

BEAR HUG**India's push to 'Act Far East' strengthens relations with traditional ally Russia**

Unveiling the Russian edition of India's 'Look East, Act East' policy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi pledged on Thursday to extend a \$1 billion Line of Credit to Russia's Far East region (RFE). Speaking at the Eastern Economic Forum in Vladivostok, set up by Russian President Vladimir Putin to attract investment to the farthest outlying East Siberian and Arctic-pole areas of the country, Mr. Modi said that the announcement of the LOC, expected to help finance Indian business projects in the region, will be the "take-off point for Act Far East", and will further strengthen bilateral ties. Mr. Modi's visit saw several initiatives being launched towards increasing the value of economic ties between the two countries, which, at approximately \$10 billion in terms of bilateral trade, lags far behind their strategic partnership and defence relationship. In the past year alone, India has contracted defence deals worth about \$14.5 billion from Russia. Chief among the 50 agreements signed this week were those on energy exploration and procurement, including a specific MoU on cooperation on LNG supplies to India, and a maritime route from Vladivostok to Chennai which will be used for energy trade as well. The two sides also agreed on a five-year 'roadmap' for cooperation on prospecting for hydrocarbons and LNG in the Far East and the Arctic, building on a history of Indian investment in oilfields in the region.

Beyond the bilateral aspect, the PM's pivot to Russia's Far East has far-reaching strategic implications. The emphasis on energy from this region is as much a bid to benefit from explorations and trade routes in the Arctic that are becoming accessible due to global warming, as it is reflective of India's desire to diversify its energy sources away from an unstable West Asia. The investment in the Far East, which is often neglected given that Russia is seen as a European power in the post-Soviet era, also underlines India's desire to draw Russia into its strategic forays in the Indo-Pacific. The government has said it welcomes cooperation with other countries for investments in RFE, notably Japan, which has in the past few years warmed up to Russia, despite their bitter territorial dispute in the region. This interest is seen as India's attempt to not only keep a traditional friend close, but to ensure some space in the current clinch between Russia and China. China's cross-border investment in RFE accounts for 71% of the total direct foreign investment of \$33 billion. Above all, the push to 'Act Far East' allows India to demonstrate its commitment to an area of concern for Moscow, thus reassuring its traditional partner that in an increasingly polarised world, India is confident of working with multiple alignments, even if they are at cross purposes with each other.

Words**Kind****Meaning**

Traditional

Adj.

Orthodox, conservative, conformist, conventional

Hug

Verb

Embrace, cuddled, squeeze, clasp, clutch, cling to

Pledge	Verb	Promise, undertake, vow, assure, guarantee
Outlying	Adj.	Distant, remote, outer, outermost
Announcement	Noun	Declaration, pronouncement, statement
Take off	Verb	Leave the ground / flourish / flee
Several	Adj.	Some, various, assorted, sundry, diverse
Initiative	Noun	Enterprise, inventiveness, capability
Strategic	Adj.	Planned, calculated, deliberate, predetermined
Agreement	Noun	Accord, concurrence, consensus, harmony
Exploration	Noun	Investigation, study, survey, research
Procurement	Noun	Accretion, achievement, acquirement
Prospect	Noun	Likelihood, hope, expectation, anticipation
Co-operation	Noun	Collaboration, teamwork, cooperation, liaison
Pivot	Noun	Central shaft, fulcrum, axis, kingpin, trunnion
Implication	Noun	Suggestion, inference, insinuation, innuendo
Accessible	Adj.	Reachable, attainable, approachable
Diversify	Verb	Branch out, vary output, expand, extend
Unstable	Adj.	Unsteady, rocky, wobbly, dodderly, unbalanced
Foray	Noun	Raid, attack, assault, incursion, swoop
Dispute	Noun	Debate, contention, disagreement, dissension, conflict, antagonism
Region	Noun	An area (not always fixed boundaries)
Demonstrate	Verb	Reveal, bespeak, indicate, signify, signal
Commitment	Noun	Dedication, devotion, allegiance, loyalty
Reassure	Verb	Encourage, hearten, buoy up, cheer up
Polarise	Verb	Co-ordinate, harmonize, integrate, orchestrate
Confident	Adj.	Self assured, assured, morale, sanguine
Alignment	Verb	Adjustment, arrangement, calibration, positioning, sequence

EASING THE PRESSURE

The best response to the Hong Kong discontent will be a policy of accommodation

The withdrawal on Wednesday of Hong Kong's controversial extradition Bill, which intended to hand over suspected criminal offenders to other jurisdictions, has raised hopes for a welcome, even if temporary, pause in tensions. The reversal has bought Beijing, which had begun mobilising paramilitary

forces in neighbouring Shenzhen city, time to deal with the political and economic fallout from the intensifying protests. All the same, the decision by Carrie Lam, the city's Chief Executive, has infused momentum to the pro-democracy campaign that is coming to be referred to as the 'Water Revolution'. While Ms. Lam dithered and delayed a decision for nearly three months, the protesters expanded their charter of demands, in effect to question the 'One Country, Two Systems' policy. Their calls for a judicial investigation into the government's handling of the crisis and alleged police violence are bound to grow louder after the roll-back of the infamous Bill. But the most potent of them all, perhaps, is the right to universal suffrage, which was originally championed under Hong Kong's 2014 umbrella movement, but effectively neutered by the government. The demand will doubtless prove pivotal to the current campaign. But a genuine exercise of the franchise may also be among the last concessions protesters are likely to extract from Beijing any time soon.

President Xi Jinping would be acutely aware of the implications of major loosening of policy as the 2047 expiry of Hong Kong's special status approaches. The risks are no less of possible spill over effects in Taiwan, whose government is wedded to independence from China. The 'Water Revolution' has so far managed to broaden its appeal among millions, transcending social classes and across different generations. As with other recent political uprisings, building a cohesive leadership and strategy might turn out to be its biggest challenge. In a sign of the unstable economic and business environment ahead, Hong Kong's GDP growth in the previous quarter was the slowest since the financial crisis. Fitch, the credit ratings agency, on Friday lowered Hong Kong's ranking from AA+ to AA, even as it underscored the city's strong financial buffers. Given its position as Asia's leading financial hub, prolonged uncertainty in Hong Kong can aggravate the current harm to global trade from the escalating tensions between China and the U.S. Mr. Xi has embarked on an aggressive policy aimed at China's economic, technological and strategic dominance. His stance vis-à-vis Hong Kong will provide important clues to the political dimension of that approach. The current discontent, however, poses a far more immediate challenge. An accommodative policy might serve the best overall interest.

<u>Words</u>	<u>Kind</u>	<u>Meaning</u>
Ease	Verb	Relieve, alleviate, mitigate, assuage, allay, soothe
Discontent	Verb	Dissatisfaction, disaffection, displeasure, resentment
Controversial	Adj.	Contentious, disputed, contended, disputable
Extradition	Noun	Deportation, handover, repatriation, expulsion
Suspect	Verb	Reck on, doubt, distrust, have misgiving about
Offenders	Noun	Wrongdoer, criminal, malefactor, felon, delinquent
Jurisdiction	Noun	Authority, control, dominion, ascendancy
Temporary	Adj.	Fleeting, ephemeral, casual, transient, transitory

Vicinity	Noun	Neighbourhood, locality, locate; domain
Mobilise	Verb	Marshal, deploy, muster, rally, assemble
Fall out	Verb	Quarrel, squabble, argue
Intensify	Verb	Escalate, step up, boost, sharpen, augment
Protest	Verb	Fulminate, outcry, object, dissent, demur
Infuse	Verb	Pervade, fill, permeate, suffuse, charge
Momentum	Noun	Energy, power, strength, drive, force, impulse
Campaign	Noun	Military, operation, manoeuvre
Refer	Verb	Mention, allude, cite, deal with, branch
Revolution	Noun	Muting, stirring, agitation, contumacious, insurgence
Dither	Verb	Hesitate, falter, waver, teeter, vacillate
Delay	Verb	Hold up, dally, tarry, behind the time
Expand	Verb	Elaborate on, enlarge on, supplement, amplify
Investigation	Noun	Examination, inquiry, inspection, exploration
Crisis	Noun	Difficulty, quandary, quagmire, fix, plight
Allege	Verb	Claim, assert, declare, proclaim, maintain
Violence	Noun	Brutality, roughness, ferocity, savagery
Infamous	Adj.	Notorious, disreputable, ill famed
Potent	Adj.	Powerful, strong, vigorous, formidable
Suffrage	Noun	Franchise, right to vote, enfranchisement, ballot
Umbrella	Noun	Protection, influence
Movement	Noun	Development, change, fluctuation, rise, fall
Neuter	Verb	Castrate, geld, cut, emasculate
Pivotal	Adj.	Central, crucial, vital, critical, focal
Genuine	Adj.	Authentic, real, actual, bonafide
Acute	Adj.	Severe, critical, drastic, dire, dreadful
Implication	Noun	Suggestion, inference, insinuation, innuendo
Appeal	Noun	Plead, beg, urge, call, make a plea
Uprising	Noun	Rebellion, revolt, insurrection, mutiny
Cohesive	Adj.	Connect, consistent
Buffers		Cushion, absorb, soften, lessen, diminish