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Research Paper

INDIA RUSSIA RELATIONS: PRESSING THE RESET BUTTON

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ABSTRACT

India and Russia have shared a bonhomie that speaks about their inclination towards one another and also the maturity in their relation that have come over the years. Both have had testing days, survived international pressure and have time and again proved their onus towards a multi polar world order. The time tested ties have survived since ages, but this does not mean that both have taken one another for granted. This paper seeks to examine the points of convergence between Moscow and New Delhi in a new international order that has become more challenging and demanding. The new governments in both the countries see bilateral relations with a new momentum, engaging to solve problems, managing weak points and lifting the relation from redundancy to resurgence. Having said this my paper seeks to examine the bilateral relations from a new horizon stating that both the countries value the relation and also are working towards breaking the monotony in the relation that has been there post cold war. New issues, challenging international circumstances, role of soft power, engagement in economics and trade all feature in this new relation. So to say, the reset button in the relation has been pressed.

KEYWORDS: India, Russia, foreign policy, multilateral engagement, technological skill

INTRODUCTION

If the global balance of power has shifted from the Atlantic to the Pacific, the rise of India has become an indisputable reality. Factors of Indo-centricity and Indo asymmetry has made India the South Asian big brother¹. The Indian Foreign policy has matured over the years, has become more dynamic in terms of multilateral engagement, and also has made bold decisions that have earned her reverence and accolades. Arun Jaitley, the Indian Finance Minister rightly paraphrases John Donne, “no country is an island entire of itself” recognising the integration of India into the world economy² so much so that Jaitley (2016) argues that even the destitute stricken populace in India think of themselves as “middle class”³. Russia on the other hand is a country which was never a single land, Russian

people never a single race; it was a nation of many nations. The term Great Power (*velikaya derzhava*) has been replaced by a reference to Russia as ‘one of the leading centres of the contemporary world’ and also of a ‘new Russia’ that finds mention in the Foreign Policy Concept⁴. The present and successful incursions and influence of Russia in Georgia in 2008, in Ukraine in 2015, and current influence in Syria speak of its military, technological skill and the will of the political elite led by Putin to embolden Russia’s image in the world. Driven like Putin, by a vision of restoring and enhancing his nation’s influence and glory, Narendra Modi has opted for a policy which stresses on geo-economics and enhanced political relations with its vicinity, major powers in Asia, Japan, China and of course the United States. Before delving into the depth of Indo Russia



bilateral ties, it becomes indispensable to see the points on which both these countries find convergence. Contemporary India as well as Russia has a number of issues that make them alike. Interestingly, Maitra (2016) draws similarity between the Mughals in India and the present day Russian Federation. Despite modern Russia is not feudal like the Mughal India was, however, their society, capacity of internal dissent and approaches to foreign policy is alike and the Russian policy makers can learn a great deal from the late Mughals is what he professes⁵. The similarity in views of India and Russia are as follows:

1. Multi polarity: Both the countries do not recognise the principle of a unipolar world order where the world is dominated by a single hegemon (specifically the United States). They are clear on the agenda of recognising multiple poles of power and influence. To quote Trenin (2015) ‘Moscow has been seeking to speed up the reform of the world order to make it polycentric’⁶. The creation of the Eurasian Union, a Moscow led economic, political, security, and cultural centre of power in northern Eurasia is means towards this end. This statement can also be substantiated by the multilateral alignments like the BRICS, the G8, the SCO etc., where a number of regional powers have come together to challenge the hegemony of the U.S.A. The tendency towards unipolarity under the hegemony of the USA is considered by both Indian and Russian to be undesirable as this also corresponds to the belief in a cultural uniqueness and power significance which would remain underestimated in such a system. Bipolarity constituted in the division of deciding power in the international system between the USA and Russia is also an unachievable model in this era. Therefore, today both India and Russia share the goal of a multi polar world order which defines the sphere of influence, clash or cooperation of individual poles of power, having a multilevel and multi-themed relation⁷.

2. Concern towards a Rising China: Chinese growth its robust economy and the public diplomacy efforts done by the Chinese elites in order to influence citizens abroad have all created a sense of anxiety among the world leaders. New Delhi and Moscow are no exceptions. Even history holds testimony to this insecurity. The Soviet Union was the pioneer of the socialist bloc and China at that point in time was her obedient follower. However, the Ping Pong Diplomacy in 1971 when Sino American relations saw its zenith making a trilateral convergence among America-China-Pakistan had led to the international isolation of the

Soviet Union and regional isolation of New Delhi. This was responded by the 1971 Treaty of Peace and Friendship between India and the Soviet Union implicitly (and explicitly for the creation of Bangladesh). Further, as a matter of fact India’s trade with China surpasses India Russia trade figures. In fact, the biggest challenge in bilateral ties between India and Russia is about creating an expected level of trade. Russia is interested in India playing a more active role in Central Asia and simultaneously balance a growing a China also. Russia has been supportive of India joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation which unites all countries of Central Asia, China and Russia. Also, much before the BRICS, Russia has promoted the RIC Russia-India-China trilateral convergence. Russia has been an unequivocal supporter of India claim on the UNSC Permanent seat.

3. Diversification of Ties: A shift of focus from bilateral to multilateral ties has been on the agenda of both New Delhi and Moscow. The BRICS, SCO, G8, G4, all are expressions of this multi lateral engagement. This gives a chance to explore our ties in various fields, counters regional and world hegemon and also creates a sense of security and most crucially evades a possible outcome of technological war. Apart from global alignments, India and Russia both stresses on active and strong ties with major powers like China, Japan, U.S.A, Germany, France etc,. One can conclude that Russia doesn’t go along well with some of the mentioned countries like Japan (due to issues in North China sea), U.S.A of course (annexation of Crimea and sanctions imposed on Russia). Former Finance Minister of Poland and Deputy Prime Minister from 2007 to 2013 Jacek Rostowski come up with an acronym PEKO where he states that the West today is threatened by the PEKO leaders who follow Lenin’s ideology of “politics precede over economics”. The PEKO leaders are Russian President Vladimir *Putin*, Turkish President Recep *Tayyip Erdoğan*, the Polish politician Jarosław *Kaczyński*, and Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor *Orbán*⁸. Also, despite Russia shares good relations with China with no territorial disputes post 2000, Sino India relation is marked by territorial disputes. However, as Nye (2007) points out that the West needs Russia for combating terrorism, for security, energy production, to check nuclear proliferation in Iran and North Korea and many other issues. It is right to say that India shares a good relation with all these countries however to say that these countries do not have a demanding nature would be wrong. Ahluwalia (2015) is of the opinion that Russia has never been demanding or prescriptive like the

U.S.A.⁹. It's a give and take relation with them; a better term would be mutual benefit. For instance, Late President of India Dr. Kalam in his book *Ignited Minds* mentions that despite good quality iron ore is produced in India but due to lack of good technology India is incapable of producing high grade machines. When this mineral is exported to Japan the machines produced there are sold to Indian consumers at a much higher rate. Certainly, India can count on these countries in times of trouble but Russia is a country that assures us of its benevolence.

4.Active Public Diplomacy: The term Public Diplomacy was coined by Edmund Gullion, former US Ambassador and Dean of the Edward R. Murrow Centre of Public Diplomacy at the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Tufts University, in 1964. Public Diplomacy is a variant of soft power (coined by Joseph Nye). Gullion defined public diplomacy as one that 'deals with the influence of public attitudes on the formation and execution of foreign policies'. Public diplomacy has gained momentum in both the countries with their respective foreign policy wing making efforts in targeting a group of citizens abroad and influencing them through their respective values, culture etc. For e.g. The Public Diplomacy wing of the Ministry of External Affairs in India comes out with a monthly magazine India Perspectives which is printed in 14 languages and goes to 170 countries including Russia¹⁰. The India Perspective has dedicated a plethora of articles about India's inclination towards Moscow like "Bollywood goes Russian" where the Indian Film Festival in Russia is expanding the reach of the Indian cinema in Moscow¹¹; likewise an article dedicated to Modi's visit to UFA, Russia for the BRICS Summit¹² and the five Central Asian states in 2015¹³ represents India's multifarious engagement with the resource rich regions of Central Asia where Russia continues to have a strong presence in terms of the Russian speaking population there or the presence of the Russian Manas Air base in Kyrgyzstan, all talks about the dominance of Russia in the CIS regions.

From Russian side the public diplomacy division called the Rossotrudnichestovo has been making innovative efforts towards influencing citizens abroad about its culture and values. Russian efforts in India can be explained by the Russian Centre for Science and Culture, an institution working in the Indian metropolitan cities of New Delhi, Mumbai etc., that hold functions, talks, discussions, cultural programmes to create awareness about Russian culture among Indians.

The Russia India Report Magazine comes out with a variety of articles about Indo Russia relation in disparate field like culture, bilateral talks, politics etc.,. Russia and India Report mentions an article on "Public Diplomacy's 90th anniversary at RCSC", dated 20 November 2015, where the 90th anniversary of VOKS-SSOD-RAMS-ROSZARUBEZH CENTER-ROOSOTRUDNICHESTVO at the Russian Centre of Science and Culture was celebrated marking 90 years of devoted Russian service towards the promotion of cultural diplomacy in India¹⁴. Celebrated figures like H.E. Sayed Muazzem Ali, High Commissioner of Bangladesh in India, Prof. Sanker Basu, President, Indian Alumni Association of Soviet/Russian Academic Institutions, and Fedor Rozovski, Director, RCSC were present. The cultural group performed STANISTA, a Cossack dance founded in 1990. Governments of both the nations have prioritised soft power over hard power and this can be justified through the various efforts towards effective public diplomacy efforts.

5.Mutual Respect for Sovereignty and World Peace:

While the Panchsheel doctrine of India announces respect for every nation's territorial integrity and abates the fear among South Asian nations about India's Big Brother image and the possibility of India's incursion into their territory, Moscow on the other hand in the Foreign Policy Concept 2013¹⁵ expresses the same wishes and aspirations. However, the context, time and the strength of a particular situation is not ignored. The Indian incursion in East Bengal to create a Bangladesh in 1971, or the Russian invasion of Georgia in 2008 considered as the first cyber war, or the Ukrainian crisis where the South Ukrainians willingly joined the Russian Federation in 2015 after a plebiscite deserves applaus as far as the concerns of both India and Russia to recognise the right of individual nations and the rights of their respective citizens is concerned. It is important to mention here that reverence for territorial integrity found expression in the Non Aligned Movement in India and the recognition of anti imperialism by the Soviet Union. While the former recognised the individuality of the third world nations, the latter supported the anti imperialist fights that had been taking place world over. In fact, leaders after Stalin like Khrushchev and Brezhnev welcomed India's policy of NAM and not joining the capitalist bloc stating that "those who are not against us are with us". Both India and Pakistan hold gratitude to Alexi Kosygin for successfully holding the Tashkent Summit in January 1966 which normalised tensions and relations in India

Pakistan relations after the Indo Pak war in 1965. During the UN General Assembly 2014 vote on Crimea, India abstained from condemning Russia's 'land grab'. Hence, we can conclude that respect for sovereignty is a term that is dear to both India and Russia.

6. Containment of Terrorism and its fallouts: We cannot deny the fact that both India and Russia in particular and the world in general is reeling under the threat of terrorism. There is both internal instability and fear from external ones too. For India, the economically less developed states of Bihar, Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh, Uttar Pradesh, the north east states, Jammu and Kashmir poses Maoist and terrorist tendencies. Similarly, Chechnya and the concept of 'war widows' there is quite a problem in Russia. Also, the CIS nations of the Fergana Valley namely Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan is quite fragile and is replete with insurgent tendencies. Afghanistan, Pakistan are in the immediate boundary of India and Russia and the ideological intolerance along with drug trafficking, etc are some problems faced by the two nations. The most dangerous fallout is indoctrination camps that are spread all over and the innocent Muslims youths of India and Russia bear the repercussions. Russia faces problems through the Xinxiang district of China too were terrorist infiltration is common. Not to forget Pakistan has been the biggest source of tension for India which through various agencies has been disturbing the Indian solidarity and peace. Russia has supported the Indian draft at the UN on Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT). The two sides signed a MoU on co-operation in combating terrorism in December 2002. A Joint Working Group on Combating International Terrorism meets from time to time and its fourth meeting was held in Delhi on 24 October 2006. The 2016 January Pathankote incident is one of the recent examples of Pakistan's terrorist animosity towards India and others being the 2000 Parliament attack etc.,

7. No Common Issues to Fight over: It is important to notice here that India and Russia do not share certain issues that might land them up in hostile grounds towards one another. Ahluwalia (2015) is of the opinion that Russia and India do not share a border to fight over and have a good amount of geo-strategic similarity¹⁶. It is overall important for the security needs of both the countries. Fortunately, we have never had any clash of interest on land, in the ocean or in the sky. In fact, we happen to support one another in matters that are dear to us. One must not forget that Moscow

by the virtue of its veto power in the UNSC has been rescuing India's stand on Kashmir. The 1999 Kargil war for India was a testing time and Moscow unequivocally supported India's stand on Kashmir when sanctions were imposed and India was facing the international pressure. So has been the case with Moscow. India titled its Non Aligned Movement towards Moscow during Soviet Russia invaded Afghanistan on December 26, 1979. Thus, India and Russia have been natural allies and mostly we see convergence as far as our interests and goals are concerned.

Thus, these were the important points of convergence between Moscow and New Delhi relations. Having mentioned this, a brief discussion on the history of Moscow New Delhi relations seems pertinent.

HISTORICAL & TIME-TESTED TIES:

To begin with our historical relations can be traced back to the second half of the 15th century when the Russian merchant traveller Afanasy Nikitin visited India in 1466. Krausse (2012) argues that Moscow of the time of Peter the Great had imperialist tendencies in India!¹⁷ A scheme of invading India was proposed by Napoleon to Tsar Alexander I in 1807. The best known attempt of invasion was drawn up by Skobelev in 1878¹⁸. However, all these schemes could not consolidate. Russian poets like Tolstoy had influenced Gandhiji to a great length. Gandhiji learnt the spirit of ahimsa and simple living in Tolstoy's book 'The kingdom of God is Within You'. Politically speaking, initially, the response of the Russian leaders towards the Indian leaders was negative. Stalin referred to Nehru as the 'running dog of imperialism'. The Indian National movement was seen as a bourgeoisie movement. However, relations improved eventually. In 1927, Motilal Nehru with his son Jawaharlal Nehru had visited Moscow to take part in the 10th anniversary of the October Revolution. In 1930 Rabindranath Tagore had visited Moscow and was deeply influenced by the expansion of the basic education. Similarly, various high profile visits have shaped the image of both the countries towards one another. The Indian daily, National Herald in an article titled Discovery of USSR about Indian health minister Rajkumari Amrit Kaur's visit to the USSR in 1953, wrote that she, like many others, thought India could learn a lot of things from the USSR. Indira Gandhi, after a month long visit to the Soviet Union in 1953 shared her experience stating that "It is not important that I did not see poor people or fashionably dressed people like in France and Sweden during my month-long visit to USSR. What is important is the huge progress achieved by the country and methods used to

resolve the problems that the country faces"¹⁹. The Second Five Year Plan of India namely the Mahalanobis Plan was executed on the Soviet lines. The Bokaro, Bhilai and Bhakra projects that gave India its first major international modernised look was shaped by the Soviet help. In 1959, the Soviet Consulate in Calcutta spent constructive time with the local farmers in Androl, West Bengal, telling them about various technological initiatives of the Soviet Union. In 1960s, when India's state owned HAL began the licensed production of MiG-21 fighters, the Soviet Union was the only country to supply weapons and also assisted India in setting up production on Indian soil. The Tashkent Summit of 1966 gave a framework for post Indo Pak relations after the 1965 war successfully concluded by Shastri, Mohd. Ayub and Kosygin. India Today's Principal Correspondent Madhu Jain came out with a fact filled and lucidly written article about the Festival of India celebrated in Moscow on July 31st, 1987 in the presence of Gorbachev and the then PM Rajiv Gandhi²⁰. Our bilateral ties reached such a zenith that we see an inclination of India's NAM towards Moscow during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1989. Many scholars argue that this propensity was in reciprocation of the 1971 Indo Soviet Treaty of Peace and Friendship of 1971. 'A friend in need is a friend indeed' is something that paraphrases the Indo Soviet ties.

YELTSIN PERIOD: A PERIOD OF HIATUS 1991-2000

However, a hiatus of ten years (1990 -2000) took place during the Yeltsin period. Why was this so and what were the fallouts?

- The Soviet Union had collapsed and 15 new Commonwealth of Independent States had emerged in its place. Allen (2005) cited Putin quoting the collapse of the USSR as 'the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century'¹;
- Yeltsin stopped the funds to the third world countries including India. Time did necessitate this as Moscow was undergoing acute inflation, and needed funds to manage its own economy. Moscow looked towards the West for help;
- Russia denied India the cryogenic engine promised earlier and this created a lack of apprehension, distrust and negative image of Russia in India. During Russian Vice President Rutskoi's visit to Pakistan, Russia supported Pakistan on the Kashmir issue in December

1991. It was a dispute that had to be solved by international agreements. This certainly gave wrong signals to the Indian leaders. However, Yeltsin corrected the argument later.

- Yeltsin visited India from Jan 27 to 29, 1993. Signed treaty on 28 January 1993 in which 'peace clause' was dropped. Speaking to the Indian Parliament Yeltsin recognised India as a partner and friend. In March 1997 largest military deals signed between Dewe Gowda.

PUTIN PERIOD: RESURGENCE IN TIES 2000-2015

The face of Moscow changed with the coming of Vladimir Putin. He is not only a charismatic leader but knows how to play his cards well. Certainly his international posture has become strong post Georgian war and also the recent Ukrainian crisis. He did not submit to the international pressure. Nye (2007) refers to the Russian politics as a pendulum which had swung too far in the direction of chaos under Yeltsin and now in the direction of state control under Putin²². This can be true to some extent. I feel there is a leadership crisis in Russia. Putin is the last resort that can help her country escape from an economic crisis amidst international political events that has made Moscow more vulnerable. Putin has been following the policy of Roosevelt "speak softly and carry a stick; you'll go a long way". Putin once stated that "either Russia will be great or it will not be at all"²³ In the case of India the one and half years of Modi government is too busy in projecting India as a major power capable of taking decisions at the international platform. Putin and Modi are very much alike as both are strong nationalists (I would not term them as fascists though). Both have acknowledged one another as reliable friends and needs are working towards strong bilateral ties. Some efforts have been made in the following fields. They are:

DEFENCE: To begin with, Indian military needs coincide with Russian political interests. Russia innately desires to contain China, curb religious fundamentalism across its borders and latent hostility emanating from the USA that perturbs her thoroughly. Therefore, implicitly stating to counter all Russia sees a strong, innovative and militarily capable India and so helps India in maximising her military interests. Fortunately, Makienko (2015) notes that India Russia relation in the defence sector has moved from supplier buyer relation to one of cooperative production model. The Su-30 MKI fighter (first contract signed on November 30, 1996 taken

up by Russian contractor Irkut Corporation), BrahMos missile projects, the Fifth Generation Fighter Aircraft (FGFA), medium Military Transport Aircraft (MTA) fall under this category. It is also important to note that Indian demand has been a driver of innovation for Russian technicians and scientists. For the Indian Navy, two series of Talwar-class frigates (Project 11356), BrahMos/Onyx/Yakhont, Club/Caliber, and Uran/Kh-35 missile systems, the Sea Serpent/Novella anti-submarine search and sighting system and the Ka-31 AWACS helicopter were efficiently designed and delivered by Moscow to India²⁴. India acquired 290 Su-30K/Su-30MKI aircraft from Russia and the Indian Navy contracted for 45 MiG-29K ship borne fighters. In April 2013, India celebrated the 50th anniversary of the beginning of deliveries of Soviet MiG-21.

INDRA is a joint bi annual naval exercise taken up by both the countries. Joint naval exercises took place in April 2007 in the Sea of Japan and joint air borne exercise took place in September 2007 in Russia.

Despite these developments a new phase has come in the Indian defence sector which is its diversification. Indian military procurements are being diversified now. India is not only building its indigenous military weapons but our procurements do not solely rely on Russia. India has been able to get latest technologically upgraded weapons from France like Rafale fourth generation fighter result of India's medium multi role combat aircraft (MMRCA) and from USA (six C-130J military transport aircrafts; ten C-17A, twelve P-8I maritime patrol aircraft were procured)²⁵. However, these weapons are expensive and consume a good amount of India's resources for its maintenance. Russian weapons are comparatively cheaper but effective too. India which has a large population to feed must take this into account.

ENERGY: In nuclear field, Russians have built the Kundankulam Nuclear Power Plant of which two units (2X1000 MW) are becoming operational. Russia has the world's largest gas reserves. However, a possible link of pipelines from Russia happens to be from China or Afghanistan which have difficult terrains. ONGC Videsh Ltd. has a 20% stake in Sakhalin-I. It has also acquired Imperial Energy in 2008 which has oil-producing assets in Tomsk. ONGC and Rosneft signed an MoU in May 2014 for bilateral cooperation in subsurface surveys, exploration, appraisal and hydrocarbons production in the offshore Arctic Region of Russia. In September 2015, OVL signed an agreement with Rosneft to acquire 15%

stakes in Rosneft's Vankorneft oil field. Other Indian oil and gas companies are also in talks with Rosneft for possible Indian investment in Russia in the hydrocarbon sector. In 2012, Gazprom Marketing & Trading Singapore and GAIL have signed a 20-year LNG supply contract. In July 2015, Rosneft & ESSAR had signed a non-disclosure agreement under which Rosneft for acquisition of 49% stakes by Rosneft in ESSAR's Vadinar Oil Refinery. ESSAR has also signed a contract with Rosneft which envisages supply of 10 million barrels of oil over a period of 10 years.

SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY: Russia and India have long been Strategic partners in space exploration. India's first satellite was orbited by a Soviet Kosmos-3 rocket from the Kapustin Yar site on April 19, 1975. The first Indian to travel to space, Rakesh Sharma, flew with the Soviet Soyuz T-11 expedition in 1984. In the mid-1990s and the early 2000s, Russia supplied 12 KRB cryogenic third stages for the Indian GSLV rockets. The 12 KRB upper stage was developed by the Khrunichev Space Centre under a Contract with the Indian Space Research Organisation. The Gas Turbine Research Establishment (GTRE) and the Gromov Flight Research Institute (GFRI) completed the high altitude tests for Kabini core and the GTX-35VS Kaveri turbofan engine for India by the end of 2007. In November 2007, the two countries have signed an agreement on joint lunar exploration. Chandrayan-2 is a joint lunar exploration mission proposed by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Russian Federal Space Agency (RKA) and has a projected cost of 4.25 billion (US\$90 million). The mission, proposed to be launched in 2017 by a Geosynchronous Satellite Launch Vehicle (GSLV) launch vehicle, includes a lunar orbiter and a rover made in India as well as one Lander built by Russia. The ongoing collaboration in the field of science & technology, under the Integrated Long-Term Programme of Co-operation (ILTP) is the largest co-operation programme in this sphere for both India and Russia. ILTP is coordinated by the Department of Science and Technology from the Indian side and by the Russian Academy of Sciences and Russian Ministry of Industry & Science and Technology from the Russian side. Development of SARAS Duet aircraft, semiconductor products, super computers, poly vaccines, laser science and technology, seismology, high-purity materials, software & IT and Ayurveda have been some of the priority areas of co-operation under the ILTP.

Under this programme, eight joint Indo-Russian centres have been established to focus on joint research and development work. Two other Joint Centres on Non-ferrous Metals and Accelerators and Lasers are being set up in India. A Joint Technology Centre based in Moscow to bring cutting edge technologies to the market is also under processing. An ILTP Joint Council met in Moscow on 11–12 October 2007 to review cooperation and give it further direction. In August 2007, a MoU was signed between Department of Science and Technology and Russian Foundation of Basic Research, Moscow to pursue scientific co-operation.

In the IT sector, India’s IT majors like Wipro, TCS, HCL Tech, Infosys are larger than their Russian counterpart like the National Computer Corporation. Only Wipro and Infosys have subsidiaries in Russia with low turnovers. The Russians blame it on bureaucratic hurdles. In e-commerce, A.T. Kearney’s Global Retail E-commerce Index, Russia’s position is the 13th whereas India does not even rank in top 30. The need for cooperation comes in the training of the IT professionals by their Russian counterparts and Indian population can be absorbed by the Russian market for its growth.

TRADE: Indian economy is defined as a major market today with a young population both skilled and unskilled which can be a boon to the Russian economy. The country has become globalised both in terms of orientations and inputs. In India-Russia economic relations issues like long distance, language barrier poses challenge. Also, many Indian firms still have this hangover of Yeltsin period when many mafia groups were present in the Russian economy known for illegal activity. Trust deficit adds up to this. So the need is to create an atmosphere of transparency by initiatives of the Government from both the sides to inflate trade. The Joint Study Group 2006-2007 between the two countries indicated that both the countries require a degree of specific interest and supervision in order to develop commercial relationship between the two countries. The Khemka Sun Group had its branch in Russia in the 1990s and today Russian firms like Hidroenergoprom and Rudgormash compete effectively in the Indian market for contracts. A new aspect in our economic relation has been in the field of region to region cooperation. In October 2000 a number of regions of the Russian Federation and the Republic of India signed agreements. They are mentioned as under:

Indian	Russian
Andhra Pradesh	Tatarstan
Karnataka	Samara Region
Gujarat	Astrakhan region
West Bengal	Voronezh region
Mumbai	St. Petersburg
Hyderabad	Kazan
All India Manufacturers’ Association	Tver Region
Chamber of North Eastern States of India	Union of Industrialists and Entrepreneurs of the Tula Region

Astrakhan is the shortest route that links India with Russia. This place has a historical significance as Indian traders community had settled here during the 17th century. In January 2013, the delegation headed by the Vice Governor Chairman of the Government of the Astrakhan region, Konstantin Markelov, met Narendra Modi, the then CM of Gujarat. Russian tourists visit Goa, Kerala and Indian dealers in Sarojini Nagar market and Khan Market of New Delhi are proficient in Russian

Language as mostly their customers are Russians. Indian agricultural products are underrepresented in Russia. This has to be improved. However, Russia does not figure even in India’s top 25 export destination²⁶ nor in India’s top 25 import sources²⁷. Cooperation in space, technology, medicine will not suffice unless bilateral economic cooperation is given a boost. Bilateral trade fairs, exhibitions, *melas* should come up. The statistics of trade is abysmally low but has grown to some extent as noted down in the following figure-

Head	2013	2014	2015 (till 30 November)
India's export to Russia (USD Thousand)	3,088,799	3,172,157	2,067,339
Indian import from Russia	6,981,503	6,341,109	4,797,351
Total Bilateral Trade	10,070,302	9,513,266	6,864,690

Fig I: India Russia Bilateral Trade, Source: Embassy of India, Moscow²⁸.

The top 5 Indian imports from Russia in 2015 includes pearls, precious stones; fertilizers; nuclear reactors & boilers; mineral fuel & oil and machinery and mechanical equipments²⁹. The top five Indian exports to Russia in 2015 includes pharmaceuticals, coffee, tea; nuclear reactors; tobacco and electrical machinery³⁰. Our trade needs more diversification in terms of products and regions. On 18th June, 2015, India and the Eurasian Economic Union signed a joint statement establishing a Joint Feasibility Study Group (JFSG) for feasibility study on the proposed FTA/CECA between India and the Eurasian Economic Union. The first meeting was held in Moscow on 31 July, 2015. Ms. Sushma Swaraj, External Affairs Minister visited Moscow and co-chaired the 21st Session of the India-Russia Intergovernmental Commission for Trade, Economic, Scientific and Cultural Cooperation (IRIGC-TEC) on 20 October 2015. Ms Nirmala Sitharaman, Minister of State for Commerce & Industry, led a high level business delegation at the St Petersburg International Economic Forum from 17-19 June 2015. In the banking sector, India and Russia are cooperating too. Indian banks like the State Bank of India, Canara Bank have opened their branches in Russia while Russian banks like VTB, Sberbank, Promsvazbank, Gazprombank have opened their branches in India. Reliance communications and Sistema Shyam TeleServices Ltd (SSTL), a joint venture of Russian Sistema JSFC and Shyam Group, working in India under the MTS brand are making joint ventures in the Indian market.

EDUCATION: Indian medical students favour Russia for medical studies after China. During 2012-2014, 5,950 Indian medical students in the Russian Federation took the Foreign Medical Graduate Examination in India and 1,094 cleared the exam³¹. The Tver Medical Institute in Russia has the largest number of Indian medical students. The study of Indology is quite famous in Russia. The St. Petersburg State University recently published *Essay on the History of Indian Literature*. Russian scholars have written extensively about Indian

novelist. Viktor Balin's book on the novels of Premchand, Svetlana Eminova's *Innovation in Modern Hindi Literature* and others. Similarly, Russian language centres, Russian and Eurasian study centres have come up in the Indian universities of Delhi University, Jawaharlal Nehru University. Russia and India should hold educational *melas* in order to create more awareness of the broad opportunities that the educational programme of these nations have to offer for one another.

TRANSPORT: Loopholes in economic ties can due to be the lack of a contiguous border and therefore the logistics of connectivity. The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the sea route from the Russian Far East are major projects between the two countries that are yet to gain momentum. The INSTC is an important initiative taken up by Russia, India and Iran to promote transport cooperation and enhance connectivity with the landlocked Central Asian region. The agreement was signed in St.Petersburg on 12 September 2000³² and ratified by all three signatories and has been in force since 16 May 2002. It has now expanded and includes 11 new members namely: Republic of Azerbaijan, Republic of Armenia, Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic, Republic of Tajikistan, Republic of Turkey, Republic of Ukraine, Belarus, Oman, Syria and Bulgaria (as observer). The INSTC promotes movement of goods from Mumbai to Bandar Abbas by sea, from Bandar Abbas to Bandar-e-Anzali by road, from Bandar-e-Anzali to Astrakhan by ship across the Caspian Sea, and from Astrakhan to other regions of the Russian Federation by Russian railways. The capacity of this corridor has been estimated by the experts at 20 to 30 million tonnes of goods per year. The Coordination Council and the Experts Group of the three governments have been meeting at regular intervals to give out recommendations and make this project effective. The sixth meeting of the Experts Group I and II was held from 28-30 May 2012 in New Delhi. Certain proposals and recommendations were adopted like utilisation of India IT skills for updating the website of

INSTC, creation of INSTC Operational Authority with head office in Iran and others³³. The 5th round of the co-ordination council meeting of the INSTC was held in Baku on 24-25 June, 2013. In the meeting the Iranian side reported that the Qazvin-Rasht section of the INSTC route will be commissioned for railway traffic by January 2015.

CONCLUSION

To conclude, I would like to sum up with the following points. Firstly, the both Russia and India have stood the international pressures and have stood with each other in testing times. This however, does not validate the point that both have or can take each other for granted. Secondly, we have followed a hyphenated policy 1991 towards one another. We would never utilise one another for balancing a third party. Russia Pakistan shares a pretty good relation and India never sees her relation with Moscow through the lens of Pakistan. Even if interference is suggested, that is to solve issues and disputes. Thirdly, India and Russia are constantly working towards better bilateral talks especially where we are weal like economic ties. This creates mutual trust, and better understanding of each other's culture and society. There is newness in our relationship where we are looking to diversify, understand, cooperate, and work towards our weakness. The reset button has been pressed!

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