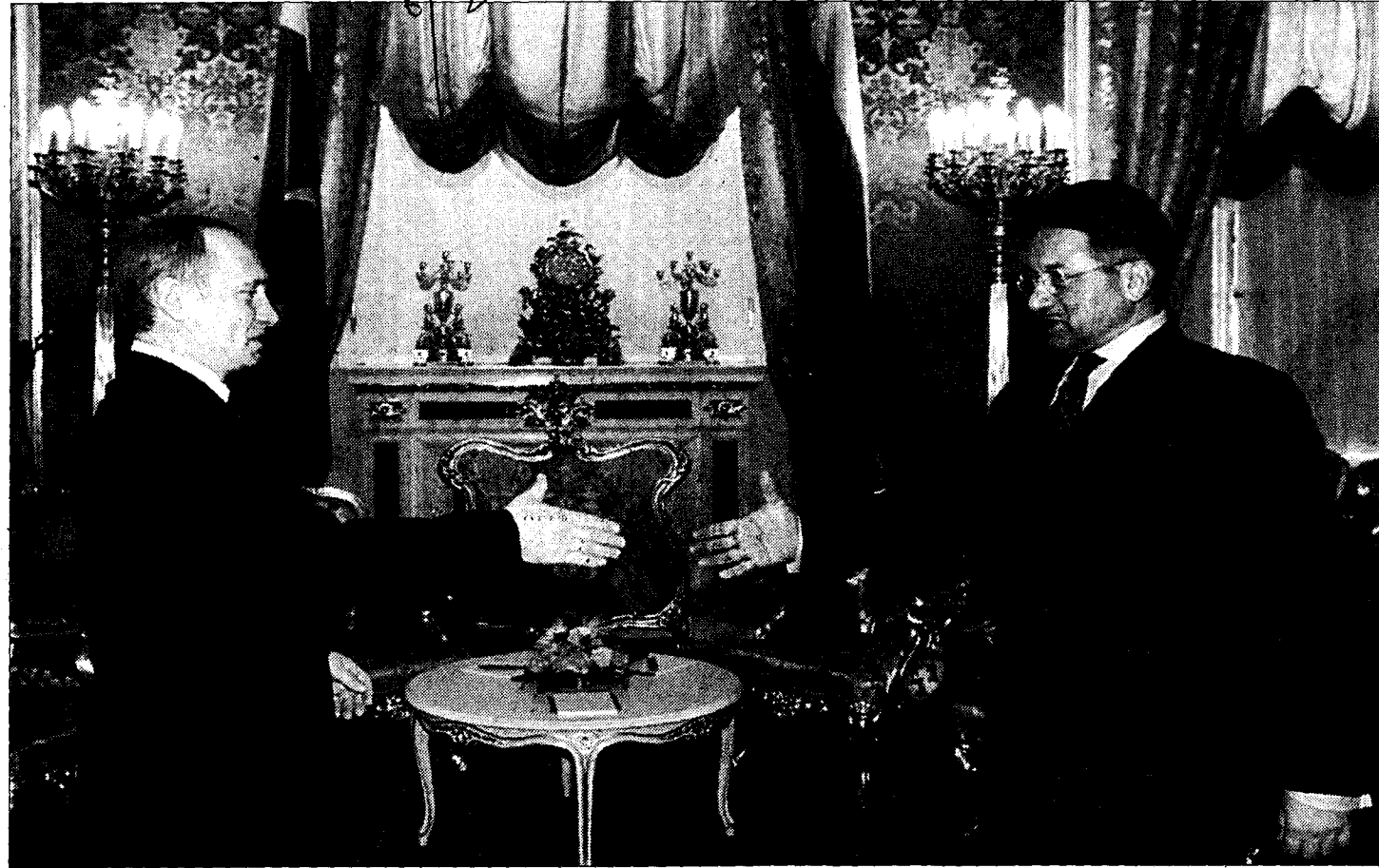
MOSCOW, Feb. 5. — After holding talks with President Pervez Musharraf, Russian leader Mr Vladimir Putin today called for resumption of India-Pakistan dialogue to resolve all outstanding issues on the basis of the 1972 Simla Accord and 1999 Lahore Declaration.

Emerging from one-to-one meeting with General Musharraf lasting over two hours at the Kremlin, the Russian President said they discussed in details "the search for new ways to resolve India-Pakistan relations and new venues for bilateral and multi-lateral exchange of views." Mr Putin, however, did not mention whether India's demand for ending cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir figured in the talks, but said he wished General Musharraf "success" in fulfilling Pakistan's "all obligations" as a member of the anti-terror coalition.

The General, the first ever Pakistani head of state to visit Russia in three decades, said Pakistan was firm on seeking a "peaceful" solution to the Kashmir issue and favoured an early resumption of India-Pakistan dialogue, Itar-Tass reported.

Mr Putin appreciated de-escalatory steps taken by India and Pakistan terming them as "positive."

On the first day after the Putin-



Vladimir Putin shakes hands with Pervez Musharraf during their meeting at Kremlin on Wednesday. — AFP

Musharraf talks the two countries signed three memorandums of understanding to enhance bilateral cooperation in combating international terrorism, academic

and cultural exchange.

The MoU signed between the Interior Ministries of the two countries provides for exchange of information and training of ex-

perts in combating international terrorism, trans-national crimes and illegal drug trafficking.

Mr Putin expressed satisfaction at the talks with General

Musharraf and expressed hope that the General's visit would "create extra conditions for the development of state-to-state relations between Russia and Paki-

stan, and would permit better co-ordination of efforts in combating international terrorism and on other issues of common interests".

The Pakistani President, on his part, said: "I have not come to add a new page to the history of our bilateral relations, but to start a new book, of which President Putin could be a co-author with me." Apparently referring to strained Russo-Pak relations, General Musharraf proposed to "bury the bad past" and take everything good to build a new relationship with Russia.

Gen Musharraf is expected to address a press conference before returning home tomorrow.

Warm welcome for Pervez

Pakistan President Gen Pervez Musharraf was accorded the highest level of reception at Kremlin today by Russian President Mr Vladimir Putin who expressed hope that this visit would boost bilateral Russia-Pak relations. Mr Putin said he hoped that the three-day visit of Gen Musharraf will "provide a new impetus for development of economic and political relations".

Welcoming Gen Musharraf in the Green Drawing room of the historic Moscow Kremlin (Fort), Mr Putin complimented Gen Musharraf as "not only a successful military man, but also a successful politician."

MUSHARRAF INVITES SELF TO MOSCOW, AWAITS REBUFF

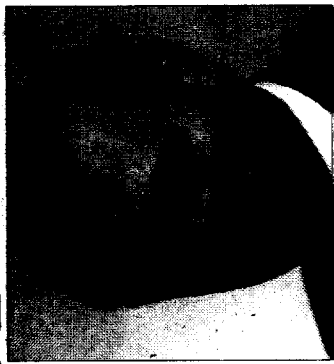
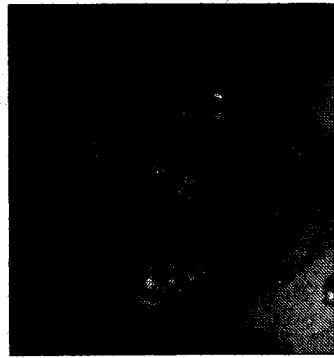
Putin 'snubs' Pervez with call to Vajpayee

Stateman News Service

NEW DELHI, Feb. 4. — In what could clearly be construed as a sharp diplomatic rebuff to a visiting Head of State, Russian President Mr Vladimir Putin called Prime Minister Mr Atal Bihari Vajpayee around the time Pakistani President Gen. Pervez Musharraf reached Moscow.

The gesture is particularly significant as Gen. Musharraf is the first Pakistani HoS to visit Russia in nearly 30 years. Officials said Mr Putin made the 12-minute telephonic call to Mr Vajpayee this evening for "bilateral consultations" while also expressing "full understanding" that New Delhi could only resume a bilateral dialogue with Islamabad once cross-border terrorism ceased completely, thus somewhat echoing Delhi's stand on this cantankerous issue.

In Almaty last June when all three leaders were attending the CICA summit, Gen. Musharraf invited himself and Mr Vajpayee to Moscow, announcing it as a major Russian initiative to kickstart the



ET TU, MINE HOST? Gen Musharraf and President Putin

Indo-Pak dialogue. As it turned out, both Russia and India promptly denied that any such move was afoot, placing it in the realm of the general's imagination.

There have been reports prior to this visit from Islamabad that the general would seek Russian mediation to urge a resumption of dialogue with India, stalled since Pakistan-aided terrorists attacked Parliament in December 2001. Mr Putin's call and statements in Moscow categorically stated Russia's position that any dialogue could take place once Pakistan recognises the sanctity of the LoC and stops sending infiltrators across. Russia has also publicly sought the disman-

ing of their relationship for the last three decades since the Indira-Brezhnev era.

Grounded US Boeing takes flight again

Stateman News Service and Agencies

NEW DELHI, Feb. 4. — Even as news agencies reported the sighting of another unidentified aircraft near Chennai, India decided to approach the International Civil Aviation Organisation about Pakistan misdirecting an American plane into violating Indian airspace.

In Mumbai, a day after a US-registered Boeing 757 belonging to Comco Corporation was forced to land at Mumbai's Chatrapati Shivaji Airport's international terminal for alleged violation of Indian airspace, the American plane was today cleared for take-off by Director General of Civil Aviation with a revised flightplan for onward journey to The Seychelles.

Quoting Union Minister for civil aviation, Syed Shah Nawaz Hussain, news agencies said an unidentified aircraft was sighted 180 nautical miles off Chennai. "Even today an unidentified plane was sighted 180 nautical miles off Chennai ... and it did not respond to our signals", the minister said and added that the Air Traffic Control immediately informed the Air Force. The matter has been brought to the notice of the defence and external affairs ministries, he said.

Last week, a US Air Force aircraft sighted over 100 nautical miles off Chennai did not respond to ATC's

signals. While last evening, defence and civil aviation authorities forced an American plane to land in Mumbai for violating regulations.

Mr Hussain said the Indian government will complain to the ICAO Pakistan's AIC providing wrong flying instructions to the American commercial aircraft. The US craft with 11 crew members was directed by Indian authorities to land in Mumbai last evening.

MiG fighter planes scrambled from the Bhuj airbase after the Indian Air Force's surveillance unit noticed that the cargo plane owned by Conco Corporation had deviated significantly from its flight path, the sources said. The IAF had to direct the Boeing 757 of Conco Corporation on way to Male from Karachi to land here.

Asked if his ministry was taking up the matter internationally, the minister said: "We will be informing the ICAO that Pakistan gave wrong directions to the American pilot. It is for the US government to pursue the matter with the ICAO or to lodge a protest with Pakistan". Asked if his ministry was recommending action to the MEA, Mr Hussain said: "The MEA is aware of the matter".

He said during an inquiry jointly conducted by the Directorate General of Civil Aviation and intelligence agencies, "we learnt that Karachi misled them (the American crew)".

Russian envoy dubs N Korea talks a success

Seoul/Moscow, January 20

A RUSSIAN envoy has held six hours of talks with reclusive North Korean leader Kim Jong-Il and described the meeting on the nuclear stand-off between Pyongyang and Washington as successful.

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Losyukov emerged from Monday's talks to describe them as successful, but gave no details, said Russia's Itar-Tass news agency.

"The meeting was very substantive. The atmosphere was very warm," Losyukov said.

It was the first sign of a possible breakthrough in an impasse that began in October when Washington said the North had admitted to a secret nuclear weapons programme. Pyongyang later kicked out UN nuclear inspectors, removed the seals from a mothballed reactor and pulled out of a global treaty preventing the spread of atomic arms.

Losyukov has presented Pyongyang with a set of three proposals that call for the Korean peninsula to be nuclear-free in exchange for guarantees of the North's security and for the resumption of economic and humanitarian aid to the impoverished Communist State. He was believed to have given Kim, leader of the world's only Communist dynasty, a message from President Vladimir Putin, Itar-Tass said. Russia is one of the few countries to maintain close ties with Pyongyang. Kim has visited Russia twice in recent years and Putin has made three trips to Pyongyang.

The Russian envoy, the first

foreign diplomat to meet Kim since the crisis began, was due to return to Beijing on Tuesday.

US officials have cited some progress in easing the nuclear crisis, the latest indication that Washington has moved away from its hard line of "no talks" by ditching a policy of refusing to reward bad behaviour by the North now that the standoff has become a distraction from efforts to disarm Iraq.

A senior North Korean diplomat tried to play down fears of conflict on the divided peninsula by saying the North had no wish to harm South Korea although it would regard any US move to impose sanctions as a declaration of war.

US Undersecretary of State John Bolton was in Beijing for what he said would be "a long day of consultations" with Pyongyang's closest ally. He is due in Seoul on Tuesday.

US Secretary of State Colin Powell dismissed suggestions of war and rejected comparisons of the administration's approach to North Korea with its effort to force Iraq to disarm. "We don't have a cookie cutter policy for every situation," Powell said on CNN.

Washington is searching for a diplomatic solution to persuade Pyongyang to abandon its suspected nuclear-weapons programme, but has threatened Iraq with war if it fails to cooperate with UN weapons inspectors. Powell said he hoped the UN body would formally take up the North Korea issue in the "not-too-distant future".

He said US President George W. Bush believed a diplomatic solution was possible.

Reuters

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THE HINDUSTAN TIMES