



# Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS)

Forum for National Security Studies (FNSS)

55/17

## INDIA-RUSSIA 18<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL BILATERAL SUMMIT: A NEW VIGOUR WITH A NEW VISION

**Chandra Rekha**  
*Associate Fellow, CAPS*

2017 marks the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of India-Russia diplomatic friendship that traverses the fields of politics, defence, economics, science and technology, nuclear, energy security and strategic engagement. In these 70 years, the partnership has undeniably been a litmus test for both the countries given the dynamic nature of international affairs. As a matter of fact, post Soviet disintegration, the vigour in the bilateral engagement had diminished as a result of the dismal status of Russia (the heir of Soviet Union) and India's own economic crisis. However, despite the sometimes individual positions of the two entities in addressing the complexities and challenges in the strategic partnership, the two countries have also realised that there are enough congruent interests that make this relationship unique and sustainable. Since 2000, India and Russia have reinvigorated bilateral commitments through mechanisms such as annual summits corresponding to the changes taking place in the new world order.

Recently, at the 18<sup>th</sup> annual summit on 31 May to 02 June 2017, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Vladimir Putin communicated positive attitude and feelings towards the partnership. Mutual gestures were conveyed by the two countries as India was named as a guest country in St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF); and a road in New Delhi was named after the Late Ambassador Alexander Kadakin who had passed away on 26 January 2017. Friendly moves such as these have reinforced the message that despite the hiccups, India and Russia will continue to explore opportunities that will strengthen the traditional partnership. Indeed, railways, ports and shipping, oil and gas, nuclear power were some of the major areas of cooperation that were explored with a new vigour and a new vision.

On the nuclear front, India and Russia have signed the General Framework Agreement and

Credit Protocol between Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited and Joint Stock Company 'ATOMSTROYEXPORT' for Units 5 and 6 of the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant.<sup>1</sup> Consequently, the two countries have agreed to collaborate on advanced nuclear manufacturing capabilities in India in line with Government of India's "Make in India" initiative. Through this project, India continues to explore possibilities of attracting foreign investments and collaboration in various sectors.

Another prospective area of cooperation that is being explored is the 'Indo-Russian Train Gain'. The two countries have agreed to pool resources for the development of high-speed rail projects in India alongside state-of-the-art technologies in automation, safety system, collision repair and monitoring rail network via GPS under the ambit of "Vision 2020".<sup>2</sup> Various high-speed rail projects are, therefore, being studied. One such an agreement was signed during this summit for the Nagpur-Secunderabad Semi High Speed Study in India.

India and Russia are set to collaborate on exploration of hydrocarbons in the Arctic shelf. The Arctic region also known as the 'frozen desert' has in recent times emerged as the new geopolitical theatre for Russia due to its enormous amount of natural resources including fish, oil, gas and various other minerals. India's observer status in the Arctic Council alongside this development with Russia would enhance

India's presence in yet another area of interest of Russia.

The defence sector seems to have re-emerged as a major focus area of cooperation as India and Russia announced the first Tri-Services exercise- INDRA 2017 to be held between the two countries. Joint ventures for production of Kamov 226 helicopters and frigates have also been mentioned. Joint production, joint manufacture, military technical cooperation and exchange of advanced defence technologies with/to India were reiterated by President Putin. "The assembly of high-tech military products has been set up in India with Russia's participation. We agreed with the Prime Minister to continue to jointly develop and manufacture modern weapons systems," Putin said, adding the cooperation is not limited to direct supplies of the latest Russian military equipment to India".<sup>3</sup>

Economic sphere of engagement continues to be the weakest link in the partnership. The functioning of the International North South Economic Corridor is expected to enhance economic relations between India and Russia. More importantly, there are also efforts to promote settlements of Indian-Russian trade in national currencies to reduce dependence of the trade engagement on other currencies.

The two countries are ardent advocates of a polycentric world order alongside being active members in multilateral fora such as BRICS and SCO. Having been victims of terrorist attacks,

both India and Russia have called for a joint effort to combat the rise of Islamist fundamentalism, climate change, nuclear proliferation, cyber security threats and nuclear terrorism. Russia continues to strongly support India's permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council and Nuclear Suppliers Group. It was also critical in pursuing India's membership into Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

The two countries should work towards further enhancing the bilateral engagements by not just exploring opportunities in new spheres but also convey and address the factors that may impact the relations in the coming future. Russia's growing proximity with Pakistan and China and upward trend in India and the United States relations is a case in point. Both countries have pursued their respective national interests but none of their national interests have been 'anti-India' or 'anti- Russia'. Contrary to seeing each other's growing proximity towards the US (India) and China (Russia) as a matter of concern, the two countries can possibly utilise this to the advantage of bringing US and Russia together and China and India respectively.

There is constant comparison of the current bilateral partnership to that of the Soviet times. This is unnecessary since the 70 years of strategic partnership has gone beyond bilateral engagement as today it has a global and multilateral connotation. Mutual interests,

cooperation, understanding and concerns have been and continue to be the key factors in strengthening of bilateral strategic partnership. But, the strategic partnership in the current context needs new vigour with a new vision and hence, India and Russia should explore more avenues of cooperation such as soft power capabilities especially at the academia level of interaction, cultural exchange etc. Nevertheless, Prime Minister Modi's visit has put to rest the speculations surrounding the spiralling down of the relations between India and Russia as the warm embracing of the two leaders only showed that the traditional partnership continues to be embraced with same robustness, heartiness and energy which are here to stay for a many years to come.

*(Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the position of the Centre for Air Power Studies [CAPS])*

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> List of MoUs/Agreements signed during the 18<sup>th</sup> India-Russia Annual Summit (June 01, 2017), Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 02 June 2017. <http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/28509/List+of+MOUs+Agreements+signed+during+the+18th+India+Russia+Annual+Summit+June+01+2017>, Accessed on June 12, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> 70 YEARS OF INDIA-RUSSIA: PARTNERSHIP IN THE RAILWAYS, <http://www.makeinindia.com/article/-/v/70-years-of-india-russia-partnership-in-the-railways>, Accessed on June 13, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Vinay Shukla, "India, Russia Ties on New Growth Trajectory", India Strategic, June 2017. <http://www.indiastrategic.in/2017/06/04/india-russia-ties-on-new-growth-trajectory/>, Accessed on June 12, 2017.