

## **Indian PM's Visit to Russia - Eastern Economic Forum**

### **Why in news?**

The Indian PM is to visit the Russian city of Vladivostok as the guest of honour at Eastern Economic Forum (EEF), 2019.

### **Why is Vladivostok significant to India?**

- During the India-Pakistan war in 1971, the U.S. and British Navies tried to threaten the Indian security.
- At that time, the Soviet Union dispatched nuclear-armed fleet from its Pacific Fleet based at Vladivostok in support of India.
- Ever since then, the city of Vladivostok, located in Russia's Far East, has had a special relevance for Indians.
- There are, now, plans to invest in Russia's Far East, thus, paying back the long-held Indian debt to Vladivostok.

### **What are Russia's priorities now?**

- The Far East lies in the Asian part of Russia and is less developed than the country's European areas.
- As part of his 'Pivot to Asia' strategy, Russian President Vladimir Putin is inviting foreign countries to invest in this region.
- Russia's outreach to Asian nations has especially gained momentum after the 2014 Crimea crisis spoiled its relations with the West.
- Russia also wants to make sure that China does not become a hegemon in the Eurasian region.
- It is thus deepening cooperation with countries like India, Vietnam and Indonesia.
- Here, the Far East has the potential to become an anchor in deepening India-Russia cooperation.
- Moreover, New Delhi has expanded the scope of its 'Act East policy' to also include Moscow.

### **What are the concerns with Indo-Pacific strategy?**

- The idea of an 'Indo-Pacific region' signals India's willingness to work with the U.S. mainly to counter China's assertive maritime rise.

- But this has left Russia concerned.
- It is apprehensive that the U.S. would exert pressure on India's foreign policy choices.
- Russia is thus worried that it could lose a friendly country and one of the biggest buyers of Russian military hardware.

### How is the Indo-Pacific engagement now?

- India has maintained that Indo-Pacific is not targeted against any country and stands for inclusiveness and stability.
- For India, Indo-Pacific is not a club of limited members; it wants to have inclusive engagement with all the relevant stakeholders.
- India has also been able to convince Russia that its engagement with the U.S. is not going to come against Russian interests.
- With these constant assertions, India and Russia are now working for a multipolar Indo-Pacific.

### What are the future prospects?

- At least 17 countries have already invested in the Far East.
- The region has its investment-friendly approach and vast reserves of natural resources.
- With this, it has the potential to strengthen India-Russia economic partnership in areas like energy, tourism, agriculture, diamond mining and alternative energy.
- Lack of manpower is one of the main problems faced by the Far East.
- Given this, Indian professionals like doctors, engineers and teachers can help in the region's development.
- Presence of Indian manpower will also help in balancing Russian concerns over Chinese migration into the region.
- Further, India, one of the largest importers of timber, can find ample resources in the region.
- Japan and South Korea have also been investing and New Delhi may explore areas of joint collaboration.
- **Paradiplomacy** - India has also given due importance to 'paradiplomacy' where Indian States are being encouraged to develop relations with foreign countries.
- In other words, Indian states would be collaborating with Russian Provinces to increase trade and investments (State-to-province ties).
- For India, there is immense potential for mid-sized and small businesses.
- These should be assisted to overcome language and cultural barriers so that they successfully adopt local business practices.

- **Sea-route** - The two countries are also looking at the feasibility of Chennai-Vladivostok sea route.
- This would allow India access to Russia's Far East in 24 days, compared to the 40 days taken by the current route via Suez Canal and Europe.
- This route would potentially add to the required balance to peace and prosperity in South China Sea.
- This would also open new opportunities for India, like the India-Russia-Vietnam trilateral cooperation.
- **Trade** - The U.S. President Trump is interested in 'deglobalisation' and China is promoting 'globalisation 2.0 with Chinese characteristics'.
- Given these, it is wise that India and Russia increase their areas of cooperation and trade.

**Source: The Hindu**

## **Quick Facts**

### **Eastern Economic Forum**

- The Eastern Economic Forum was established by Decree of the President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin in 2015.
- In accordance with the Decree, the Eastern Economic Forum takes place each year in Vladivostok.
- Every year, the Eastern Economic Forum serves as a platform for the discussion of key issues in the world economy, regional integration, and the development of new industrial and technological sectors.
- Global challenges facing Russia and other nations are discussed too.