

## **India-Russia Relations - Changing Nature**

### **Why in news?**

Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov recently visited India, to make preparations for the upcoming visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin for the annual summit.

### **What are the highlights?**

- On the bilateral front, both sides appeared to make progress on strategic cooperation, cooperation in energy, nuclear and space sectors.
- Also mentioned was the talk on a free trade agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU).
- Discussions also involved more agreements on military-technical cooperation for the joint production of India-made Russian weapons.
- Mr. Lavrov highlighted that Russia was the only partner supplying India “cutting-edge military technology”.
- Neither side referred to the upcoming delivery of the \$5 billion S-400 missile defence system directly.
- However, they reaffirmed their commitment to their defence partnership.
- Affirmations included those on avenues for more investment in connectivity.
- This included the International North-South Transport Corridor and the Chennai-Vladivostok Eastern Maritime Corridor.

### **What were the conflicting areas?**

- The areas of divergence over their worldview seemed to emerge during their public remarks.
- India’s External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar made reference to the “rebalanced nature” of international relations.
- Mr. Lavrov’s praise of Russia-China ties was clearly not shared by Mr. Jaishankar.
- While India’s side referred repeatedly to India’s “Indo-Pacific” strategy, Mr. Lavrov preferred the more continental reference to the “Asia-Pacific” region.
- Mr. Lavrov’s indirect reference to the Quad as an “Asian NATO” was significant.
- He however said both sides agreed that military alliances in Asia were inadvisable and counterproductive.

- On Afghanistan as well, the Russian push for bringing the Taliban into a power-sharing arrangement in Kabul seemed to be against India's consistent push for a "democratic Afghanistan".
- Besides these, unlike earlier, the visit did not include a meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- The absence of a meeting at the highest level is notable.
- To note, Mr. Modi met with U.S. Special Envoy John Kerry just a day later.
- Also, at his next stop, in Islamabad, Mr. Lavrov was received by Prime Minister Imran Khan and Pakistan Army Chief General Bajwa.
- This was Mr. Lavrov's first visit to Pakistan in 9 years, and was a clear message of deepening ties.
- Unlike in 2012, Mr. Lavrov, this time, said that Russia was ready to strengthen Pakistan's counterterrorism efforts with the supply of "relevant equipment."
- Given these, there is clearly an impression that New Delhi and Moscow are not as much on the same page as they have traditionally been.

### **What is the way forward?**

- India and Russia have successfully addressed divergences between them in the past.
- Nevertheless, even the deep, traditional and "time-tested relations" of the kind they have shared for decades cannot be taken for granted.
- India and Russia should move quickly, if they desire to dispel the notion that those ties are under any strain by the changed reality.

**Source: The Hindu**