

Statement by Minister of Defence Nirmala Sitharaman Sept. 27, 2017

Good afternoon, your excellencies, Secretary James Mattis, secretary of defense of the United States, representatives of the media, ladies and gentlemen. It is indeed a privilege to receive Secretary Mattis in Delhi. I extend a warm welcome to him on his first visit to India as secretary of defense.

He's a special visitor for me, as he is the first administrative counterpart I have met since taking over my responsibility as defense minister of India.

We have just concluded a very substantive, constructive, forward-looking talk. I thank Secretary Mattis for generously sharing his deep knowledge and wisdom of defense matters. I'm confident that his knowledge and experience will contribute to further deepening defense and security cooperation between India and the United States.

Ladies and gentlemen, India and the United States share a strong and vibrant strategic partnership. As the world's largest democracies, we also share fundamental values and interests.

Defense cooperation between India and the United States has grown significantly in recent years, and emerged as a key pillar of our strategic partnership.

Our military-to-military engagements continue to grow. We recently concluded the trilateral Malabar naval exercise in the Bay of Bengal, along with Japan. This edition of Malabar demonstrated the progress made in operational synergies between our navies.

As we speak, our armies are conducting their exercise Yudh Abhyas in the United States. In our talks today, we agreed to explore additional and specialized exercises.

Cooperation in defense equipment has grown steadily over the past years. The U.S. is now a leading supplier of state-of-the-art defense equipment to India.

I appreciated Secretary Mattis' willingness to share further cutting-edge platforms which would enhance India's defense preparedness to meet current and emerging threats. Secretary Mattis and I agreed that we need to expand on the progress already made by encouraging co-production and co-development efforts.

I reiterated India's deep interest in enhancing defense manufacturing in India under Prime Minister Modi's make-in-India initiative. I thank Secretary Mattis for his supportive position in this regard and look forward to working closely with him to realize joint projects.

In this context, we agreed that the full implementation of the understanding reached following the announcement by the U.S. last year recognizing India as a major difference partner will provide further energy and momentum to our collaboration on defense technology and manufacturing.

We also discussed how to refocus and reenergize the Defense Technology and Trade Initiative,

the DTTI, as a mechanism to promote technology- sharing as well as co-development and co-production efforts.

We also exchanged views on regional and international issues of mutual interest. The situation in our neighborhood and the growing menace of cross-border terrorism were discussed in depth. There is growing convergence in the approaches of border countries on this issue. We both recognize the importance of holding those who use terrorism as an instrument of state policy to account and to dismantle the infrastructure that supports terrorism.

As you're aware, India welcomes President Trump's new U.S. strategy for Afghanistan announced last month. Today, I had useful discussions with Secretary Mattis on how we could strengthen our cooperation bilaterally as well as within -- as well as with the government of Afghanistan, in pursuit of our common objective of a peaceful, democratic, stable and prosperous Afghanistan.

We also discussed the issues relating to maritime security in the Indian Ocean and the broader Asia -- Asia-Pacific region, as well as regional connectivity issues. I'll read that again. We also discussed the issues relating to maritime security in the Indian Ocean and the broader Asia-Pacific region, as well as regional connectivity issues.

India supports the freedom of navigation, overflight and unimpeded lawful commerce. We also believe that disputes should be resolved through peaceful means and in accordance with the universally recognized principles of international law.

I am happy to note that Secretary Mattis reaffirmed the U.S. position in support of these principles. I also welcome his reiteration of the U.S. commitment to work with India in ensuring maritime security in the Indo-Pacific and as first responder to HADR situations.

From our discussions today, I'm confident that we are entering a new phase in our strategic defense partnerships with the United States.

I once again thank Secretary Mattis for visiting India. I also thank him for inviting me to visit the United States to carry forward our discussions.

I now invite Secretary Mattis to deliver his remarks. Thank you.