



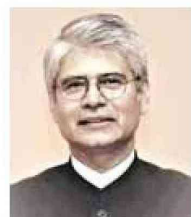
The strength of India-Russia strategic relations will be enhanced by supporting the work of talented individuals from both countries in all aspects of human endeavour to give direction to the future development of bilateral relations in the 21st Century

In April 2018, the year-long calendar of events marking the 70th anniversary of India-Russia diplomatic relations came to an end. Looking back at the seven decades of close interaction between the two countries, some significant moments stand out. India and the Soviet Union established diplomatic relations on April 13, 1947, some months before India's formal Independence in August that year, through an exchange of diplomatic notes between their envoys in China. This method was resorted to because of the reluctance of the United Kingdom, which was still the colonial power in India, to endorse the decision of India's Interim Government to establish diplomatic relations between India and the Soviet Union.

The year 1955 was critical for India-Soviet Union relations, marking the first exchange of "summit" level interaction between the two countries. Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru visited Moscow as the leader of independent India in June that year. Intriguingly, this was several decades after his first visit to Moscow in 1927, and almost eight years after India's Independence. This was reciprocated by the visit of the top Soviet leadership of First Secretary Nikita Khrushchev of the Soviet Communist Party and Prime Minister Nikolai Bulganin to India in November. The visits laid the foundation for today's strategic partnership between India and Russia.

The political impact of these visits was evident internationally in the UN Security Council, where the Soviet Union used its veto power for the first time to block anti-India initiatives on Jammu & Kashmir (in February 1957 and June 1962) and Goa (December 1961). The economic impact of these visits was the creation of an infrastructural launch pad for India's aspirations to become a manufacturing and knowledge-based economy. Already in February 1955, bilateral agreement had been reached on constructing the Bhilai steel plant. This was followed by the creation of major Indian public sector enterprises, which are household names today, such as Bharat Heavy Electricals Limited (BHEL) and Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC), among others. In 1958, the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) Bombay was established with financing received from the Soviet Union through UNESCO. In 1963, the defence manufacturing sector was added to bilateral relations, with the first licensed production of MiG-21 aircraft in India. Aeronautics India Limited, set up specifically for this purpose, was merged in 1964 with Hindustan Aircraft Limited of Bangalore to become Hindustan Aeronautics Limited or HAL.

The third landmark is 1971. In August that year, India signed a Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation with the Soviet Union. During the December 1971 war with Pakistan, which resulted in the independence of Bangladesh, India was able to use the diplomatic space



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provided by this treaty to successfully implement its military and diplomatic objectives. The Soviet Union cast three vetoes in the UN Security Council on December 4, 5, and 13 to block attempts to stop India from its ongoing military campaign. (In an ironic twist, the first veto used in the UN Security Council by the newly admitted People's Republic of China as a permanent member on August 25, 1972, was to prevent the admission of Bangladesh as a member of the UN).

1991 was a watershed year for both India and Russia. In July that year, India's annual Budget presented to Parliament outlined its historic economic reforms. In December that year, one of the final decisions of the Soviet Parliament was that the Russian Federation would be the successor

India's aspirational policies. India's foreign policy objectives have been consciously directed towards integrating India more effectively into the complex matrix of bilateral and multilateral cooperation to ensure the peaceful external environment needed to sustain its growth.

Newly independent Russia embraced the path of radical economic reforms in 1992, based on the concept of "shock therapy". Russia opted for a presidential form of democracy, based on its Constitution adopted after a referendum in 1993. Unlike India, where there has been continuity in its political discourse while undergoing economic reforms, Russia experienced the unique phenomenon of breaking out of the political shackles of Communist ideology, rediscovering its rich civilisational

had said that, "Russia and India are ancient civilisations, but at the same time, they are living democracies." During that visit, the then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had asserted that "as traditional friends, we wish to see Russia as a strong and confident state, an important constituent of a multi-polar world order". These two statements highlight the core values that lie at the heart of the formal India-Russia strategic partnership launched during that visit, which was elevated to a "special and privileged strategic partnership" in 2010. It is evident from the seven decades of bilateral relations that both India and Russia have consistently supported each other's aspirations to re-emerge as revitalised nation-states on the international stage.

Today, the India-Russia strategic partnership faces some daunting challenges. Some of these challenges emanate from within the relationship itself, especially in the acknowledged shortfalls in the areas of economic cooperation and people-to-people exchanges. Some of these challenges are linked with the disruptions being caused to the international order by the continuing threat of terrorism, which directly impacts multi-religious societies like India and Russia. The emergence of assertive unilateralism is the most recent of such challenges, which threatens the carefully built balance and structure of international cooperation where India and Russia have cooperated to mutual benefit.

Looked at from this perspective, it is possible to identify at least five specific steps which could steer India-Russia strategic relations towards their mutually agreed objective.

First is the annual summit mechanism. President Putin, as "the original architect of India-Russia strategic relations", created the annual summit mechanism in 2000, alter-

ning between India and Russia, to drive the strategic partnership by ensuring the regular meeting of the executive heads of the two countries. The 18th such summit was held in St Petersburg in 2017 during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit, demonstrating the viability and resilience of this idea.

The recently announced informal summit (called "working visit" by the Russian side) between Prime Minister Modi and President Putin to be held in Russia on May 21, 2018, is a harbinger of the kind of innovation that is needed to enable more frequent, and less structured, discussions between the executive heads of India and Russia.

Through such informal meetings, India and Russia would be better placed to pursue mutually agreed policy options to counter the disruption that directly or indirectly impinges on their strategic partnership. A good example of the kind of challenge that would require such informal meetings is the response of the India-Russia strategic partnership to the unilateral imposition of sanctions by third countries.

Second, India and Russia signed an agreement on principles of cooperation between the states and union territories of India and the constituent entities of the Russian Federation at their summit in 2000. Prime Minister Modi, when he was Chief Minister of Gujarat, and the then Governor Anatoly Guzhvin of Astrakhan implemented this agreement by entering into a cooperation agreement between their respective entities during the 2001 summit held in Moscow. Last June, Prime Minister Modi had interacted with Russia's Regional Governors. Discussions have been held on making this mechanism more effective and extending its coverage.

**THE RECENTLY ANNOUNCED INFORMAL SUMMIT BETWEEN MODI AND PUTIN, TO BE HELD IN RUSSIA ON MAY 21, IS A HARBINGER OF THE KIND OF INNOVATION THAT IS NEEDED TO ENABLE MORE FREQUENT AND LESS STRUCTURED DISCUSSIONS BETWEEN THE TWO EXECUTIVE HEADS**

The writer was India's Ambassador to the United Nations (2013-2015), and India's Deputy Ambassador to the Russian Federation (2001-2005). His writings on Russia have been published in India and abroad

state of the dissolved Soviet Union. Since 1991, India and Russia have taken different paths towards achieving their socio-economic objectives. India, building on the resilient structures of parliamentary democracy established in the country after Independence in 1947, followed the path of phased economic reforms for growth. This process has withstood the test of successive General Elections to catapult the country into its current position as the seventh biggest economy in the world, valued at \$2.26 trillion. The socio-political impact of this has been reflected in

heritage in the process.

Today, the World Bank lists Russia as the world's 12th biggest economy by the GDP, valued at \$1.28 trillion. From its initial period of volatile socio-economic and political developments, including weathering the 2008 global financial crisis, Russia has stabilised into a strong nation-state. Russian foreign policy reflects the objective of securing peace and stability around its immediate periphery in order to sustain its socio-economic development.

In his historic address to India's Parliament during his first state visit in 2000, President Vladimir Putin

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One proposal is to apply this mechanism to the Russian Far East. The natural resource-rich Russian Far East, bordering China, Japan, and the Korean Peninsula, comprises nine constituent entities of the Russian Federation, with a population of about seven million people. Bringing India's new focus on "cooperative federalism" into play, this mechanism could become a delivery vehicle for boosting economic and people-to-people exchanges, contributing to the substance of the strategic partnership in a sensitive region of Asia. For this, both sides would need to carefully identify those states and entities which have the capacity and interest to interact meaningfully in the Russian Far East. Sectors such as pharmaceuticals, gems and jewellery, agro-processing, tourism, and IT-enabled services could become the specific drivers of greater exchanges. The success of such a "pilot project" would have a major impact on this area of cooperation, and on the overall strategic partnership between India and Russia.

Third, steps could be taken to integrate the discussions and work of the three structured platforms servicing the annual summit with the objective of enabling the effective participation of India and Russia in each other's manufacturing sectors. These three platforms are the India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission

(IRIGC), mandated to look at economic cooperation; the India-Russia Military Technical Commission (MTC), mandated to look at defence cooperation; and the newly created High Level Science and Technology Commission for scientific and technological cooperation.

The successful synergy of using strategic relations and objectives to bring together technology (including research and development), manufacturing, employment generation, and marketing is evident in the bilateral cooperation between India and Russia in the defence production arena under the MTC and can be used as a template in a wider context to boost economic relations.

The manufacture and supply of tanks and missiles (T-90 and BrahMos), ships and submarines (the Talwar-class stealth frigates, the aircraft-carrier Vikramaditya and the nuclear submarine Arihant), fighter and early airborne warning aircraft (Sukhoi 30MKI and IL-76) are all examples of such cooperation. Each of these contracts significantly supported the Russian manufacturing sector, including in the development and application of innovative technologies, and generated employment in Russia during a time of great tribulations within the Russian economy and society. Each of the products that were acquired by India through this cooperation has significantly enhanced India's



defence and security capacities. In some cases, Russian technologies and platforms have been inducted into the Indian armed forces before they were inducted into the Russian armed forces. This dimension has added the vital element of trust, which anchors the strategic partnership between India and Russia.

Integrating the work and output of the three structures would help identify and achieve specific steps to give substance to India-Russia economic cooperation. Such a step would implement Russia's declared objective of increased participation in the Make in India programme, and open similar opportunities for Indian entities, including small and medium enterprises, to enter corresponding sectors in Russia.

Eventually, the emergence of an integrated platform of policy-makers and entities actually engaged on the ground would drive the India-Russia strategic partnership in the future, implementing the core vision.

Fourth, steps should be taken to create a sustainable structure to take India-Russia energy partnership into the Eurasian region. This cooperation has been remarkable since 2000. The ONGC's external arm, OVL-Videsh, has invested 20 per cent in Russia's \$12 billion Sakhalin-I project, in which the other shareholders are Exxon of the United States, Sodeco of Japan, and Rosneft of Russia. In 2015, the OVL invested \$1.5 billion for a 15 per cent stake in Rosneft's Vangkor oilfield, one of the largest continental oilfields in

Russia. In turn, Rosneft has invested \$13 billion in Essar Oil, which owns Gujarat's Vadinar Oil Refinery, the second largest in India. Gazprom of Russia has a 20-year supply agreement with GAIL to supply 2.5 million tonnes of LNG annually to India, beginning this year.

As analysts have pointed out, the contracted volumes are sufficient to cover 10 per cent of gas and 5 per cent of oil imported by India at present. In non-fossil energy, Rusatom of Russia is currently the only foreign investor in India's civilian nuclear energy sector, with the first two 1,000W units of the Kudankulam power plant already commissioned. India and Russia presently plan to construct up to 20 nuclear power plants in India. Clearly, the foundation exists

for creating a Eurasian energy grid of producers and consumers, which can become economically viable and sustainable, and one of the drivers of India-Russia strategic cooperation.

Fifth, to become more vibrant, steps need to be taken to connect the younger generations of India and Russia as future stakeholders in the partnership. Historically, the role played by individuals in generating greater awareness and understanding about India and Russia cannot be underestimated. India has played an important role in the Russian imagination for centuries. A Russian trader, Afanasy Nikitin, compiled the first Russian travelogue on India during his journey between 1466 and 1472 (before Vasco da Gama "discovered" India in 1498 for the Western world). The first major Russian Indologist, Gerasim Lebedev, lived and worked in Kolkata at the close of the 18th century. His grammar of East Indian languages was published in 1801. The famous Russian 19th Century artist, Vasily Vereshchagin, (with his wife Elizabeth Kondratievna) first visited India in 1874, spending two years painting hundreds of portraits and landscapes of India, many of which can be seen today in Moscow's famous Tretyakov Gallery. The impact of Indian films on Russian society is acknowledged by both sides at all levels of interaction.

Russia's influence on

India over the centuries is being gradually put into the public domain. Connectivity for transport of goods, services and ideas enriched the interaction between India and Russia through the Silk Road, the precursor of today's ambitious North-South Transport Corridor project between the two countries. The Caspian port city of Astrakhan was a major confluence of India-Russia contact, and even had its "Indian Quarter" as noted in a book published in 1716. In the 20th Century, Russia's role in the evolution of Indian thought was symbolised by the correspondence between Mahatma Gandhi and Leo Tolstoy dating back to 1899. Russia was carried into the popular imagination by the writings of Rabindranath Tagore, who visited Russia in September 1930. Rukmini Devi Arundale, India's famous Bharatanatyam dancer, who founded the cultural and educational centre Kalakshetra in 1938, acknowledged the influence of Russia's legendary ballerina Anna Pavlova on her as a "spiritual teacher" and inspiration. The life and work of Nikolai Roerich, the philosopher-artist, who was born in Tsarist Russia in 1874 and died in independent India in December 1947, is symbolic of the spiritual dimension of India-Russia relations.

The strength of India-Russia strategic relations will be enhanced by supporting the work of talented individ-

uals from both countries in all aspects of human endeavour to give direction to the future development of bilateral relations in the 21st Century. In this context, the third International Conference of Indologists held in St Petersburg in April 2018 showcased the need to broaden and deepen people-to-people interaction to cover the entire gamut of social sciences between the two countries as a top priority. This will generate "knowledge leaders" in different areas, who can transform and sustain this relationship as a popular relationship. In the process, the values that imbue the India-Russia ties today can be better appreciated, including the impact of the civilisational dimension.

The international ecosystem in which the India-Russia strategic partnership functions is undergoing a period of great churn, especially in Asia. The common membership of India and Russia in Eurasian bodies, like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building in Asia, provide a broader framework for the partnership. Imaginatively used, these platforms can help India and Russia contribute to stability in international relations, based on the principles of the UN Charter and a mutual interest in focusing on national development with a supportive external structure of peace and security.