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.

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