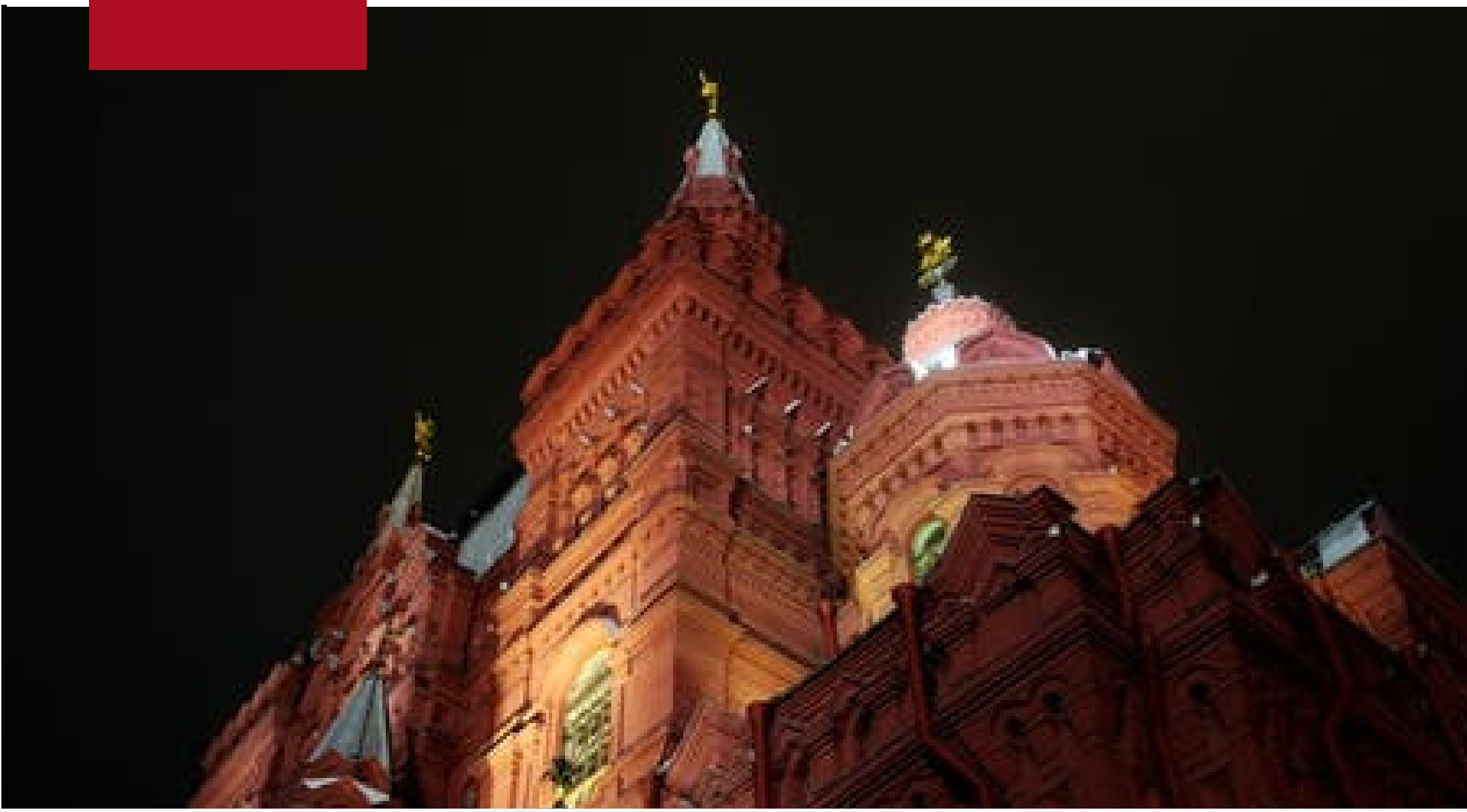
Chandrawat & Partners



BILATERAL RELATIONS

INDIA - RUSSIA

INTRODUCTION

India–Russia relations represent one of the most enduring and resilient partnerships in modern international politics. Built on the strong strategic, military, economic, and diplomatic foundations forged with the Soviet Union during the Cold War, the relationship seamlessly transitioned following the dissolution of the USSR in 1991. Today, both nations describe their ties as a "Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership," sustained by deep mutual trust and regular summit-level dialogue between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Vladimir Putin—including the 23rd Annual Summit in New Delhi in December 2025 and the 2026 BRICS Summit. As the two nations commemorate 80 years of diplomatic relations in 2027, their partnership continues to evolve to meet contemporary global realities.

Traditionally, the Indo-Russian strategic partnership has rested on five core pillars: politics, defence, civil nuclear energy, counter-terrorism cooperation, and space. In recent years, economic and energy cooperation has emerged as a transformative sixth pillar. Having surpassed earlier targets to reach a record US$68.7 billion in bilateral trade in FY 2024–25, New Delhi and Moscow have set an ambitious goal of achieving US$100 billion in annual trade by 2030, supported by ongoing Free Trade Agreement negotiations between India and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).

Institutional engagement is steered by the India–Russia Intergovernmental Commission (IRIGC), while both nations collaborate closely across major multilateral forums such as the UN, BRICS, G20, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). In the defence sector, Russia remains India's largest arms supplier—accounting for 40% of India's arms imports between 2021 and 2025—even as the partnership shifts from a traditional buyer-seller dynamic toward joint research, co-development, and domestic manufacturing under Make in India.

Expanding diplomatic infrastructure reflects this deepening engagement. India maintains an Embassy in Moscow and four Consulates General in Saint Petersburg, Vladivostok, Kazan, and Yekaterinburg, while Russia operates an Embassy in New Delhi, three Consulates General (Chennai, Kolkata, and Mumbai), and three Honorary Consulates (Goa, Hyderabad, and Thiruvananthapuram). Underpinned by enduring public goodwill and growing cultural, academic, and tourism exchanges, India and Russia enter their ninth decade of diplomatic ties with a shared commitment to a multipolar world order.

HISTORY

Goods uncovered from archaeological site such as Pazyryk indicates that nomads inhabiting the area conducted trading activities with India during 4th-3rd century BCE. In 1468, Russian traveller Afanasy Nikitin began his journey to India. Between 1468 and 1472, he travelled through Persia, India and the Ottoman Empire. The documentation of his experiences during this journey is compiled in the book The Journey beyond Three Seas (Khozheniye za tri morya). In 18th century the Russian cities Astrakhan, Moscow and St. Petersburg were frequently visited by Indian merchants. Russia was used as a transit trade between Western Europe and India.

In 1801, Tsar Paul ordered plans made for the invasion of British India by 22,000 Cossacks, which never actually occurred due to poor handling of preparations. The intention was that Russia would form an alliance with France, and attack the British Empire and its weak point using a French corps of 35,000 men and a Russian corps of 25,000 infantry and 10,000 mounted Cossacks. Some Cossacks had approached Orenburg when the tsar was assassinated. His successor Alexander I immediately cancelled the plans.

Soviet Union and India

A cordial relationship began in 1955 and represented the most successful of the Soviet attempts to foster closer relations with Third World countries. The relationship began with a visit by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru to the Soviet Union in June 1955, and First Secretary of the Communist Party Nikita Khrushchev's return trip to India in the fall of 1955. While in India, Khrushchev announced that the Soviet Union supported Indian sovereignty over the disputed territory of the Kashmir region and over Portuguese coastal enclaves such as Goa.

In 1965 the Soviet Union served successfully as peace broker between India and Pakistan after an Indian-Pakistani border war. The Soviet Chairman of the Council of Ministers, literally Premier of the Soviet Union, Alexei Kosygin, met with representatives of India and Pakistan and helped them negotiate an end to the military conflict over Kashmir.

Relations between the Soviet Union and India did not suffer much during the right-wing Janata Party's coalition government in the late 1970s, although India did move to establish better economic and military relations with Western countries. To counter these efforts by India to diversify its relations, the Soviet Union proffered additional weaponry and economic assistance.

Russia and India

Relations with India have always been and I am sure will be one of the most important foreign policy priorities of our country. Our mutual ties of friendship are filled with sympathy, and trust, and openness. And we must say frankly that they were never overshadowed by disagreements or conflict. This understanding - this is indeed the common heritage of our peoples. It is valued and cherished in our country, in Russia, and in India. And we are rightfully proud of so close, so close relations between our countries.

— Dmitry Medvedev, about relations with India

We are confident that India lives in the hearts of every Russian. In the same way, I can assure you that Russia also lives in our souls as a Homeland, as people who share our emotions, our feelings of mutual respect and constant friendship. Long live our friendship!

— Pratibha Patil, about relations with Russia

"...India-Russia relationship is one of deep friendship and mutual confidence that would not be affected by transient political trends. Russia has been a pillar of strength at difficult moments in India's history. India will always reciprocate this support. Russia is and will remain our most important defense partner and a key partner for our energy security, both on nuclear energy and hydrocarbons,"

— Pranab Mukherjee, about relations with Russia

POLITICAL RELATIONS

The first major political initiative, since the collapse of the Soviet Union, between India and Russia began with the Strategic Partnership signed between the two countries in 2000. President Vladimir Putin stated in an article written by him in the Hindu, "The Declaration on Strategic Partnership between India and Russia signed in October 2000 became a truly historic step". Former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh also agreed with his counterpart by stated in speech given during President Putin's 2012 visit to India, "President Putin is a valued friend of India and the original architect of the India-Russia strategic partnership". Both countries closely collaborate on matters of shared national interest these include at the UN, BRICS, G20 and SCO. Russia also strongly supports India receiving a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. In addition, Russia has vocally backed India joining the NSG and APEC. Moreover, it has also expressed interest in joining SAARC with observer status in which India is a founding member.

Russia currently is one of only two countries in the world that has a mechanism for annual ministerial-level defence reviews with India. The Indo-Russian Inter-Governmental Commission (IRIGC) is one of the largest and most comprehensive governmental mechanisms that India has had with any country internationally. Almost every department from the Government of India attends it.

Relations have deteriorated recently due to India's anti-China stance. Russian foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov, accused the West of trying to undermine Russia's close partnership with India. He added that India is being used as an object by the Western powers.



IRIGC

The Indo-Russian Inter-Governmental Commission (IRIGC) is the main body that conducts affairs at the governmental level between both countries. Some have described it as the steering committee of Indo-Russia relations. It is divided into two parts, the first covering Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Co-operation. This is normally co-chaired by the Russian Deputy Prime Minister and the Indian External Affairs Minister. The second part of the commission covers Military Technical Co-operation this is co-chaired by the two countries respective Defence Ministers. Both parts of IRIGC meet annually.

In addition, to the IRIGC there are other bodies that conduct economic relations between the two countries. These include, the Indo-Russian Forum on Trade and Investment, the India-Russia Business Council, the India- Russia Trade, Investment and Technology Promotion Council and the India-Russia Chamber of Commerce.

An article penned by Vladimir Putin was published in The Times of India on 30 May 2017, a day before Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Russia, to mark the 70th anniversary of the establishment of relations between India and the Russia on 13 April 1947.



MILITARY RELATIONSHIP

The Soviet Union was an important supplier of defence equipment for several decades, and this role has been inherited by the Russian federation. Russia 68%, USA 14% and Israel 7.2% are the major arms suppliers to India (2012-2016), and India and Russia have deepened their Make in India defence manufacturing cooperation by signing agreements for the construction of naval frigates, KA-226T twin-engine utility helicopters (joint venture (JV) to make 60 in Russia and 140 in India), Brahmos cruise missile (JV with 50.5% India and 49.5% Russia).In December 1988, an India–Russia co-operation agreement was signed, which resulted in the sale of a multitude of defence equipment to India and also the emergence of the countries as development partners as opposed to purely a buyer-seller relationship, including the joint ventures projects to develop and produce the Fifth Generation Fighter Aircraft (FGFA) and the Multirole Transport Aircraft (MTA). The agreement is pending a 10-year extension. In 1997, Russia and India signed a ten-year agreement for further military-technical cooperation encompassed a wide range of activities, including the purchase of completed weaponry, joint development and production, and joint marketing of armaments and military technologies.

Now, the co-operation is not limited to a buyer-seller relationship but includes joint research and development, training, service to service contacts, including joint exercises.

In October 2018, India inked the historic agreement worth US$5.43 billion with Russia to procure five S-400 Triumf surface-to-air missile defence system, the most powerful missile defence system in the world ignoring America's CAATSA act. The United States threatened India with sanctions over India's decision to buy the S-400 missile defense system from Russia.

- India and Russia have several major joint military programmes including:
- BrahMos cruise missile programme
- 5th generation fighter jet programme
- Sukhoi Su-30MKI programme (230+ to be built by Hindustan Aeronautics)
- Ilyushin/HAL Tactical Transport Aircraft
- KA-226T twin-engine utility helicopters
- some frigates

Between 2013 and 2018, Russia accounted for 62% of arms sales to India, down from 79% between 2008 and 2012.

Troops of the Indian Armed Forces during the 2020 Moscow Victory Day Parade.

Additionally, India has purchased/leased various military hardware from Russia:

- S-400 Triumf (purchase pending)[40]
- Kamov Ka-226 200 to be made in India under the Make in India initiative.
- T-90S Bhishma with over 1000 to be built in India
- Akula-II nuclear submarine (2 to be leased with an option to buy when the lease expires)
- INS Vikramaditya aircraft carrier programme
- Tu-22M3 bombers (4 ordered, not delivered)
- US$900 million upgrade of MiG-29
- Mil Mi-17 (80 ordered) more in Service.
- Ilyushin Il-76 Candid (6 ordered to fit Israeli Phalcon radar)
- The Farkhor Air Base in Tajikistan is currently jointly operated by Indian Air Force and Tajikistan Air Force.



ECONOMIC RELATIONS

Bilateral trade between India and Russia spans key value chain sectors, including energy, fertilisers, metals, machinery, electronics, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, engineering goods, textiles, agricultural products, and precious stones. Having grown from US$1.5 billion in 2002 to US$11 billion in 2012, bilateral trade surged to a record US$68.7 billion in FY 2024–25 (and nearly US$60 billion in FY 2025–26), far surpassing the earlier US$30 billion target for 2025. Both governments have now set a target of US$100 billion in annual trade by 2030, while working to narrow the trade imbalance by boosting Indian exports. Economic engagement is steered by the IRIGC, alongside the India–Russia Business Council, the CEOs' Council, and the Chamber of Commerce.

To sustain this momentum, both nations are negotiating a Free Trade Agreement between India and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), streamlining customs procedures, strengthening national-currency settlement mechanisms, and advancing transport corridors such as the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and the Chennai–Vladivostok Maritime Corridor. Long-term supply partnerships anchor trade in crude oil, coal, LNG, fertilisers, and rough diamonds through major enterprises such as Rosneft, Gazprom, and Alrosa.

Industrial and technological collaboration continues to expand. In civil aviation, Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) and Russia’s United Aircraft Corporation (UAC) partnered in 2025 to localize manufacturing of the SJ-100 regional passenger aircraft in India. In civil nuclear energy, Russia is constructing four additional reactors at the Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant alongside discussions on Small Modular Reactors. As the world’s largest diamond cutting and polishing hub, India facilitates direct rough diamond trade through Mumbai’s Special Notified Zone. Cooperation is also growing in IT, railways, and tourism—boosted by Russia’s Unified e-Visa for Indians and India’s fee-free 30-day e-Tourist Visa for Russian nationals.

On the investment front, India and Russia have set a target of US$50 billion in mutual investments by 2030 across energy, pharmaceuticals, manufacturing, critical minerals, and green technologies. Additionally, India’s US$1 billion Line of Credit supports joint infrastructure and connectivity projects in the Russian Far East.

INDIAN COMMODITIES EXPORTS TO RUSSIA (2014)

Russian imports from India amounted to $3.1 billion or 1% of its overall imports, and 0.7% of India's overall exports in 2014. The 10 major commodities exported from India to Russia were:

PRODUCT CATEGORY	QUANTITY ($ MILLION)
PHARMACEUTICALS	$819.1
ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT	$382.3
MACHINES, ENGINES, PUMPS	$159.4
IRON AND STEEL	$149.1
CLOTHING (NOT KNIT OR CROCHET)	$135.7
COFFEE, TEA AND SPICES	$131.7
TOBACCO	$113.9
VEHICLES	$111.1
KNIT OR CROCHET CLOTHING	$97.9
OTHER FOOD PREPARATIONS	$77.7

RUSSIAN COMMODITIES EXPORTS TO INDIA (2014)

Russian exports to India amounted to $6.2 billion or 1.3% of its overall exports, and 0.9% of India's overall imports in 2014. The 10 major commodities exported from Russia to India were:

PRODUCT CATEGORY	QUANTITY ($ MILLION)
GEMS, PRECIOUS METALS, COINS	$1100.0
MACHINES, ENGINES, PUMPS	$707.4
ELECTRONIC EQUIPMENT	$472.7
FERTILIZERS	$366.8
MEDICAL, TECHNICAL EQUIPMENT	$302.7
OIL	$223.8
IRON AND STEEL	$167.4
PAPER	$136.8
INORGANIC CHEMICALS	$127.4
SALT, SULPHUR, STONE, CEMENT	$105.1

FREE TRADE AGREEMENT (FTA)

Both governments have long viewed their bilateral trade well below its optimal potential, with the only long term way of rectifying this through having a Free trade agreement (FTA). Bothgovernments haveset up a joint study group (JSG) to negotiate the specifications of an agreement, a final agreement would be signed between India and Eurasian Economic Union of which Russia is a part of (also including Kazakhstan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan & Belarus). Thereby, the Indo-Russian FTA would result in a much bigger free trade agreement including India, Russia, Kazakhstan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan & Belarus.[65] It is predicted once an FTA is in place bilateral trade will increase manifold, thereby significantly increasing the importance of economics in bilateral ties.

The table below shows the recent Indo-Russian bilateral trade performance:

INDO-RUSSIAN TRADE (2009–12)

YEAR	TRADE VOLUME (BILLION $)	ANNUAL CHANGE
2009	$7.46	-
2010	$8.53	+14.34%
2011	$8.87	+3.98%
2012	$11.04	+24.50%

CO-OPERATION IN THE ENERGY SECTOR

Energy sector is an important area in Indo-Russian bilateral relations. In 2001, ONGC-Videsh acquired 20% stake in the Sakhalin-I oil and gas project in the Russian Federation, and has invested about US$1.7 billion in the project. Gazprom, the Russian company, and Gas Authority of India have collaborated in joint development of a block in the Bay of Bengal. Kudankulam Nuclear Power Project with two units of 1000 MW each is a good example of Indo-Russian nuclear energy co-operation. Both sides have expressed interest in expanding co-operation in the energy sector.

In December 2008, Russia and India signed an agreement to build civilian nuclear reactors in India during a visit by the Russian president to New Delhi.



SPACE CO-OPERATION

Historically, there has been a long history of cooperation between the Soviet Union and India in space. Examples include Aryabhata it was India's first satellite, named after an Indian astronomer of the same name. It was launched by the Soviet Union on 19 April 1975 from Kapustin Yar using a Kosmos-3M launch vehicle. The only Indian to visit space, Rakesh Sharma, was also launched by the Soviet Union under Interkosmos space program. During President Vladimir Putin's visit to India in December 2004, two space-related bilateral agreements were signed viz. Inter-Governmental umbrella Agreement on co-operation in the outer space for peaceful purposes and the Inter Space Agency Agreement on co-operation in the Russian satellite navigation system GLONASS. Subsequently, a number of follow-up agreements on GLONASS have been signed.

In November 2007, the two countries have signed an agreement on joint lunar exploration. These space co-operation programmes are under implementation. Chandrayaan-2 was a joint lunar exploration mission proposed by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Russian Federal Space Agency (RKA) and had 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), included a lunar orbiter and a rover made in India as well as one lander built by Russia. But due to the repeated delays in the joint venture, the Indian side ultimately decided to develop its own lander and borne all costs of the mission by itself. Later on ISRO developed its own lander named Vikram and launched Chandrayaan-2 mission successfully on July 22, 2019 from SDSC SHAR, Sriharikota, Andhra Pradesh.



SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Science and technology form a cornerstone of the India–Russia strategic partnership. Historically anchored by the Integrated Long-Term Programme of Cooperation (ILTP), bilateral collaboration is today steered by the IRIGC Working Group on Science and Technology and the inter-ministerial Roadmap for Science, Technology & Innovation (STI) Cooperation. Institutional coordination is led by India's Department of Science and Technology (DST) and Russia's Ministry of Science and Higher Education alongside the Russian Academy of Sciences.

Collaborative research spans basic sciences, advanced materials, biotechnology, clean energy, oceanography, seismology, and emerging domains such as artificial intelligence, quantum technologies, and cyber-physical systems. In space exploration, ISRO and Roscosmos cooperate closely, including on astronaut training and life-support systems for India's Gaganyaan human spaceflight mission.

Beyond government-to-government linkages and joint research centres, the DST–Russian Science Foundation (RSF) partnership supports competitive, peer-reviewed research grants across universities. Both nations also actively connect startups, academia, and industry through joint technology commercialization programmes to translate cutting-edge research into market-ready solutions.

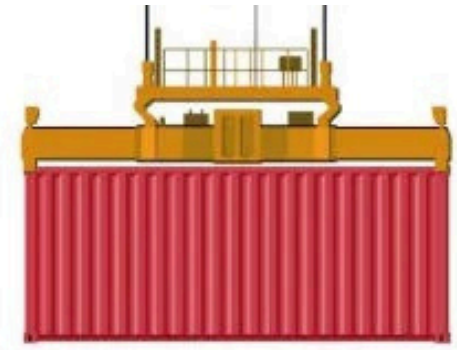


NORTH-SOUTH TRANSPORT CORRIDOR

The International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is a 7,200-km multimodal network of ship, rail, and road routes connecting India with Iran, Russia, Central Asia, the Caucasus, and Europe. Linking major hubs such as Mumbai, Chabahar, Bandar Abbas, Bandar Anzali, Tehran, Baku, Astrakhan, and Moscow, the corridor operates across three branches: the Western route through Azerbaijan, the Trans-Caspian maritime route, and the Eastern rail route via Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

Offering a resilient alternative to the traditional Suez Canal pathway, the INSTC reduces transit times between India and Russia from over 40 days to roughly 20–25 days and lowers freight costs by nearly 30%. Supported by ongoing rail upgrades like the Rasht–Astara link, the corridor actively facilitates growing bilateral and regional cargo flows.











COOPERATION IN THE CULTURAL SPHERE

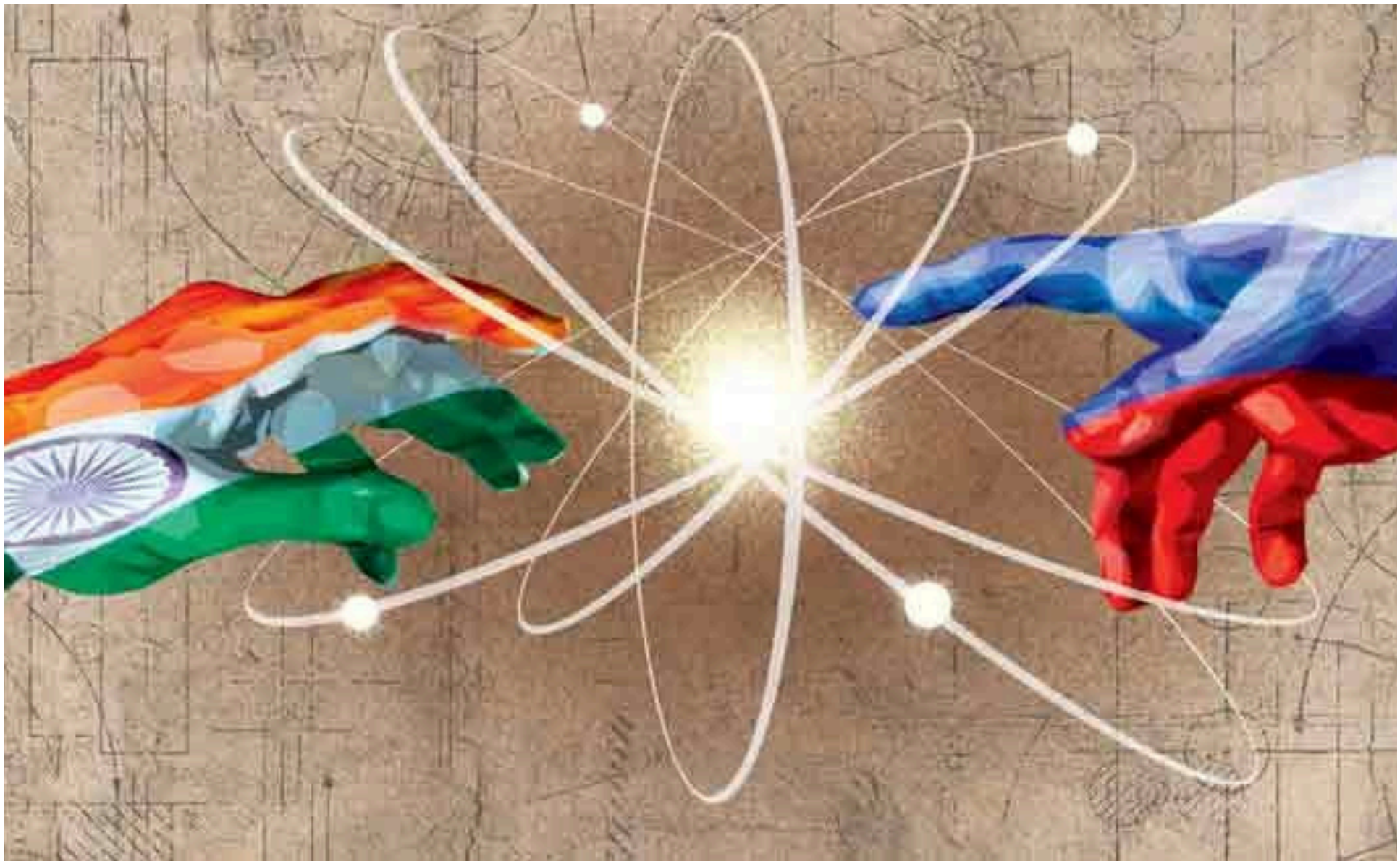
Indo–Russian cultural relations are rooted in centuries of historical interaction. One of the earliest Russian travellers to India was Afanasiy Nikitin, a merchant from Tver whose journey (1466–1472) was chronicled in A Journey Beyond the Three Seas, documenting Indian society, trade, and culture. His travels were later immortalized in the acclaimed 1957 Indo–Soviet film Pardesi, starring Oleg Strizhenov and Nargis Dutt. Similarly, the Russian city of Astrakhan served as a thriving hub for Indian merchants from the 16th century onward; in 1722, Tsar Peter the Great met Indian merchant leader Anbu-Ram there and granted full free-trade and transit rights.

Cinema and the performing arts have long anchored people-to-people affection. Generations of Soviet and Russian audiences embraced Indian films such as Awaara, Bobby, and Disco Dancer, while Russian literature, ballet, and theatre deeply influenced Indian artists. Meanwhile, Yoga enjoys widespread popularity across Russian cities, building on early intellectual interest sparked by figures like Leo Tolstoy, Nicholas Roerich, and theatre practitioner Constantin Stanislavski.

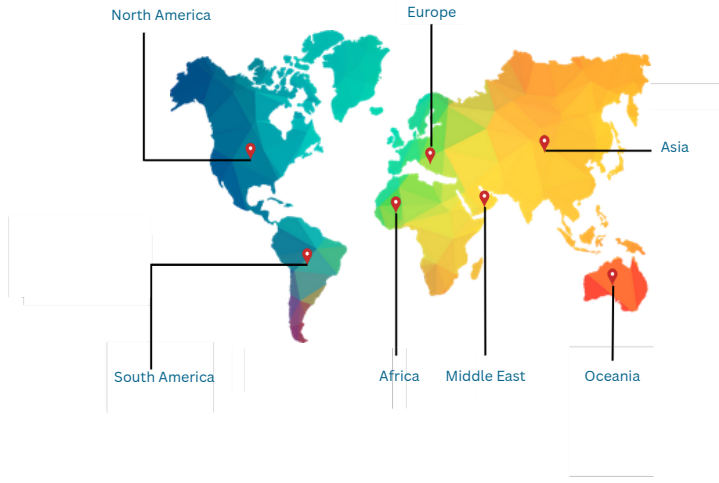
Today, cultural and educational ties are actively promoted by Russia's Rossotrudnichestvo through its five Russian Houses in New Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata, Chennai, and Thiruvananthapuram, alongside India's Jawaharlal Nehru Cultural Centre (JNCC) in Moscow. Academic links remain strong, supported by Hindi departments and Indology chairs at leading Russian universities in Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Kazan, and Vladivostok, as well as the bilateral agreement on the mutual recognition of educational qualifications. Nearly 40,000 Indian students currently pursue higher education in Russia, with both nations working toward a goal of 100,000 Indian students by 2030. Regular festivals—including Bharat Utsav, Days of Russian Culture, and mass International Day of Yoga events—continue to deepen civilizational bonds.

NUCLEAR DEALS

Civil nuclear energy is a cornerstone of India–Russia strategic ties, anchored by the 2008–2009 intergovernmental agreements and implemented by NPCIL and Russia's Rosatom. At the flagship Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant in Tamil Nadu, Units 1 and 2 (1,000 MW each) are commercially operational, while Units 3, 4, 5, and 6 are in advanced construction and commissioning stages toward a combined capacity of 6,000 MW. Building on recent summit-level agreements, both nations are also advancing long-term fuel supply localization, exploring a second Russian-designed plant equipped with advanced VVER-1200 reactors, and expanding cooperation into Small Modular Reactors (SMRs).



SERVING CLIENTS WORLDWIDE



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