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## Re-Energizing Indo-Russia Bilateral Ties with Special Reference to Recent 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual India-Russia Summit

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### **Abstract:**

*Indo-Russia bilateral relation is considered one of the world's most time-tested friendships ever. Over the years, the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership with regular high-level visits and exchanges diversified the bilateral relationship between India and Russia beyond defence and energy sector. The recent visit of P.M. Modi to Moscow in 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual India-Russia Summit was seen as having a wider geopolitical perspective as well as significance. It was the Modi's 6<sup>th</sup> official visits to Russia. He raised the issue of Russia-Ukraine crisis and advocated for peace depicting as the solution cannot be found in the battlefield rather it is negotiation to bring solution. Besides, India-Russia bolstering strategic ties is seen as crucial for the whole world. During the visit, praising India's achievements to Indian diaspora, Modi also revoked about the envision India as the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest economy in the world in his third term.*

**Keywords: Bilateral, Geo-political, India, Russia, Strategic, Summit.**

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**Introduction:** India and Russia have a close relationship from the soviet era. Since then, it has been playing a crucial role in India's defence and development. 'The Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Co-operation' of 1971 is the basis for these bilateral ties. However, Soviet Union's support to India during some crucial circumstances like in the time of Indo-Pak wars strengthened these ties further. It has been a longstanding and time-tested bilateral tie as well as a key pillar of India's external policy with Russia. Besides, the signing of the "Declaration on the India-Russia strategic partnership" in October 2000 during the visit of President Valdimir Putin to India was sufficiently qualitative in nature and reached the cooperation at almost all levels like political, defence, security, trade and commerce, science and technology, space, culture and people-to-people ties (Govt. of India, 2024). Moreover, the visit of the Russian President to India in December, 2010, the Indo-

Russia relation reached to a new height which elevated the strategic partnership to the level of 'specific and privileged strategic partnership' (Foshko, 2011). It indicates the operation of several institutionalized dialogue mechanisms at both political and official levels to ensure regular interaction and follow-up actions. In addition to that a new dimension to the bilateral co-operation initiated in December, 2021 with the first 2+2 dialogue (Foreign and Defence Ministers of both countries) taking place alongside the summit level talks between the head of two governments. Apart from that, both the countries remain in touch at various levels like leadership, ministerial, inter-governmental as well as multilateral engagements at regular basis (Moscow, 2024).

**Literature Review:** India-Russia relations have been a subject of interest for scholars and researchers in recent years. Some literature reviews are:

Stobdan (2018) examines the evolution of India-Russia relations since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Stobdan argues that the relationship has transformed from a transactional to a strategic partnership with a focus on defense, energy, and economic cooperation. Sharma (2020) provides an overview of the key themes and trends in India-Russia relations, including defense cooperation, energy trade and cultural exchange. Sharma highlights the need for further research on the impact of global geopolitics on the bilateral relationship. Singh (2019) critically examines the defense cooperation between India and Russia, including arms trade, joint military exercises, and defense technology transfer. The author argues that while defense cooperation remains a cornerstone of the relationship, it also poses challenges for India's defense modernization efforts. Gupta (2018) analyzes the Sakhalin-III oil and gas project in Russia, which involves Indian investment. The author highlights the project's significance for India's energy security and the challenges faced in implementing the project. Mukherjee (2020) explores the cultural exchange programs and people-to-people contacts between India and Russia, including educational exchanges, tourism, and cultural events. The author argues that these initiatives have helped strengthen the bilateral relationship and promote mutual understanding.

These literature reviews provide a comprehensive overview of different aspects of the India-Russia relations, more specifically in defense cooperation, energy trade, cultural exchange, and people-to-people contacts. These also indicate various complexities and challenges in the relationship and suggest areas for further studies.

**Methodology:** This paper is based upon the method of content analysis. Hence, the data has been collected from secondary sources, namely, magazines, books, working papers, news papers, articles and internet sites etc.

**Co-operation in defence, security and technology:** India's relation with Russia in defence has always been longstanding and wide-ranging cooperation and it has also been a trustworthy supplier of defence equipment including modern tanks, missiles, helicopters, submarines, aircraft and other defence technologies to India. Besides, both the countries often engage in joint military exercises, share intelligence and counter terrorism co-operation as their geopolitical and internal security precautions. Both the countries also

participate in multilateral exercises such as Vostok 2022 held in September, 2022, Russia. The defence ties between both the countries have evolved over time from buyer-seller to joint research and development, joint co-operation of advanced defence technology and systems. Russia has been India's one of the most reliable partners in its nuclear energy programme especially the construction of nuclear power plants.

Moreover, the collaboration on innovation in different areas of science and technology between the two countries include clean energy, Agri-tech, space research, medical science and engineering etc.

**Collaboration in trade and commerce:** India has a big market which enhances the investment opportunities and joint ventures for Russia to expand economic ties with India covering various sectors like energy, infrastructure, information technology, pharmaceuticals and so on. Over the years, bilateral trade and commerce has been growing rapidly between India and Russia. Both the countries had earlier set the targets of enhancing bilateral trade to \$ 30 billion and bilateral investment to \$ 50 billion by the year 2025. As per figures revealed in Financial Year 2023-24 by the department of commerce, bilateral trade has reached an all-time high of \$ 65.70 billion (Kumar, 2024). India imports largely from Russia include oil and petroleum products, fertilizers, mineral resources, precious stones and metals etc., while the exported items from India include pharmaceuticals, organic chemicals, iron and steel, electrical machinery and mechanical appliances. On the other hand, the bilateral investments between the two countries are maintained stronger with the Russia's investment in India are banking, railways, oil and gas, petrochemicals and steel sectors whereas Indian bilateral investments in Russia include primarily in the sector of oil and gas and pharmaceuticals (Moscow, 2024).

**Cultural exchanges and people to people contact:** Fostering greater understanding between the two states, people to people contacts through deep and historic cultural linkages have been playing an important role since long. Both the countries have cultural centres to promote languages, arts and cultural activities to strengthen the bilateral ties. Moreover, increasing tourism between the two countries has been bolstering people to people contacts. This has been accelerated by both countries' effort through the facility of e-visas.

**International co-operation:** Both the countries share common views on various major global issues including multilateralism, counter terrorism in the world forums such as United nations, G-8, G-20, BRICS and the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO). Russia has consistently expressed support for India's candidature for a permanent seat at the UNSC. This time-tested relationship is based on trust, mutual understanding and strategic convergence which is highly appreciated by the leaders of both countries. This growing bilateral tie further deepened by recent regular multilevel bilateral engagements between the two nations, including India's Chair-ship of SCO and G20 in 2023. The expansion of Indo-Russia relation over the entire spectrum of co-operation is basically a shared foreign policy priority.

**Recent 22<sup>nd</sup> annual India-Russia summit and future prospects:** Over the years, the Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership with regular high-level visits and exchanges diversified the bilateral relationship between India and Russia beyond defence and energy sector. The recent Moscow visit of P.M. Modi in 22<sup>nd</sup> Annual India-Russia Summit was seen as having a wider geopolitical perspectives as well as significance. The ties of both the countries have shaped new contours with this two-day visit displaying the commitment towards strengthening historical relationships with Russia. P.M. Modi has broken the tradition travelling first to the neighbouring country after being sworn in which he followed in his previous two terms. In this third consecutive term, P.M. Modi has chosen Russia not only showed the change in his foreign policy priority rather a strategic move when at the same time around, the leaders of 32 countries of NATO gathered in celebrating 75 years of its anti-Russian stand in Washington DC. It was also his first visit to Russia since it invaded Ukraine in February, 2022. Starting with Guard of Honour at the Moscow airport, Modi's two-day official visit for the 22<sup>nd</sup> Indio-Russia bilateral relation indicated many things. It also implies that India is not going to give up the most strategic relationship with Russia despite the concern of the western world in this prevailing international situation. Rather, it is among the few nations to have a good relation with both the western world and Russia. All eyes of the European countries and more specifically neighbouring countries like Pakistan and China were on this Modi's visit. The question raises all around that; can this decisive diplomatic move of Modi change the global equation in this crucial time of world order? Or will India be able to defuse the current situation between Russia and Ukraine? The time can respond better to these questions. However, India's diplomatic stand on Russia-Ukraine war is a crucial as it has not been condemned Russia's invasion yet. Rather, there is a perception regarding India that has been made in the international arena is the only nation to become a mediator between Ukraine and Russia as it has maintained good relations with both sides. PM Modi's conversation with Ukrainian President Zelenskyy during the last G7 meeting in Italy and time to time telephonic conversations with both the rivalries proved that relation (Znwar, 2024). Regarding Russia-Ukraine crisis as one of the focussed areas of Modi's Moscow visit, he revealed that the solution cannot be in the battlefield and this is not the era of war rather dialogue is perhaps only way forward and solutions can be provided. Putin lauds PM Modi's contribution to international peace in the event of bilateral talks. The Russian president appreciated P.M. Modi's effort to find ways to resolve the Russia-Ukraine war through negotiation and mediation as peaceful means when he presents highest Russian civilian honour '*Order of St. Andrew the Apostle*' to Modi. This honour is actually the manifestation of importance of India in the world forum as the raising power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Prime Minister describes the relation between India and Russia of several decades is one of the most trustworthy. India cannot alienate Russia not because of exporting 60-70 percent defence equipment but it needs Russia's support from the geo-political point of view. India has some geo-political challenges in the region more specifically with China and in this probable worst-case scenarios, USA and other countries of the west have lesser prospects to

mediate with China rather than Russia. Moreover, India has always been working with the policy 'Nation First' and therefore; it has been buying oil at a discount despite various sanctions issued against Russia by almost major powers of the world in view of Russian invasion on Ukraine. Though India faced criticisms for this move, however; India side-lines all allegations and bravely justifying on the ground by stating that it will continue to buy for the national interest which pushed bilateral trade ties volume with her beyond expectations.

During this visit, both the countries have signed nine Memorandums of Understandings (MoUs) and agreements on trade, climate and research, are significant among others. The discussion also focussed on 'India-Eurasian Economic Union Trade and Goods Agreement', which will be expedited in months ahead. The estimated target of 100 billion by 2030 as trade target was set by both the leaders during this visit. Moreover, the need of fertilizer supply from Russia to India for the agri-production and the farmer's yield was one of the focussed areas in the economic domain. Apart from that several connectivity initiatives are also taken by this co-operation like the International North-South Transport Corridor, the Chennai-Vladivostok Eastern Maritime Corridor and so on (India Today, 2024). Vinay Mohan, the foreign secretary briefs media during the visit that, the talk was primarily focussed on economic engagement and how it will be beneficial for the project of 'Make in India', 'Atmanirbhar Bharat' and other economic sectors.

Both the leaders reaffirm their commitment on the issue of terrorism and condemn terror attacks in both the countries. Recently there were terror attacks in Moscow and Dagestan before some days of Modi's visit. It is expected that this relation will get an extra energy when Modi will visit BRICS summit in Kazan for which President Putin made his invitation.

**Prime Minister with Indian diaspora in Moscow:** To make the travel and trade easier between the two nations, P.M. Modi announced to open two new consulates in Kazan and Yekaterinburg during his address to Indian diaspora in Moscow. During this visit, he also raised the matter of Indians working in the Russian army with the President Putin who were misled to join. Moscow took this matter seriously and assured to discharge and facilitate them all to return India (India Today, 2024). Praising India's achievements to Indian diaspora, Modi also revoked about the envision India as the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest economy in the world in his third term. Now a days, India is the most reliable model in digital transactions in the world and it now contributes 15% to global economy are some of the aspects reflected in Modi's address to Indian diaspora in Moscow.

Apart from that, during this summit, P.M. Modi kept head high for the interest of Indian farmers and common people vowed to expand bilateral co-operation with Russia to ensure their welfare despite having international pressure. He also expressed his concern about the challenges faced by the world in the last five years including Covid-19, Russia-Ukraine crisis, Israil-Palestine conflict are among others. Hence, he once again stressed upon the negotiation and mediation as the strategies to bring international peace and security.

**Limitations and Suggestions:** The 22<sup>nd</sup> India-Russia annual summit was a significant event

not only for both the countries but also for the whole world, but it also had some limitations. The summit was held amidst a complex geographical scenario which might have restricted the scope of discussions or overshadow other important areas of cooperation such as people to people connections and cultural exchanges. Furthermore, the summit might have raised concerns about the attention to global challenges like healthcare, climate change, terrorism and increasing militarisation in the world scenario. This summit has also a biased perspective on broader regional and global implications. Despite these limitations, the summit successfully marked a significant milestone in the Indo-Russia strategic partnership. Moreover, future summits can build upon this success to explore new areas of cooperation and strengthen bilateral relations such as strengthening interregional dialogue, joint manufacturing and technological exchange, enhance ties in energy, space and military-technical sectors and so on.

To conclude, it has been seen that the bilateral ties between India and Russia among the steadiest of major external relationships in the contemporary world. This bilateral relation has been expanded beyond the traditional areas such as military cooperation rather adopted new models of cooperation significantly with the raising demand of time. Finally, the researchers can refine their approaches to ensure more comprehensive and accurate analysis of this summit for the further research.

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