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## **India and Russia, hand-in-hand for a bright future**



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India and Russia have recently completed 70 years of diplomatic relations. On April 13 2017, which marked the historic occasion, a grand launch function for year-long celebrations to salute this friendship was held in New Delhi. More than 100 events, which will span diverse areas of bilateral collaboration, will be held both in India and Russia during the year-long celebrations.

Solid at diplomatic levels, the relations between the two countries are also strongly characterized by people to people relations. Though, the official diplomatic ties between the two great nations may only be seven decades old, there have been extremely enriching interactions between the Indians and Russians at various levels over the last many centuries.

Indian and Russian cultures started intermingling more closely from mid 19th century onwards. While Rabindranath Tagore's poetry was translated into Russian, Mahatma Gandhi and Leo Tolstoy corresponded with each other on their great world views. In the 20th century, the immortal works of Nicholas Roerich and his love for India became a part of India's rich cultural legacy. Russian writers like Dostoevsky, Pushkin and Chekov still continue to have a deep impact on Indian thought and drama.

The history of ideas is dotted with landmarks of correspondence between great minds. The interaction between Mahatma Gandhi and Leo Tolstoy is one such fascinating example. Gandhi and Tolstoy admired each other's philosophy of life and their minds met on common intellectual ground. Their message is as relevant today as it was in their lifetime. The world is still plagued with hunger, social injustice and political and economic oppression.

Both Gandhi and Tolstoy were committed to advocating human brotherhood and unity of all creations. And it is such deeply emotional friendships - rooted in strong civilizational commonalities that form the foundation of the bond that we the people of India and Russia have been enjoying for years, decades and centuries.

Post India's Independence, Russia was a key contributor to India's emergence as a significant industrial & scientific power. It has been India's steadfast and unvarying friend and has helped us propel our country into the modern age and this has allowed us to take our rightful place in the comity of nations.

In the current times too, relations with Russia are a key pillar of India's foreign policy. Russia has been a longstanding time-tested partner of India. Since the signing of 'Declaration on the India-Russia Strategic Partnership' during President Vladimir Putin's visit in October 2000, India-Russia ties have acquired a qualitatively new character with enhanced levels of cooperation in almost all areas of the bilateral relationship including political, security, trade and

economy, defense, science and technology and culture. Under the Strategic Partnership, several institutionalized dialogue mechanisms operate at both political and official levels to ensure regular interaction and follow up on cooperation activities. In 2010, the Strategic Partnership was elevated to the level of a 'Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership'.

One of the strongest pillars of India-Russia strategic partnership- Military Technical Cooperation is the route for acquiring cutting-edge military technologies and platforms for our armed forces. Now this cooperation has evolved from a simple buyer - seller framework to one involving joint research, development and production of advanced defence technologies and systems. We also hold exchanges and training exercises between our armed forces annually. Soon India will have a first-ever tri-service exercise with Russia which will include assets and manpower from Army, Navy and IAF-all the three services together.

In 2007, India and Russia signed a framework agreement on cooperation in the peaceful uses of outer space, including satellite launches, GLONASS navigation, remote sensing and other societal applications of outer space. The cooperation in the field of outer space is not new. The year 2015 marked the 40th anniversary of the launch, on a Russian (then USSR) launch vehicle 'Soyuz', of India's first satellite "Aryabhata" which was built by ISRO.

In December 2014, Department of Atomic Energy (DAE) and Russia's Rosatom signed the Strategic Vision for strengthening cooperation in peaceful uses of atomic energy between India and Russia. Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant (KKNPP) is being built in India with Russian co-operation. Units 1 and 2 of KKNPP have already become operational.

Both the countries are also working together in the field of hydrocarbons-which holds great potential for cooperation. In the second and third quarter of 2016, Indian companies invested close to US\$ 5.5 billion in Russia's Oil and Gas sector. The Rosneft led Russian Consortium is also expected to invest close to US \$ 13 billion to solidify the Russia-India partnership in this sector. Both the sides are working towards realization of an 'Energy Bridge' between the two countries, which is based on robust civil nuclear cooperation, LNG sourcing, partnership in the Oil and Gas sector, and engagement in renewable energy sources.

The Inter- Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation (IRIGC-TEC) is the apex Government to Government forum to review bilateral economic cooperation. To make the economic partnership as strong a pillar as other pillars of the strategic partnership between India and Russia, is a key priority for the two governments. The two nations have set a target of US \$ 30 billion bilateral trade by 2025.

India will be the guest country at the 21<sup>st</sup> St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (1<sup>st</sup> to 3<sup>rd</sup> June 2017). Prime Minister Shri. Narendra Modi, who has been invited to be the Guest of Honour at SPIEF' 17, had recently said, "India and Russia are celebrating and building on the achievements of our past. We are working to model a partnership that befits our common ambition and meets our shared goals for the 21<sup>st</sup> century".

The future trajectory of India Russia ties is well defined and planned and will surely bring benefits for the great people of both the nations. As one would say it in Russian- 'Indiya I Rossiya ruka-v-ruke v svetloye budushoe' - India and Russia, hand-in-hand into a bright future".

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*Views expressed in the article are author's personal.*