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## News & Statements



### Politics

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#### [Transcript of Joint Press Conference given by Mr. de Villepin and his counterpart Mr. Sinha](#)

[ Hyderabad House, New Delhi, Friday, 13 February, 2004 ]

Navtej Sarna, Spokesman of the Ministry of External Affairs introduced the two Ministers :

“Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen, welcome to this joint press interaction with their Excellencies the Foreign Ministers of India and France. The Foreign Minister of India, Mr Yashwant Sinha will kindly make his opening remarks” :

Yashwant Sinha : “Friends I am very happy to welcome my friend and colleague from France Dominique de Villepin to India. As you are aware this is his second visit to India after he took over as Foreign Minister, this is a record which I have not been able to match so far. But we are very happy that he is visiting us. He has just given, as you are aware a Seminal Talk on multilateralism in memory of Madhavrao Scindia and I believe that the talk and the question and answer session has gone off very well, and I have already personally congratulated Mr de Villepin on his presentation. We have spent over an hour discussing various issues we have spent time on discussing our bilateral relationship and then we have discussed the global situation. I have briefed my colleague on the situation in the sub continent, in south Asia. Mr de Villepin stopped in Afghanistan on his way to Delhi and he was kind enough to give me a first hand account of the situation in Afghanistan as he saw it, and we discussed the Middle East and the state of the peace process there, and we exchanged views on a number of issues, Very briefly, we both agreed that our bilateral relationship is exceedingly good – we have no problems in our bilateral relationship. In most areas of cooperation the mechanisms which have been set up are working well and our cooperation in every area, and specially in the area of science and technology is proceeding apace. We have exchanged views with regard to local proliferation issues also and there is a meeting of minds on that, as indeed on others issues that we have discussed. India and France have worked in the past with the greatest degree of understanding of each others positions. We have been in India been extremely grateful to France for the understanding they have shown on all issues of concern to India, and in our talks today that has come out once more very strongly. Its shared values, shared concerns, its shared approach to the resolution of many of those issues. I am very happy that we have had this opportunity once more. Dominique de Villepin and I had met last in September on the margin of the UN Assembly, and once again this has been a very important occasion for us to exchange views on a number of issues.”

Mr. de Villepin : “let me say that I was very pleased to have the opportunity to meet this morning with my friend and colleague Yashwant Sinha. He said that it is my second visit in India, but never forget that I was posted here in this country which is for me a very friendly and respected country. We’ve discussed of course all major items, regional crises, terrorism and proliferation and I was very happy to see once more that our bilateral relationship is strengthening. Major French companies as you know are investing in India to create partnerships. Our technical and scientific cooperation reflects the achievements that we can produce together – I would like to mention just one example, the implementation in Iran of a joint workshop for telemedicine, the creation of a joint laboratory on water resources management In the cultural field you may know that an important exhibition of Indian films just started in Paris. This proves once again the great interest of the French public for Indian culture. Our strategic dialogue allows us to enlarge this bilateral relationship. We share the same willingness to reinforce peace and stability in the regions of crises and to give the right

answer to the many threats of our times whether it be terrorism or proliferation. I had the opportunity as Yashwant Sinha said this morning to explain in front of many political leaders academics and youngsters how India and France could improve their cooperation to meet these challenges. Our growth is based on the same principles as India, in particular the necessity to keep the international community united so that our actions can remain legitimate. Unity, responsibility, collective security, these principles we do believe are key factors of stability of our world. This is true of course in Afghanistan, we will ensure the success of the political process if the international community remains determined to guarantee collective security and economic development in this country. We welcome the prospect of the Berlin conference and the political process and the elections that should take place this year in Afghanistan. Of course this is also true in Iraq to ensure security and to rebuild this country we must remain united. A failure in Iraq would be of course a failure for everyone. But we will make progress in this direction only with the help of the United Nations. We welcome, when I was in New York a couple of days ago, discussing this with both Kofi Annan and Colin Powell. We welcome the decision of the UN Secretary General to send a mission in Iraq to discuss how we could enrich the political process. We need to have a real political process that can set up the moves for the future of democracy in Iraq. But this of course implies that first Iraq can recover the sovereignty as soon as possible and as you know under Resolution 1511 and the agreement between the CPA the coalition force and the council of Iraqi government have decided to make this possible by the end of June and we hope that this date can be of course respected. Beyond those strategic issues Indian friends are participating to the definition of a new world order of things do strike me we share the same democratic value and the willingness to make them the basis of the multilateral instrument. This is necessary to ensure that everyone's voice will be taken into account and that the people's diversity will be correctly reflected by a number of initiatives, but a number of initiatives remain to be launched to improve the efficiency of those instruments, one of them is the enlargement of the Security Council, You know how much we are in favour of the inclusion of India as a permanent member of this body. Indeed we are deeply convinced that India has a great role to play on the world's stage. India has just showed once again a sense of responsibility by opening its dialogue with Pakistan. This is in the interests of the whole region. India is deeply committed to the fight against terrorism. She has put forward concrete proposals supported by several countries including France and India has also opened consultations with countries from the South like Brazil, where I was a couple of days ago, and South Africa to set up new rules of global governance that we need very much in our world today. So, let me express again how pleased I am to be here. I am ready to answer any questions."

Harold Hyman – Radio Classique : Soyez vous favorable a plus de présence de la communauté internationale dans le règlement pour le dossier indien pakistanais ? I translate – I made a mistake, I thought he, the Minister said something which he didn't say, so I rephrase my question :

Do you think that France can have a role in helping internationally the international community to be present in the Indian – Pakistan differences ?"

Yashwant Sinha : "I think we have stated"....

Dominique de Villepin: "I'll first correct and then you ..... it'll be better"

"I think that India and Pakistan have exactly both showed the way that is the way which we can settle problems in the world today and the decision and the gesture of the Prime Minister of India - opening the dialogue last April and the last links between Indian authorities and Pakistani authorities are the best way to deal with these matters. Bilateral relationship is of course the key of everything and between India and Pakistan the last months are giving to all the world community the best example on how to set up solutions for this region as well as in many other areas. So I think the spirit of Shimla is of course the best spirit in which we should work, and again I'm after our meeting and from what we have seen during the last exchanges, quite optimistic in the good will of India, their intention and their willingness to go forward, and it is in the interest of the region to see that bilateral talk, to see this willingness to go forward and of course the interests of the world community."

Yashwant Sinha : "The Minister has said what I wanted to say." (laughter from audience)

Amit Baruah – The Hindu : spoke in Hindi first "I will translate my question into English. if I may be permitted to ask both Ministers. Mr de Villepin in your lecture you spoke a lot about Iraq, I just wanted to know what is your assessment of the situation there, the car bombings that have been taking place, the actual position on the ground. Are we better off now than we were 6 months or 8 months ago, and if I may ask a separate question of Mr de Villepin, on the India France bilateral relationship in terms of selling Airbus aircraft or Scorpene submarines do you think that the Russians or the British have done better than you all on this front ?"

Dominique de Villepin: "Well on the first part of your question concerning Iraq, of course we have been following very closely the improving situation concerning the daily life of the Iraqis which is of course one of the key factors trying to rebuild the public services is of course a very important element and I think in all parts of the country we have seen some very encouraging progress. Of course the key question of security and violence do concerns us very much and I

think that the situation of violence and terrorism is a very worrying one. You have seen direct attacks during the last months against the coalition and you see today a growing number of terrorist attacks against the Iraqi peoples it selves with some very specific targets, the police, some representatives of the Iraqi political and civil society and that does concern us very much and that's why we believe that the political process should be enhanced, reinforced very much. It is the starting point, how to get to the full sovereignty of Iraq and as you know we have been proposing in order to make sure that this progress is getting stronger and stronger we have been proposing the idea of an international conference that could take place just after this return of sovereignty, after -- in the month of June, in order to make sure that both, all the parties, all the political forces in Iraq are going to work together and that we are able to maintain the unity of Iraq. But also to make sure that all the countries, all the neighbouring countries in the regions are going to be associated to this process it is very important to have all the neighbours, Iran, Syria, Turkey all part of the process. It is very important to have all the Arab states being part and supportive of this process and I think such a conference which could address of course, economic issues but also security issues of the regions are quite important if we want to keep up on a momentum. Today we have on the ground this commission set up by the UN Secretary General. We are waiting for the conclusions. It is of course very important to see whether we could enlarge the political process, make sure that this process is going to be well accepted by all the parties, who will depending upon the conclusions see what we can be and what we can do and how we can do better and I think that it is in the interest of the world community. Of course there is one thing which is sure – every one of us is concerned by what is going in Iraq and everyone of us do wish that things get better. It is the interest of the regional community, it is in the interest of Iraq but it is also in the interest of the world community.”

Yashwant Sinha : “India remains deeply concerned at the growing spiral of violence in Iraq. We have welcomed the involvement of the United Nations once again in the processes of Iraq and I entirely agree with what my colleague has said just now, that we are keenly looking forward to the outcome of this UN commissions visit to Iraq. It has been our view that it is only the UN which can lend credibility to the process that we want to take place in Iraq including the return of sovereignty to the Iraqi people, which must be the starting point of both democracy and peace in Iraq, to the extent to which a credible Iraqi administration can take over the reins of the government, the better it will be for the establishment of peace in that troubled part of the world.”

Dominique de Villepin: “Concerning the more bilateral question that you have asked, I must say that we have a very good and fruitful discussion with my friend and colleague Yashwant Sinha this morning and we are quite hopeful for all the different project that you have mentioned concerning the relationship between France and India”

Yashwant Sinha : “but I hasten to add that France has not lost out in \_\_\_\_”;

Agence France Presse : “Mr Sinha some French businessmen this morning said that there was a form of disability for the European Union in India. They said that for India there is France, Great Britain, Germany but it is little bit difficult for you to have a relationship with them as Europeans, do you acknowledge that, and what do you think is the way of having \_\_\_\_is it that being European doesnt exist \_\_\_\_”

Yashwant Sinha : “On the contrary, while we continue to deal bilaterally with the sovereign states within the European Union, I say with a degree of confidence that India is dealing with the European Union as an entity also. And you are aware of the fact that we have just had our fourth summit with the European Union. We have the best of relationships with the European Commission in Brussels. We engage them from time to time. In fact, if on the 13th February I am having bilateral discussions with my colleague Dominique de Villepin, on the 16th I am receiving the European Union Troika for discussions here, so therefore it is not at all correct to say that we have not. On the economic side we learnt to deal with the European Union as an entity when it was the European Economic Community, and from then on, that means from the 60's we have been watching closely the evolution of the European nations into a union finally, we have very keen interest, and one of the issues which we want to discuss with the French Foreign Minister, we did not have time to discuss, but over lunch I'll talk to him of the expansion of the European Union the five members who'll be there from the 1st of May and the issues which have been raised in the Union. We have a keen interest in this process, and India is very comfortable dealing with them.

Agence France Presse : “France has been regularly supporting India for a permanent seat in the Security Council. When exactly is this going to happen, is there a concrete timeframe ?”

Dominique de Villepin: “Well we have been supporting this idea of India as a permanent member of the UN. First because its common sense. One billion people, one billion of Indians in the world community, the biggest democracy in the world, Of course if we want to ensure more representativity of the Security Council we should take that into account, and I am confident of the spirit of responsibility of India, of course is welcome in the Security Council and it is important at this stage to be sure that we are going to reform in the good direction the UN. And there is two necessities. The first one is more representativity of course, and the

second part of the reforms should be more efficiency, and that's where we need certainly to make sure that the UN are going to have the necessary tools in order to be more active in the international community, and we have mentioned a certain number of ideas that could help for example having a real Security Council for Economic and Social Matters, for example having a Disarmament Corps, for example having a Human Rights Corps, for example having an organisation which would be specialised on the questions of environment. I think it is important to be able to reflect on all these different issues we thought that it would be useful to have the Security Council in its political formation, being in a position to meet every month, as a council of peace, in order to make sure that we can examine and work on all the different regional crises and not let things just go and from time to time say ah this regional crisis has gone out of hand, no, we should before be able to work on these difficult issues. As you know the UN Secretary General has decided a process he has decided to form a Committee. A Committee of wise persons who are going to be able to work during the next month and propose some different important projects of reforms of the UN."

Saurabh Shukla – Hindustan Times : "My question is for the French foreign minister. Mr Minister there has been a lot of concern here on the proposed turban ban in France. I am sure that our foreign Minister must have discussed this with you. (Dominique de Villepin– "absolutely") Don't you think that this kind of controversy would actually strengthen the hand of extremists who are actually unleashing a propaganda of sorts on this ?"

Dominique de Villepin: "First, I was hoping that someone was going to ask me this question. Because as you said it is important that everybody understands what is going on in France and why are we deciding to have a law on this issue of what we call in France 'laïcité' which is not an easy concept to explain and it is due to our own political history, our own political tradition in the 19th century and the beginning of this century, beginning of the 20th century that we decided in order to make sure that neutrality, tolerance, the spirit which is the one of France, of human rights and democracy has led us to decide to have a law on this separation between the state and the church to ensure that in our system religion is not going to interfere, and this is a matter not of distrust towards religion, but a matter, on the contrary of confidence, of tolerance, of respect. And due to the situation today, we thought that it could be useful to have a law in order to make sure that this sphere of tolerance is going to be fully respected. Of course as you know, the Sikh community in France is very well known and very well respected. There are approximately 5000 Sikhs in France, and of course the law is not at all aimed at any kind of religion, and we are fully respecting religions, confessions and traditions. The law is aimed to any religious sign in public schools that could create a climate of distrust and could be an attempt to this spirit of tolerance. That's why we decided to forbid all the visible, the .. what we call 'ostensible' the ostentatious signs in our public schools. As you understand its only in public schools, that's a very limited, but very important of course, area and we have begun having a discussion, a dialogue with the Sikh community. During the last month they have been received as a delegation in our Ministry of Education, two times, and the Minister, the Minister for Education, Luc Ferry, to which I have been talking before coming here to India, told me that he was going to meet again the delegation of the Sikh community, in the next days in Paris. And I am going to meet in a couple of hours with the Chairman of the Minorities here in India, to discuss this matter. But of course we are going to see the best way to answer to this question and to show the necessary respect which we have of course, for this community, but taking into account what are the constraints of our situation in France, and I am convinced that we are going to find a way which would be satisfactory for the Sikh community in France."