

Article by the Prime Minister of India H.E. Mr. Narendra Modi on the 70th Anniversary of establishment of diplomatic relations between India and the Russian Federation

Seven Decades of India-Russia Friendship

Seven decades ago, on 13 April 1947, even before India gained independence, India and Russia established diplomatic relations with each other. I convey my warm greetings to the people of Russia and India on the 70th anniversary of this momentous milestone which we are celebrating this year.

India-Russia relations have been the one constant in a world that has changed dramatically since 1947. They have withstood the test of time, and grown from strength to strength. The resilience of our relationship is based on the fact that it rests on the principles of equality, trust and mutual benefit. We have adapted our partnership to the different stages of our national development and to the changing realities of the international context. We have been together in times good and bad.

Our relations of course go well beyond the last seventy years. They are steeped in history. They also go well beyond the governments. Afanasei Nikitin travelled from Tver to India in the 15th century to connect Russia to India. Later, in the mid-18th century, Indian merchants travelled between India and Russia and established settlements in Astrakhan. Gerasim Lebedev, who was a pioneer of Indology and Bengali theatre, visited India around the same period. He was followed by Ivan Menayev in the mid-19th century, who introduced Sanskrit to the people of Russia, studied Vedic literature, the edicts of Ashoka the Great, Pali grammar and Buddhist studies. Scholars like Sergei Oldenburg and Fyodor Shcherbatskoy continued that tradition during the

following decades, translating and studying many Indian epics and classical texts.

In later years, Rabindranath Tagore's poetry was translated into Russian and Mahatma Gandhi, the father of our nation, and Leo Tolstoy corresponded with each other. The immortal works of Nikolai Roerich and his love for India remain a part of our rich cultural legacy. Russian writers like Dostoevsky, Pushkin and Chekov influenced Indian thought and drama. Yoga, Indian films, songs and dances remain an abiding bond between our people.

The Soviet Union helped India build its industrial base. The factories at Bokaro and Bhilai, the hydroelectric dam at Bhakra-Nangal, and the images of Wing Commander Rakesh Sharma on board the Soyuz T-11 as the first Indian cosmonaut, are etched in the minds of every Indian.

In the last seventy years, India has developed a large and diversified industrial and technological base. We are among the fastest growing large economies of the world. The potential for India's accelerated growth has never been greater, nor the optimism higher. Russia has re-emerged from the events of 1991 as a global power with international reach and influence. Its economy has been modernized and a new generation is driving the country forward.

In 2000, India and Russia signed a Declaration on Strategic Partnership. In 2010, we elevated our partnership to the level of a Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership. These documents are more than just words. They contain an ambitious blueprint for our cooperation. Our cooperation in the military technical field is a pillar of great strength in India-Russia relations. Russian equipment and technology is the mainstay of our defence forces. The symbols of our contemporary partnership today include Indian investments in Sakhalin 1, and now the Vankor and Taas-Yuryakh oil fields, the nuclear power plant at Kudankulam and the Brahmos Joint Venture Project. In the

economic field we are moving in the direction of increasing mutual investments in manufacturing, development of the International North-South Transport Corridor and creation of a Green Corridor. India has been an important contributor to the pharmaceutical industry of Russia.

But we cannot and should not be satisfied with our achievements and must strive to open new vistas. We should fully exploit our mutual complementarities based on our large markets, resource endowments and industrial and technological base. We are focusing on increasing our bilateral trade which is considerably below our potential. We are opening new areas of cooperation in the energy sector, telecommunications and science and technology. We have set up funds to facilitate investment in high technologies. We look upon the Arctic as another area of cooperation with Russia. We wish to expand cooperation between the regions of Russia and the States of India, and especially with the Russian Far East. We are working on expanding our trade ties with the Eurasian Economic Union. We are exploring new areas of cooperation like railways, innovation, IT, diamond trade, and infrastructure. There are efforts towards greater joint production and technology transfer from Russia to India. We are working together to enhance physical connectivity as also intensify contacts between our scientists, universities and intellectuals, particularly the younger generation. Russian companies are welcome to join our flagship programmes such as Make in India, Start Up India, Skill India and Digital India.

The significance of our relations goes beyond the bilateral sphere. This is natural and has always been so. Our partnership has contributed to global peace and security. We have supported each other's key interests. We are important stakeholders in upholding the stability of the international political, security, economic and financial order. We cooperate closely in forums such as the United Nations, BRICS, G-20, East Asia Summit, RIC and the IAEA.

India looks forward to becoming a full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation that became possible with wholehearted Russian support.

At a time of multiple global challenges, our cooperation becomes all the more necessary. There is loosening of the traditional power balance in the world. New centers of influence and new engines of growth are emerging. The United Nations Security Council no longer reflects these changing realities, and direly needs reform. The world is plagued by multiple regional hotspots. Their effects are being felt across the world. The biggest threat to civilized societies comes from terrorism that is today more lethal and more organized than ever before. Terrorism is challenging our way of life. India and Russia are natural partners in fighting terrorism unitedly and with determination and to promote a multi-polar international system based on the central role of the United Nations and international law.

In India, the policy of building strong relations with Russia enjoys crosscutting national consensus. Every government in India since 1947 has accorded the highest priority to developing close relations with the government and people of Russia. My government is not only committed to following this policy, but taking our relations to newer heights.

I will never forget my first visit to Russia in 2001 with Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee. I was struck by the achievements of Russia, its sense of history and the pride of its people. I have visited Russia a few times thereafter, and every time I have felt the immense goodwill towards my country and people. We deeply value the leadership and support that President Putin has given to our relationship.

As we commemorate seven decades of our close partnership, we have an occasion to celebrate our achievements and plan the future trajectory of our relationship. When President Putin visited Goa in October 2016 for the 17th

annual bilateral Summit, we agreed on a roadmap to celebrate this momentous occasion. I am happy to note that the road map is well on its way to implementation and that many new elements are being enthusiastically added to the celebrations.

I pay homage to all those, known and unknown, who have toiled and contributed to the development of the unique relationship between our two nations. We are the inheritors of their legacy and beneficiaries of their hard work and above all, their unwavering faith in this relationship. We are committed to building on this legacy and bequeathing to our youth a strong and vibrant partnership that will contribute to changing the world for the better.

I eagerly look forward to my visit to the beautiful city of St. Petersburg for the 18th Annual India-Russia Bilateral Summit and the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum.

Long live India-Russia friendship!