



LATEST TRENDS AND CHALLENGES OF RUSSIA - INDIA DEFENCE COOPERATION

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Abstract

Defence Cooperation is the cornerstone of the Russia - India Strategic Partnership. Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi met in Samarkand, Uzbekistan on the side-lines of the Shanghai Cooperation in September 2022. They extensively discussed various strategic issues between Russia and India. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute database, Russia supplies 75% of defence equipment to India. Russia and India have strategic cooperation and friendship in the contemporary multipolar world order. The nature of Russia-India defence cooperation has shifted from a buyer relationship to the joint development of weapons and technologies. Since India is diversifying its armed imports, Russia has to supply the latest weapons to India to strengthen strategic defence cooperation. Russia has remained a major arms export to India. Russia - Ukraine War and Russia's proximity with China in defence cooperation have affected the Russia - India Defence Cooperation. Despite these developments, Russia and India have determined and are motivated to ensure uninterrupted defence cooperation. Russia's supply of S-400 Trimp surface-to-air missile systems is the best example of Russia-India strategic defence cooperation. India's participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and developing proximity with the United States of America have become challenges for the Russia-India strategic partnership. In this context, this article will critically elucidate the latest trends and issues of strategic Russia-India defence cooperation in the contemporary multipolar world order.

Key Words: *Defence Cooperation, Strategic Partnership, joint ventures, Russia – India Military-Technical Cooperation, S- 400 Missiles*

Introduction

Defence Cooperation is the cornerstone of the Russia - India strategic partnership. Russia and India have signed the Agreement on the Programme for Military-Technical Cooperation. Both countries have signed the Agreement for 2021-2031 on the auspicious occasion of the inaugural programme of the India - Russia 2+2 dialogue, which was held on 06th December 2021. This agreement has facilitated both the countries to strengthen the strategic defence cooperation. Further, this agreement strengthened the military-technical cooperation in the aspects of production, research and development; sales of armament systems and military types of equipment. Russia and India have been regularly conducting military exercises as part of strategic defence cooperation (Embassy of India, Moscow, 2023).

Russia and India have mechanisms to resolve the issues related to the military and military-technical cooperation. The inaugural 2+2 dialogue meeting took place on 6th December 2021 in New Delhi on the occasion of the annual summit. 2+2 dialogue was attended by the Foreign Ministers and Defence Ministers of both Russia and India respectively. The India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-MTC), was established in 2000. It is the highest competent body to discuss important issues related to military-technical cooperation. Russian and Indian defence ministers meet alternatively at Moscow and New Delhi respectively to participate in the Russia - India India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-MTC).



The 20th edition of The India-Russia Inter-Governmental Commission on Military Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-MTC) took place in New Delhi on 6th December 2021 (Embassy of India, Moscow, 2023). There are nine sub-groups, working groups have been working under this committee to review and discuss issues and future aspects of military-technical cooperation.

Indian Defence Minister Shri Rajnath Singh participated in the 10th Conference on International Security (MCIS) on 16th August 2022 in Moscow, Russia and explained the Indian perspective on Global Security in the contemporary multipolar world order (Embassy of India, Moscow, 2023). It was organized under the aegis of the *International Military Technical Forum Army 2022 in the Moscow Region* (Embassy of India, Moscow, 2023)

T-90 Tanks, Su-30 - MKI aircraft, Kamov-31 and MiG - 29 Aircraft are the key defence equipment and part of Russia – India strategic defence cooperation. These developments led to dynamic changes like defence cooperation from buyer–seller relationships to the joint development of weapons and technologies (Embassy of India, Moscow, 2023). Brahmos Cruise missile, Multi Transport Aircraft (MTS), Fifth Generation of Aircraft, and Global Navigational Satellite System (GLONASS) are the best examples of Russia - India joint venture. Indo-Russia Rifles Private Limited (IRRPL) has been established under the joint venture and it has started production of AK-203 rifles in India under the “Make in India” initiative. Under the title “INDRA”, the joint exercises have been conducted between three Armed Forces. Tri–Service exercise has organized in Kaliningrad in September 2023. The Indian contingent actively participated in the International Army Games in August 2022 (Embassy of India, Moscow, 2023).

Russia - India relations: Time test ties

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and India’s External Affairs Minister Shri S. Jaishankar met in New Delhi in April 2021 and extensively discussed various strategic issues on the eve of the visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin. Both foreign Ministers have extensively discussed issues related to nuclear energy, energy cooperation, free trade agreements with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and space sectors. Since Russia has been supplying cutting-edge military technology, both Ministers have discussed issues related to the joint ventures, a joint production of India-made Russian weapons, and the delivery of a 5 billion S-400 missile defence system. It has indicated the commitment of both countries to strengthen strategic defence cooperation. Further, Russia and India have critically analysed the investment in connectivity plans related to the International North-South Transport Corridor and the Chennai-Vladivostok Eastern Maritime Corridor (The Hindu, April 10, 2021).

Russia has divergent opinions on the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue in the Indo–Pacific region. Russian Defence Minister Sergei Lavrov has described the Indo-Pacific region as Asia–Pacific region and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue as “Asian NATO”. On the other hand, India is also not happy with the Russian support for the Taliban Regime. It has affected India’s plans for the democratization of Afghanistan (The Hindu, April 10, 2021). Russian External Affairs Minister’s visit to Pakistan and his support for the Counterterrorism efforts of Pakistan has created speculations and doubts among political elite, intellectuals and researchers. Despite the divergences, both India and Russia have to resolve the issues in a very amicable manner to strengthen strategic India-Russia defence cooperation (The Hindu, April 10, 2021).



Military and military-technical cooperation

Transfer of major weapons from Russia to India(2014 -2022)

No. ordered	Designation	Weapon Description	Year of Weapon order	Year of Weapon delivered	No.of Delivered	Year delivered	Comments	
(250)	vehicle engine	vehicle engine	2016	2017-2021	(250)	YaMZ-238 (230hp) diesel engine; for 250 Casspir-6 (MPV) APC from South Africa		
		(25000)	Konkurs	anti-tank missile	(1988)	1992-2016	(25000)	For BMP-2 IFV; ordered from the Soviet Union and produced under Russian licence after the break-up of the Soviet Union; incl 9M113M version from 2003
		9	Garpun	sea search radar	(1998)	2000-2016	9	For 3 Kolkata (Project-15A) destroyers and 3 Brahmaputra (Project-16A) and 3 Shivalik (Project-17) frigates produced in India; for use with SS-N-25



								missiles; Indian designation Aparna
		(400)	PJ-10 BrahMos	anti-ship/land-attack missile	(1998)	2006-2022	(245)	Produced under licence in India (officially joint venture for development but mainly using Russian technology from Yakhont anti-ship missile); including for NGMMCB coastal defence systems
		(400)	PJ-10 BrahMos	anti-ship/land-attack missile	1998	2006-2022	(400)	Produced under licence in India (officially joint venture for development but mainly using Russian technology from Yakhont anti-ship missile); including Block-1 and Block-2 versions
		140	Su-30MK	FGA aircraft	(2001)	2005-2021	(140)	\$3-5.4 b deal; Su-30 MKI version; produced under licence in India
		6	RBU-6000	ASW MRL	(2003)	2014-2016	6	For 3 Kolkata (Project-15A) destroyers produced in India; produced under licence in India



		8	RBU-6000	ASW MRL	(2003)	2014-2020	8	For 4 Kamorta (Project-28) frigates produced in India; produced under licence in India
		300	T-90S	tank	2006	2009-2018	(300)	Produced under licence in India
		(63)	MiG-29SMT	FGA aircraft	2008	2012-2022	(63)	\$850-965 m deal; Indian MiG-29 rebuilt to MiG-29UPG (MiG-29SMT); most rebuilt under licence in India
		(720)	AL-31	turbofan	2012	2013-2022	(720)	Spare engines for Su-30MKI combat aircraft; including production under licence in India; AL-31FP version
		(100)	PJ-10 BrahMos-A	anti-ship/land-attack missile	(2012)	2022	(5)	Produced under licence in India (officially joint venture for development but mainly using Russian technology from Yakhont anti-ship missile); for Su-30 combat aircraft
		25000	9M119	anti-tank missile	2013	2014-2022	(12000)	INR30 b (\$474 m) deal; for T-90 and possibly T-72 tanks; incl 15000 produced in India; planned



								from 2006 but delayed several years due to problems with production in India; Indian designation Invar
		8	RBU-6000	ASW MRL	(2013)	2021-2022	4	For 4 Visakhapatnam (Project-15B) destroyers produced in India; probably produced under licence in India
		236	T-90S	tank	(2013)	2018-2022	(236)	INR60 b deal; produced under licence in India
		(200)	Ka-226	light helicopter	(2015)			'RSH' programme; incl 140 produced under licence in India; Ka-226T version; selected 2015 but contract not yet signed by end-2022
		(149)	BMP-2	IFV	(2018)	2020-2021	(149)	INR9.2 b (\$141 m) deal; produced under licence in India as Sarath
		4	Talwar	frigate	2018			\$1.7 b deal; incl 2 produced under licence in India; delivery planned 2023-2026
		4331	Konkurs	anti-tank missile	2019	2019-2022	(4331)	INR8.3 b deal; Konkurs-M version; produced under



								licence in India
		464	T-90S	tank	2019	2022	(20)	INR200b (\$2.8 b) deal; produced under licence in India (with up to 80% of components produced in India); delivery planned by 2028
		156	BMP-2	IFV	2020	2022	(125)	INR11 b (\$148 m) deal; produced under licence in India as Sarath; delivery probably planned 2021-2023
		(17500)	Konkurs	anti-tank missile	(2021)	2022	(3000)	INR31 billion (\$450 m) deal; Konkurs-M version; produced under licence in India
		(12)	Su-30MK	FGA aircraft	(2022)			INR107 b (\$1.4 b) deal; Su-30MKI version; produced under licence in India; selected 2020 but not yet ordered by end-2022
		(4000)	R-73	SRAAM	(1996)	1997-2015	(4000)	
		12	AK-630 30mm	naval gun	(2003)	2014-2016	12	For 3 Kolkata (Project-15A) destroyers produced in India
		8	AK-630 30mm	naval gun	(2003)	2014-2020	8	For 4 Kamorta (Project-28) frigates



								produced in India
		16	AK-630 30mm	naval gun	(2006)	2012-2014	(16)	For 4 Saryu OPV produced in India and 2 Deepak support ships from Italy
		4	AK-630 30mm	naval gun	(2010)	2022	4	For 1 Vikrant (IAC or Project-71) aircraft carrier produced in India
		29	MiG-29SMT	FGA aircraft	2010	2012-2016	29	\$1.2-1.5 b deal; MiG-29K version (incl 4 MiG-29KUB trainer/combat version); for use on aircraft carrier
		(100)	KAB-500/1500	guided bomb	(2011)	2013-2014	(100)	Probably KAB-500 version
		10000	Konkurs	anti-tank missile	2012	2013-2017	(10000)	INR12 b (\$225 m) deal
		42	Su-30MK	FGA aircraft	2012	2013-2017	(42)	\$1.6 b deal; assembled in India from kits; Su-30MKI version
		16	AK-630 30mm	naval gun	(2013)	2021	4	For 4 Project-15B (Visakhapatnam) destroyers produced in India
		68	Mi-8MT/Mi-17	transport helicopter	(2013)	2014-2016	(68)	\$1.5 b deal; Mi-17-V5 version; incl 9 for coast guard
			3M-54E Club	anti-ship/land-attack missile	(2017)			\$125 m deal; for Dehli destroyers and Kora frigates



		(350)	48N6	SAM	(2018)	2021-2022	(140)	Part of INR390 b (\$5 b) for S-400 SAM systems
		10	S-400 Triumf	SAM system	2018	2021-2022	4	INR390 b (\$5.4 b) deal; delivery planned 2021-2023/2024
		(500)	9M114	anti-tank missile	2019	2019	(500)	INR2 b (\$29 m) deal; for Mi-35 helicopters
		(390)	Igla-S	portable SAM	(2019)	2021	(390)	'VSHORAD' programme
		1	Project-971I	nuclear submarine	2019			\$3 b deal for 10-year lease; Indian designation Chakra-3; delivery planned 2025
		(300)	R-27R/T	BVRAAM	2019	2021-2022	(200)	R-27R1, R-27ER1, R-27T1 and R-27ET1 versions; for Su-30MKI and MiG-29M combat aircraft
		(300)	R-73	SRAAM	2019	2021-2022	(200)	For modernized MiG-21 combat aircraft
		(400)	R-77	BVRAAM	2019	2021-2022	(200)	For modernized MiG-21 combat aircraft
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				(300)	R-27R/T	BVRAAM	2019	2021-2022
				(300)	R-73	SRAAM	2019	2021-2022
		(400)	R-77	BVRAAM	2019	2021-2022	(200)	For modernized MiG-21 combat aircraft

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfer Database, 2023

The above table has explained the transfer of major weapons from Russia to India during 2014 -2022. Russia has supplied the following weapons to India from 2014 to 2022: Vehicle engines; Konkurs - anti-tank missiles; Garpun – Sea search radar, PJ -10 Brahmos – anti-ship/land attack missile, SU -30



MK FGA Aircraft; RBU -6000 ASW MRL; T -90S TANKS; MIG -29 SMT – FGA Aircraft; AL-31 Turbofan; Ka- 226 Light helicopter; Talwar Frigate; R-73 SRAAM; AK 630 30 mm - naval gun; Mig -29 SMT FGA Aircraft; KAB – 500/1500 – Guided bomb; AK – 630 30 MM - Naval Gun; Mi- 8 MT/Mi-17 – transport helicopter; 3M – 54E Club - anti-ship/land attack missile; S-400 Triumf - SAM System; 9M114 - anti-tank missile; Iгла – S - Portable SAM; Project 9711 - Nuclear submarine; RBU – 6000- ASW MRL; T -90S TANKS; KAB – 500/1500; Project -971I nuclear submarines. The above data indicates that India imports key defence equipment from Russia during 2014 -2022.

Arms Exports to India from World Countries (2014 -2022):

Name of the Exporter	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	Total Values are expressed in millions)
Brazil				10		10				21
Canada	9	87								96
Czechia	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	3
Denmark								5	10	14
France	54	119	117	408	192	712	730	1959	831	5121 – (Second)
Germany	42	75	45	33	5	84	75	44	13	416
Israel	148	157	497	607	524	118	108	200	247	2606 – (Fourth)
Italy	11	6	3	3			3	3	15	43
Kyrgyzstan		4	5	5						14
Netherlands	10	10	10					10	10	48
Russia	1719	1993	1906	1534	1322	1572	1274	1455	1342	14116 - (First)
South Africa				14	14	19	19	2	13	81
South Korea					26	191	191	26		434
Switzerland	31	25								56
Ukraine	42	42	31	11	11			20	20	177
United Kingdom	150	150	130	2	4	13	28	137	121	735 – (Fifth)
United States	1115	261	38	265	21	749	420	307	219	3395 - Third
unknown supplier(s)									5	5
Total	3330	2928	2782	2892	2118	3470	2847	4167	2846	27381



Source: SIPRI Arms Transfer Database,2023.Website: http://www.sipri.org/databases/arms_transfers/sources- and - method.

SIPRI Trend Indicator Values(TIVs) expressed in millions

The above table stipulates that Russia has supplied military equipment with the worth of Trend Indicator Values (TIV) of 14116 million to India during 2014 – 2022. It indicates that India imports the majority of its weapons from Russia and Russia stood in first place in exporting the highest military arsenal to India. France stood in second place by supplying military equipment worth TIV 5121 million. Israel has emerged as the third largest arms supplier to India with the worth of TIV 2606 million. United States emerged as the fourth largest arms supplier to India with the worth of TIV 3395 million. United Kingdom has emerged as the fifth largest arms supplier to India with TIV 735 million.

Arms Imports to the top 10 largest importers (2014 -2022) :

Figures are SIPRI Trend Indicator Values (TIVs) expressed in millions.

Rank 2014-2022	Rank 2013-2021	Recipient	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2014-2022
1	1	India	3330	2928	2782	2892	2118	3470	2847	4167	2846	27381
2	2	Saudi Arabia	2743	3389	2947	3920	3276	3484	2491	1739	2272	26261
3	3	Egypt	430	1444	1643	2340	1638	1157	1403	1287	701	12042
4	5	Australia	883	1465	1026	1664	1582	1186	1655	1260	761	11483
5	4	China	1082	1231	1143	1306	2119	1503	884	981	807	11054
6	10	Qatar	55	520	885	619	581	2048	838	2075	3342	10961
7	8	Pakistan	860	771	830	868	886	733	688	1180	1565	8381
8	7	Algeria	710	894	2911	1133	1282	167	675	237	158	8165
9	9	South Korea	738	256	1038	962	1140	1495	1276	798	408	8108
10	6	UAE	733	1179	941	832	1136	810	564	508	681	7384
		Others	15629	14409	15067	14903	12051	11554	10680	12561	18443	125297
		Total	27195	28484	31213	31438	27807	27607	24000	26792	31983	256518

Figures are SIPRI Trend Indicator Values (TIVs) are expressed in millions. Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database, 2023

The above table indicates that India has emerged as the major arms importer in the contemporary global world. India has imported the defence equipment worth TIV 27381 million during 2014 – 2022. Saudi Arabia has emerged as the second largest arms importer with TIV 26261 million; Egypt is in third place with TIV 12042 million; Australia is in fourth place with TIV 11483 million and China has emerged fifth largest arms importer with TIV 11054 million in the global world.

Arms Exports from the top 10 largest exporters (2014 -2022):

Figures are SIPRI Trend Indicator Values (TIVs) expressed in millions



Rank 2014-2022	Rank 2013-2021	Supplier	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2014-2022
1	1	United States	9588	9918	9769	11732	9674	10888	9426	10994	14515	96504
2	2	Russia	5467	5927	6811	6199	7173	5627	3904	2857	2820	46784
3	3	France	1755	2263	2155	2355	1998	3612	2378	3853	3021	23389
4	4	China	1308	1800	2449	1617	1372	1585	704	1462	2017	14313
5	5	Germany	1822	1820	2529	1866	1106	1020	1172	938	1510	13783
6	6	United Kingdom	1658	1177	1339	1117	683	910	625	656	1504	9668
7	7	Italy	677	687	621	717	539	384	848	1673	1825	7972
8	8	Spain	962	977	480	820	705	308	971	594	950	6767
9	9	Israel	386	562	1226	1187	1122	348	381	543	831	6586
10	10	South Korea	220	94	473	738	1054	682	772	544	209	4785
		Others	3352	3260	3359	3091	2383	2245	2818	2678	2783	25968
		Total	27195	28484	31213	31438	27807	27607	24000	26792	31983	256518

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfer Database, 2023.

The above table indicates that the United States has emerged as the major global arms exporter with TIV 96505 million; Russia has emerged as the second largest arms exporter with TIV 46784 million; France stood in third place with TIV 23389 million; China has emerged as the fourth largest arms supplier with TIV 14313 million and Germany stood in fifth place with TIV 13783 million and United Kingdom has emerged as the sixth largest arms supplier with TIV 9668 million in the contemporary global world.

Russia and India have strengthened military technical cooperation in the contemporary global world. India has imported a wide range of defence equipment from Russia. 200 industrial facilities have been developed with the technical assistance from USSR/Russia with special reference to lic naval equipment ensed production, repair and maintenance of armored, anti-tank missile systems. Joint development of weapons and technologies has changed the nature of Russia - India defence cooperation. Intergovernmental Commission on Military-Technical Cooperation (IRIGC-MTC, October 3, 2000) and the roadmap” for the development of bilateral military cooperation between the Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation and the Ministry of Defence of the Republic of India of June 23, 2017 are the major achievements of Russia - India defence cooperation.



Russia and India's commitment to uninterrupted defence cooperation:

Russia and India have determined to strengthen defence cooperation since the level of defence cooperation has been affected by the Ukraine crisis and obstacles created by external factors. Russian Ambassador to India, Denis Alipov has stated that all troubles and barriers created by the external factors have been effectively mitigated by the Russian Federation. The ambassador told PTI that the supply of S-400 Triumf surface-to-air missile systems to India is moving smoothly as per the scheduled time. Both India and Russia have been continuing strategic defence cooperation and real-time communication concerning defence cooperation. Mr Alipov has clarified statements since some apprehensions have been created in the minds of the people related to the delivery of S-400 missiles in the context of the Russia - Ukraine on-going war (Alipov Denis, Russian Ambassador to India, The Hindu, September 04, 2022).

Mr. Alipov, Russian Ambassador to India has stated that "Defence cooperation is one of the major pillars of the Russian-Indian special and privileged strategic partnership. Both our nations are very motivated to ensure that it remains uninterrupted, and "We managed to successfully mitigate barriers created by negative external factors and adjust to new realities using alternative payments and logistics options," Mr Alipov said. (Alipov Denis, Russian Ambassador to India, the Hindu, September 04, 2022).

Despite U.S. sanctions under the provisions of the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), India signed a \$5 billion deal with Russia in October 2018 to buy five units of the S-400 air defence missile systems (Alipov Denis, Russian Ambassador to India, The Hindu, September 04, 2022). It is one of the historic and unique defence accords between Russia and India. Russia has delivered the first regiment of the missiles in December 2022. Further, Russia has completed the delivery of major components of the second regiment of the weapon systems. (Alipov Denis, Russian Ambassador to India, the Hindu, September 04, 2022). Mr. Alipov has stated "Both sides maintain real-time communication to tackle those. Currently, we note positive dynamics in the implementation of bilateral agreements and contracts, including on S-400 systems supplies, while Russia does its best to timely fulfil all its obligations," the envoy said.

Strains in Russia - India relations

Since the Russia - Ukraine war is continuing to date, there are speculations among defence experts and policymakers related to the delivery of hardware and spare parts of defence types of equipment. India imports missiles; rockets and air defence equipment are imported from Russia. Indian Defence Ministry has analysed the situation and arranged equipment and ammunition according to the prevailing geo-political scenario. In the aftermath of the Dokhla stand-off and Galwan stand-off, the Indian military has modernized its technology and the army has prepared along the borders on the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Armed forces have stockpiled the ammunition and spares at the Eastern Ladakh side. Meanwhile, Russia has assured that it will adhere to the timelines concerning delivery of the equipment as desired by India (Dinakar Peri, The Hindu, July 03, 2022).

Since 2008, India and Russia have crossed \$ 15 billion and deals including S-400 long-range air defence systems; Mango Armor-piercing fin-stabilised discarding sabot (APFSDS) rounds for the T-90S tanks, AK-203 assault rifles (Peri, The Hindu, July 03, 2022) There were some delays in supplying S-400 defence systems and the operationalisation of the agreement for the manufacture of 6.1 lakh AK-203 rifles at Korwa, Amethi in Uttar Pradesh has been delayed for some time.



Furthermore, 21 MiG-29 fighter jets for the Indian Air Force (IAF) along with the upgradation of 59 existing Mig-29 jets estimated to cost ₹7,418 crore and the manufacture of 12 SU-30 MKI aircraft at an estimated ₹10,730 crore by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) Has been delayed by the Russian defence ministry. Manufacture of 200 K-226T utility helicopters in India is also under reconsideration indigenous Light Utility Helicopters due to cost concerns (Dinakara Peri, The Hindu, July 03, 2022) Since there are financial sanctions of the West on Russia, practical problems have arisen in transferring money through the SWIFT system. Thus, Russia and India have done transactions through Rouble – Rupee arrangement. Both the Central banks have extensively discussed and accepted small payments. Russia and India have signed the agreement for the supply of S-400 in the wake of the looming threat of U.S. sanctions under CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act), Russia and India have done transactions through Rouble - Rupee system. These all factors led to the delay of 21 MiG-29 fighter jets along with the upgradation of 59 existing Mig29 jets and the manufacture of 12 SU-30 MKI aircraft (Dinakara Peri, The Hindu, July 03, 2023).

Thorny Bilateral Issues

External Affairs Minister Shri Jaishankar Ji will be visiting Moscow from December 25 -29, 2023 to discuss various key bilateral issues with special reference to delays in the supply of defence equipment, bilateral trade and Russian oil; rouble – rupee payment mechanism. Mr Jaishankar is visiting Moscow on the occasion of the annual summit to be held between Russian President Vladimir Putin and Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi. It has been a tradition between Russia and India from 2000 to 2021(Suhasini Haidar, The Hindu, 2023).

Both countries have skipped the summit for the second consecutive year due to the Ukraine Conflict. Meanwhile, Vladimir Putin and Shri Narendra Modi have been visiting several countries except participating in the annual summits between Russia and India. Adding to this, India has converted the SCO summit into a virtual SCO summit, which was supposed to take place in New Delhi. In this context, External Affairs Minister Shri Jaishankar will be extensively discussing various ket bilateral issues, global issues, multilateral issues, people-to-people ties and cultural ties. Maria Zakharova has stipulated that the Russian Foreign Minister and Indian External Affairs Minister will participate in the full-format negotiations and press - conference on December 27, 2023 (Suhasini Haidar, The Hindu, 2023).

The visit of External Affairs Shri Jaishankar has attained good momentum and significance since Mr.Sergei Lavrov visited India to participate in the G-20 Foreign Ministers' meeting in March 2023; and SCO Foreign Ministers' meeting in May 2023. Sergei Lavrov has represented Vladimir Putin at the G-20 summit in New Delhi in September 2023. Previously Shri Jaishankar visited Moscow in November 2022 to prepare for the annual summit, which has been cancelled due to war with Ukraine. Mr.Sergei Lavrov had stated in a media conference on the occasion of the G-20 summit, that payment mechanism issues have erupted between India and Russia due to the US, and EU sanctions on Russia over the Ukraine war and payment mechanism issues have to be resolved. It means delayed payments and payments have to be made through either UAE dirham or Chinese Yuan for imports from Russia. These payment balances have increased to 368% in a year from 2022 to 2023. It has been increased due to the import of Russian oil, which has led to a major trade deficit. Apart from this, there have been delays in the fourth and fifth regiments of the S-400 Triumf Air Defence Systems which will be delivered in 2024 (Suhasini Haidar, The Hindu, 2023).



Furthermore, Sergei Lavrov and Shri Jaishankar will be discussing various issues related to the Israel – Gaza war and, the Ukraine conflict. Russia has vehemently criticised the US support to Israel over the bombing of civilians in Gaza. 20,000 people have been killed in the Israel - Gaza conflict. Since India abstained from a vote in the UNGA in October 2023 over the ceasefire of the Israel - Gaza conflict and India's decision not to join the U.S.-led naval operation against Houthi attacks on shipping in the Red Sea, named "Operation Prosperity Guardian" have lily to find a good place and favour in Moscow (Suhasini Haidar, The Hindu, 2023).

Sergei Lavrov, Russian External Affairs Minister while addressing the Russian Parliament has stated that the "relations of special and privileged strategic partnership with India are progressively advancing," and further explained that Russia is focussing on India out of Global South countries along with China. Vladimir Putin has appreciated the Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi for India's stand on various contemporary global issues and global security. Vladimir Putin has praised Shri Narendra Modi for refusing to be "frightened, intimidated or forced to take any actions, steps, decisions that would be at variance with the national interests of India and the Indian people." (Suhasini Haidar, The Hindu, November 02, Vladimir Putin 2023, Moscow).

Conclusion

Hon'ble Prime Minister of India Shri Narendra Modi has extended his greetings to Russian President Vladimir Putin for visiting India and participating 21st India – Russia Annual Summit in New Delhi on 06th December 2021. Vladimir Putin and Shri Narendra Modi have exchanged very useful ideas related to defence, cultural cooperation, strategic trade and investment. Both leaders have shared perspectives on various global and multilateral issues. Russia and India have discussed bilateral relations in a very friendly atmosphere. The nature of India - Russia bilateral relations has been shifted and elevated to a Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership. But the leaders have welcomed the 2+2 dialogue the 2+2 Dialogue of Foreign and Defence Ministers and the meeting of the Inter-Governmental Commission on Military & Military-Technical Cooperation in New Delhi on 6 December 2021 (PMO Office, Government of India, 2023)

Both leaders have extensively discussed various issues related to economic cooperation with special reference to the North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the proposed Chennai – Vladivostok Eastern Maritime Corridor. Both leaders have agreed to share common perspectives on various contemporary global issues including the UN Security Council. President Putin has appreciated the Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi for India's successful Presidency of BRICS in 2021. Similarly, the Indian Prime Minister also congratulated the Russian Prime Minister for Russia's chairmanship of the Arctic Council. (PMO Office, Government of India, 2023) .Both countries have signed key defence pacts, trade, energy, science & technology, intellectual property, outer space, geological exploration, cultural exchange, and education. It has indicated the multifaceted nature of the strategic partnership between India and Russia.

The Kudankulam Nuclear Power project is one of the important milestones of the India - Russia strategic partnership. Russia has strengthened the energy capacity of India by extending cooperation in the nuclear sector. Russia and India have achieved milestones in defence cooperation. S- 400 missile systems; License-based production of T-90 tanks, Sukhoi 30 MKI fighter jets, and AK-203 assault rifles have been conducted strictly by the requirements of the Government of India programs "Make in



India" and "Atmanirbhar Bharat". (PMO Office, Government of India, 2023) BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles and Fifth Generation aircraft indicate the significance of Russia - India strategic defence cooperation. Russia and India have been actively participating in various multilateral organizations i.e. BRICS, SCO, G-20 and the Russia – India - China Trilateral Summit. Russia has appreciated India's stance on Ukraine at the United Nations. India and Russia have to resolve the disputes amicably to strengthen the strategic defence cooperation.

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