

Indo-Russia bilateral meet

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Manifest pedagogy: Look East has come a long way since its inception. It had its second phase under Vajpayee later changing to Act East under Modi. Now it has got a new dimension through Act Far East. It is very important for students to understand this trajectory to getting a complete hold over the topic.

In news: Recently honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Russia.

Placing it in syllabus: India-Russia bilateral relations

Dimensions:

- Recent visit by Modi
- Act Far East policy and different agreements signed
- Importance and challenges

Content:

Recently Narendra Modi became the first Indian prime minister to visit Russia's Far Eastern city of Vladivostok. He was there to attend the **20th India-Russia Annual Summit** followed by the **fifth Eastern Economic Forum (EEF)**, in which he was the chief guest.

The bilateral agreements signed ranged from expanding cooperation in military technology and civil nuclear energy – for which Russia is India's foremost partner – to hydrocarbons, mining and space. The countries signed a joint statement that recognized Greater Eurasia and the “**regions of the Indian and Pacific Oceans**” as forming part of a common space and agreed to intensify consultations on complementarities between their respective integration

initiatives.

The special and privileged strategic partnership between India and Russia now spans across both Eurasia and the Indo-Pacific. Russia's invitation of Prime Minister Modi as the EEF's chief guest is an acknowledgement of the confluence of the Indian and Pacific oceans.

The forum focused on the development of business and investment opportunities in the Russian Far East Region.

Indo – Russia partnership is complemented by a desire to promote a multi-polar world and it is imperative for both the countries to closely cooperate towards this end in regional and multilateral fora. Hence the leaders agreed to facilitate, in all possible ways, exploring the impressive potential of strategic partnership to the fullest, which has emerged as an anchor of stability in a complex international situation.

Agreements signed:

- India and Russia decided to step up industrial cooperation and create new technological and investment partnership, especially in advanced high-tech areas, with an aim to increase bilateral trade to \$30 billion by 2025.
- Both sides signed an agreement to develop a Vladivostok-Chennai sea route, which can become India's springboard in the Northeast Asian market.
- Both sides agreed that the work on promoting mutual settlements of payments in national currencies will be continued.
- Both the sides expressed their interest in expanding the participation of Russian business in 'Make in India' programme and that of Indian companies in investment projects in Russia.
- In this context, they have agreed to speed up preparations for signing of the India-Russia

Intergovernmental Agreement on Promotion and Mutual Protection of Investments.

- By the proposed **Trading Agreement between the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Republic of India**, it was agreed to intensify work for eliminating trade barriers.
- The two sides agreed to cooperate in the supply of coking coal from Russian Far East to India.
- The Roadmap for cooperation in Hydrocarbons for 2019–24 was signed during the Summit.
- The pacts signed during the visit included an MoU on bilateral cooperation in the road transport and road industry, plan for cooperation for combating customs violations in 2019-2022.
- Cooperation Agreement between Invest India and the Russian Direct Investment Fund for Investment Collaboration, Cooperation agreement between the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry the Roscongress Foundation, MoU between the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry and the Autonomous Non-profit Organization Agency for Strategic Initiatives to promote New Projects were signed.
- Both Sides agreed to hold a High Level Tiger Forum in India in 2020, involving tiger range countries, conservation partners and other stakeholders.
- Both Sides welcomed the increased cooperation between the State Space Corporation “Roscosmos” and the ISRO, including the human spaceflight programs and satellite navigation.
- They welcomed the active work carried out within the framework of the signed **MoU on support of the Russian Side for India’s** first manned mission “**Gaganyaan**”.
- An agreement was also signed on Cooperation between Joint-Stock Company Rosgeologia and Srei Infrastructure Finance Limited.
- Both sides agreed to review the possibility of expanding direct passenger and cargo flights including flights between various regions of both the countries.

- They also discussed easing of visa norms for Indian business persons and smoothing of currency matters.
- Among the other sectors identified for intensified cooperation are agriculture, pharmaceuticals and infrastructure.

Act Far East policy:

Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the **'Act Far East' policy** during his two-day visit to Russia, where he announced a **\$1 billion line of credit** for the development of the resource-rich region.



- He asserted that India will walk **shoulder-to-shoulder with Russia** in its development of the Far East.
- Act Far East" policy aims to boost India's engagement with Russia's Far East region thus adding a new dimension to the economic diplomacy of the two countries.
- He is the first Indian prime minister to visit the Russian Far East Region.
- Russian Far East will now serve as a **crucial point linking the continental and maritime geographies**.
- This provides a new vision for the India-Russia partnership and could also help **mitigate the strategic and political divergence** – particularly Russia's partnership with China and India's with the West.
- This policy is said to be an extension to India's **Act East policy**.
- The focus of the Act East policy, which began as a "Look East policy" – that was launched by the former prime minister PV Narasimha Rao in 1991 – was to shift the country's trading focus from the west and neighbour to the booming South East Asian countries.
- Its major objectives are to increase the interaction of the northeastern Indian states with other neighbouring

countries and to curb the increasing impact of China in the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) region.

- So far, it has not only helped build better bilateral ties with the eastern countries but also shifted the focus from the west, to further enhance global understanding and multilateral cooperation.
- Now Prime Minister Modi envisages that the Far East “will become a confluence of the Eurasian Union on one side and the open, free and inclusive Indo-Pacific on the other.”

Importance and challenges:

India is making efforts at enhancing cooperation with the Russian Far East. As a first step, for the first time ever a delegation of four Chief Ministers of Indian states led by the Commerce and Industry Minister of India visited Vladivostok on 12-13 August 2019 to explore avenues of greater bilateral engagement in targeted sectors.

India looks forward to cooperate with Russia in the Arctic and is ready to play a significant role in the Arctic Council. The **energy industry has traditionally been a key area of interaction** between the two countries – this is an area where Indian and Russian economies complement each other beneficially. Civil nuclear cooperation between India and Russia is an important component of strategic partnership.

India and Russia attach great importance to the development of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). Both the countries have always strived to upgrade their defense cooperation, by fostering joint development and production of military equipment, components and spare parts, improving the after-sales service system and by holding regular joint exercises of the Armed Forces of the two countries.

Russia has reiterated its support to India’s candidacy for the

permanent membership of a reformed UN Security Council. Both Sides are committed to strengthen multi sectoral partnership within BRICS. India and Russia unanimously recognize the effectiveness and great potential of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and strive to further strengthen the Organization as an important pillar of the emerging multipolar world order based on equal and indivisible security.

But India should also consider Moscow's criticism of the Indo-Pacific concept. The most prominent among divergence over foreign policy priorities is the Russian displeasure over the ideation of the "Indo-Pacific," with Russia calling it an "artificially imposed construct" being promoted by the US, Australia and Japan, to contain China. Russia thinks the West is unlikely to establish an equitable regional mechanism that considers the legitimate interests of all players, which threatens to fragment this shared space.

Moscow also considers regional states, particularly those in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), to be the central elements in regional integration and cooperation processes. But Russia may not oppose to India's vision for the Indo-Pacific, which is premised on inclusiveness, openness and ASEAN's centrality and unity.

While Moscow's deepening partnerships with Islamabad and Beijing worry India, both have shared interests in ensuring a more prosperous and stable Eurasia. India is working alongside Moscow in initiatives across the continent ranging from transport corridors, particularly the long-delayed International North-South Transport Corridor which became partly operational last year, to regional organizations such as the SCO – which India was admitted into in 2017 along with Pakistan with Moscow's support.

At the 20th Annual Summit recently, both leaders noted progressive development of the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership between India and Russia. These

relations are unique and are based on similar civilizational values, time-tested friendship, mutual understanding, trust, common interests and proximity of approaches to the fundamental issues of development and economic progress.

Hence India should not have a preconceived notion that Russia will turn away from China nor that India should turn away from the West. These relationships are driven by deeper strategic and economic imperatives and indicates that India and Russia are expanding their foreign policy options