

India, Russia to expand Central Asia ties: envoy

The two countries will ink deal on logistics, naval coordination during Russian Defence Minister's visit

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India and Russia are expected to conclude the bilateral logistics agreement, Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Agreement (RELOS), and a Navy-to-Navy cooperation memorandum of understanding (MoU) when Russian Defence Minister Gen. Sergei Shoigu visits India later this year. The two sides are also looking at expanding cooperation in Central Asia and the possibility of supplementing bilateral exercises with trilateral and multilateral ones, Indian Envoy in Russia D.B. Venkatesh Varma said.

On the deal for S-400 air defence systems, the envoy, in an exclusive interview to



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INDIAN AMBASSADOR TO RUSSIA



The Hindu, said: "There are specific defence and national security considerations that led India to conclude the contract for the supply of S-400 systems. All I can say is that this contract will be implemented. We will do what we have to do and necessary for India to preserve and protect its national security interests."

Both countries are also scheduled to hold the maiden 2+2 ministerial dialogue

during the visit of Gen. Shoigu. On the summit meeting, he said that dates were yet to be fixed, but was expected to take place towards the end of this year subject to the COVID situation.

Mr. Varma said that both sides were also looking at how they could cooperate in using India as a production base for exporting to third countries of Russian-origin equipment and services and would add to the Make in In-

dia programme. "Russia will remain a key defence partner for India for decades to come," he said.

Afghanistan crisis

The fast-changing developments in Afghanistan have of course taken everyone by surprise – unexpected as to their speed, as well as their consequences, Mr. Varma said, adding that it was imperative that India and Russia adapt their policies, whatever their policies were in the past.

While a number of countries in the region and beyond are affected by the Afghan developments, India and Russia are, in essence, affected even more due to the rise of Islamic funda-

mentalist and radical groups and the sanctuary that could be claimed by terror groups, Mr. Varma said. This would impact both India and Russia and normal inter-State relations especially with respect to Central Asia, with additional threats emanating from drug trafficking, organized crime and the flow of refugees, he added.

"This could potentially up-end the very foundations of inter-state relations in the broader region," he stated.

Mr. Varma, who will be retiring in two months, described the transformation in the India-Russia relationship in the last two years as a "quiet revolution."

(Full interview on bit.ly/InterviewVenkateshVarma)