

RESTORING THE BOND

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There were no dramatic agreements that came out from Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#)'s annual summit with the Russian President, Vladimir Putin this week, on the margins of the annual Eastern Economic Forum at Vladivostok. The two sides agreed to intensify energy cooperation in various sectors and develop transport connectivity between Chennai and Vladivostok. They also addressed the long-standing problem of spare part supply for the large inventory of Russian weapons with the Indian armed forces. Delhi and Moscow will now set up production facilities for spares in India. All this is welcome incremental progress. But to understand the importance of the 20th meeting in six years between the two leaders, look elsewhere.

The unfolding turbulence in India's major power relations has been brought into sharp relief by the international response to New Delhi's decision to change the constitutional status of Jammu and Kashmir. India's relations with China, already under considerable strain, have gotten worse amid Beijing's harsh response and its decision to move the United Nations Security Council in support of Pakistan. While the western powers have extended support for India's argument that the developments in Kashmir are internal to India, they have also raised questions about the human rights situation there. Russia's support seemed to come with fewer caveats and Modi has thanked his "great friend" Putin for that in Vladivostok. Even more importantly, the joint statement issued by the two leaders emphasised the shared understanding on the "inadmissibility of intervention in the internal affairs" of nations.

In the last few years, Delhi and Moscow seemed to drift apart. If Russia was concerned about India's deepening partnership with the US, Delhi warily watched Moscow's strategic embrace of Beijing and its flirtation with the Pakistan army and its proxy in Afghanistan, the Taliban. More recently, though, there has been some effort at rebuilding mutual confidence. India refused to buckle under US pressure to stop buying advanced Russian weapons like the [S-400](#) missile system. Moscow has signalled that it will remain mindful of Delhi's interests even as it aligns with Beijing. Both Modi and Putin know that the world has entered an uncertain era and they need to keep all their options in play. Neither of them wants to squander the benefits of a solid bilateral relationship built over decades in this moment of transition in major power politics. Even as India and Russia restore their strategic bonds, there should be no illusions about returning to the good old days. For, the density of Russia's partnership with China and India's engagement with America is today greater than the ties between Delhi and Moscow. The big missing link in the India-Russia relationship is a solid commercial foundation. In Vladivostok, Modi and Putin affirmed their commitment to address this weakness. They must now deliver on that promise.

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