



By: TA | AP Insight

Modi and Putin affirm special relationship as India faces steep US tariffs over Russian oil imports



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin met on the sidelines of a regional summit in China on Monday in a show of deepening ties when New Delhi's relations with Washington are **strained** over the purchase of Russian oil.

The two leaders held talks after attending the key **session** of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization gathering in the port city of Tianjin, where discussions focused on regional stability, bilateral trade and energy cooperation.

In his remarks to open the talks, Modi termed the partnership with Moscow as "special and privileged." Putin addressed Modi as a "dear friend" and hailed Russia's ties with India as special, friendly and trusting.

"Russia and India have maintained special relations for decades. Friendly, trusting. This is the foundation for the development of our relations in the future," Putin said.

Putin plans to **travel** to India in December for the 23rd India-Russia annual summit, according to his foreign affairs adviser, Yuri Ushakov.

Relationships on display

Modi used the SCO **meeting** to welcome the initiatives aimed at halting the conflict between Russia and Ukraine and called on the stakeholders to move forward constructively.

"To end the conflict soonest and establish peace permanently, we need to find out a way. It's a call of the entire humanity," Modi said.

Putin was accompanied by a large delegation that included top government officials. Russian state media reported that before sitting down for their formal meeting, Putin and Modi spoke one-on-one for almost an hour in a Russian-made limousine that Putin regularly takes on foreign trips.

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Moments before the leaders lined up for a group photo, Modi was seen clasping Putin's hand with the gusto of an old friend, bursting into his trademark hearty laughter.

The moment was infectious as Putin grinned and chuckled, while Chinese President Xi Jinping gave a measured smile. The trio, ringed by watchful interlocutors, chatted animatedly for a few seconds.

Modi **met** Xi ahead of the opening of the summit Sunday and the two leaders pledged to resolve their border differences and bolster cooperation.

Washington pushing together China, Russia and India

Monday's bilateral meeting between Modi and Putin carried added significance by coming days after U.S. President Donald Trump imposed an additional 25% tariffs on Indian imports, raising the total duties to a steep 50%, in retaliation for India's continued purchases of discounted Russian oil.

Washington has repeatedly warned New Delhi against buying Russian crude, which it said was partly keeping Moscow's revenues afloat to fund the Ukraine war. India has defended its imports as essential for meeting the growing energy needs of its 1.4 billion people.

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Analysts said Trump's steep tariffs and the tone coming from the White House have pushed New Delhi closer to China and Russia.

“While India-China reengagements started much before Trump, his policies are accelerating a process whereby India seems to be working much more closely with China and Russia to push back against economic unilateralism it is witnessing from the U.S.,” said Harsh Pant, vice president of foreign policy at New Delhi based think tank the Observer Research Foundation.

Modi travelled to Russia twice last year. The first was a visit to Moscow for talks with Putin in July, which was his first trip to Russia since the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by the Kremlin’s forces in February 2022. He then traveled to Kazan in October for the **summit** of the BRICS bloc of developing economies.

Trump's reaction

As Xi, Putin and Modi showed extraordinary unity, Trump on Monday continued to jab at New Delhi.



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As the summit wrapped up, Trump charged in a social media post that historically the U.S.-India trade relationship “has been a totally one sided disaster!”

Trump also bristled about India surging its Russian oil purchases and signaled no trade deal with New Delhi is in sight.

“They have now offered to cut their Tariffs to nothing, but it’s getting late,” Trump said in

the posting on his Truth Social platform. “They should have done so years ago. Just some simple facts for people to ponder!!!”

SCO nations share a history of business partnerships

Russia has had strong ties with India since the Cold War, and New Delhi’s **importance** as a key trading partner has grown since the war between Moscow and Ukraine.

China and India have become key buyers of Russian oil after the West shunned Russian exports to punish Moscow.

India historically bought most of its crude from the Middle East, but the world’s third-largest crude importer after China and the U.S. has started buying Russian oil available at discounted rates. Russia now accounts for around 37% of India’s total oil imports, according to analysts and Indian officials.

India can return happily to having the Russian cake and eating the American pie as part of its multi-alignment strategy - Sreeram Sundar Chaulia

Trade between India and Russia has sharply increased in recent years, reaching a record \$68.7 billion in the 2024-25 financial year. Imports from Russia reached around \$64 billion and exports from India totaled about \$5 billion, according to Indian government data.

The two nations aspire to bolster trade to \$100 billion by 2030.

Modi’s meeting with Putin underscored New Delhi’s stance that India prized its old and reliable strategic partners and has sufficient strategic autonomy in its foreign policy to maintain and strengthen its multi-dimensional partnership, said Sreeram Sundar Chaulia, an international affairs expert at New Delhi’s Jindal School of International Affairs.

At the same time, the Indian government hopes the present rough weather between India and the U.S. is a temporary aberration, Chaulia said.

“Then, India can return happily to having the Russian cake and eating the American pie as part of its multi-alignment strategy,” Chaulia said.