



■ Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Russian President Vladimir Putin during a bilateral meeting, Tashkent, Uzbekistan (File Photo)

PTI

Will the Sochi summit revive India-Russia ties?

Given US President Donald Trump's whimsical policies, it's important that New Delhi reaches out to Moscow



This seems to be the season for informal summits, especially among powerful leaders of major powers. After meeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi this Monday, Russian President Vladimir Putin will meet German Chancellor Angela Merkel and French President Emmanuel Macron next week. Modi is also expected to have many such informal summits.

In view of United States President Donald Trump's whimsical policies, these informal summits seek to reset the shape and scope of rapidly transforming global geopolitics. Also, this hyperactive footwork seems a perfect fit for Modi's personality-driven style of diplomacy as he prefers to directly engage world leaders free from the constraints of protocols, officials, agendas or outcomes. Here the optics, atmospherics and personal chemistry create a mystique of trust, promising bold decisions to resolve complex conundrums.

However, the Modi-Putin Sochi meet has its bilateral drivers. The last two-decades of India cosyng up to the US has resulted in Russia's drift towards China and Pakistan. India's defence imports from Russia have declined substantially and this will continue given that most of India's recent procurement deals have

been with western nations. Trump's 'America First' has ignited an urgency for New Delhi to mend its ties with Beijing and Moscow.

Trump's Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanction's Act poses the most formidable challenge to India-Russia defence cooperation. It seeks to impose sanctions on countries doing business with US adversaries. It has triggered sanctions on Russia and threatened to scuttle its defence exports to India. Trump's withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal will re-impose sanctions on Iran and will also target countries doing business with Tehran. Thus, Sochi will explore ways of protecting India-Russia defence ties.

Conversely, Trump's decisions have also triggered his crisis of credibility in West Asia, and, given India's enduring interests in the region, Modi must synergise India's policies with Moscow's approach to Iran, Syria, Afghanistan and on other themes like terrorism. This has already seen New Delhi stand by Moscow in its recent standoffs with western nations, first on the Salisbury case of chemical poisoning of two Russians in Britain and then in the case of Russian support for Bashar al-Assad regime's alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria.

Modi and Putin will discuss how to co-ordinate various regional and global issues, in addition to ways to protest bilateral defence, nuclear and infrastructure projects. This will also set the tone for the many meetings the two leaders will have throughout this year.

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The views expressed are personal*