

India says China has surveillance base in Myanmar.By **Chaitanya Kalbag**

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NEW DELHI, May 3 (Reuters) - India's defence minister said on Sunday China had built a sophisticated electronic surveillance base in Myanmar's Coco Islands and was beefing up airfields in Tibet to take supersonic fighters.

"China has installed sophisticated electronic surveillance equipment in the Coco Islands, just 40 km (25 miles) from the northern tip of India's Andaman Islands, from where they can monitor any defence activity along India's east coast," George Fernandes said.

He said China had also been lengthening the runways at 11 air bases in Tibet from which Sukhoi fighter jets would be capable of striking at India's borders.

Fernandes was speaking at the 101st anniversary of the birth of V.K. Krishna Menon, who was defence minister in 1962 when India fought a brief and disastrous border war with China and was forced to resign as a result of the debacle.

"Myanmar's army has grown to 450,000 from 160,000 six years ago with the support of China," the minister said. "Even the United States now recognises that China's ICBMs (intercontinental ballistic missiles) are trained against the U.S., Russia and even India."

"So we have to understand the challenges before us."

Fernandes, a former socialist firebrand whose Samata Party is a key partner in India's ruling coalition led by the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, said the issue of national security had not been discussed by many recent Indian governments.

"Why is this not discussed? Because the truth will emerge," he said, adding that a strategic defence review launched by the new government would set out plans for a National Security Council.

"We have already said we will keep our options open on building nuclear weapons," Fernandes said.

For years, the minister said, Indian policy makers had perceived Pakistan as the major threat. "We've decided that we are very strong and can take on Pakistan and the subject ends there. But we forget that from 1950, when China invaded Tibet, we ought to have been concerned equally about China."

He said China had been strengthening itself over the past two decades. "People say China will be the second most powerful nation in the world after the United States."

India, which exploded a nuclear device in 1974, has exercised a self-imposed moratorium on testing and proliferation but rejects the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.

"We are capable of building nuclear weapons," Fernandes said, "and we will use our clout to tell the five nuclear states, which include China, to abolish their nuclear weapons."

Fernandes said a visit last week by Fu Quanyou, Chief of the General Staff of China's People's Liberation Army, had been marked by confidence-building talks. ((New Delhi Newsroom +91-11-301-2024 Fax +91-11-301-4043, delhi.newsroom@reuters.com)).

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