

Poroshenko Slams India for Accepting Crimean Leader as Part of Putin Delegation

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Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov (L-R), President Vladimir Putin and India's Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj attend a signing ceremony at Hyderabad House in New Delhi.

Ukrainian President Petro Poroshenko lashed out at India on Friday over a visit by the leader of Crimea, who accompanied President Vladimir Putin's annual summit delegation this week.

India does not back Western sanctions against Russia, and the unofficial trip by Sergei Aksyonov could spoil the mood before Prime Minister Narendra Modi hosts U.S. President Barack Obama for India's Republic Day festivities in January.

Poroshenko, addressing the Lowy Institute think tank in Sydney, said India was placing more importance on "money" than "values" by welcoming Aksyanov, and it was not standing with "civilization" against Russian aggression.

"It is not an easy job, to keep the world together," Poroshenko said to laughter, when asked

by a journalist about the visit.

"The Indian position doesn't help, it doesn't save Mr. Aksyanov," he added. "He is a criminal, it's very simple. He has a criminal background and no doubt he has a criminal future."

U.S. State Department spokeswoman Jen Psaki said the United States was "troubled" by reports that Aksyonov may have been part of Putin's delegation and was seeking more information.

"We understand that the Indian External Affairs Ministry have said they were not officially aware of his visit or his participation in the delegation ... We are seeking further clarification on that."

Psaki also referred to reports of new nuclear and defense deals between India and Russia and reiterated Washington's view that it was "not time for business as usual with Russia."

Aksyonov arrived at the upscale Oberoi Hotel in New Delhi accompanied by Russian diplomats to be greeted by Gul Kripalani, a Mumbai-based seafood merchant who wants to boost trade with Russia.

Speaking to reporters after signing a memorandum of understanding to promote business, Aksyonov said his visit had "a private character" and he did not take part in any official events.

He tweeted separately, however, that he had come to India as "a member of the delegation under the leadership of the president of the Russian federation, Vladimir Putin".

India, which observes a policy of non-intervention, has refrained from criticizing Moscow's takeover of Crimea and support for an uprising in eastern Ukraine that has killed more than 4,300 people since April.

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