

# ENGAGING EUROPE

PM Modi did well to reaffirm India's strategic partnerships with Russia and France. The new global imperatives call for it

**A**S AMERICA ENTERS an uncertain era and great power relations turn turbulent, India is eager to sustain two of its long-standing strategic partnerships with Russia and France. That was the main message from the second leg of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's European sojourn last week. In the first part of the four-nation tour that took the PM to Germany and Spain, Modi's emphasis was on exploring the new avenues of cooperation with Germany and other European nations that Delhi has long neglected. Just before Modi arrived in the old continent, President Donald Trump was there shocking America's European allies with his boorish personal behaviour and anti-globalist worldview. Coupled with Trump's warmth towards China and Russia, the unfolding Western divide has begun to complicate the assumptions of India's international calculus since the end of the Cold War. Sharpening the case for a fresh Indian look at its external environment was Trump's rant against India in announcing the decision to quit the 2015 Paris accord on climate change after his return to Washington.

Amidst this new international fluidity, Delhi appreciates the need to minimise the emerging friction in the old partnership with Moscow. That India has been anxious about Russia's drift towards China and Pakistan has not been a secret. Modi's talks with President Putin did not end the differences on assessing the regional situation. For Putin sidestepped questions on Kashmir and signaled that Russia will continue to improve ties with Pakistan. Modi's focus in Moscow was on limiting political differences with Putin and revitalising the stagnant commercial engagement with Russia. If Modi turned on his personal charm to reboot the trust-based relationship with Putin, his mission to Paris about establishing rapport with President Emmanuel Macron who has just taken charge of France. Paris has always been an exception to India's ambivalent relationship with the West, and Modi appears to have won Macron's commitment to build on the special relationship with France in the areas of high technology and defence and extend it to counter terrorism.

Macron's decision to accompany Modi to a memorial for Indian soldiers who fought in France during the First World War is an acknowledgement not just of Delhi's past contribution to European geopolitics, but its future role in ordering this vital region. In aligning with Europe on mitigating climate change amidst US pull out of the Paris Accord and navigating the current divisions between Russia on the one hand and Germany and France on the other, Modi has shown some diplomatic finesse. But to play the long game in these tumultuous times, the PM must get his domestic economic and security decision-making upto speed with the new global imperatives.