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The Hindu

13/07/2024

A wobbly walk: On Modi's Moscow visit and India-Russia ties

India did well to assert its ties with Russia, but the optics were bad

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Moscow visit was billed as his first "stand-alone" visit during this tenure, with officials laying stress on the purely "bilateral" framework. However, while the visit had strong bilateral components, its impact has been felt globally, with unprecedented criticism from Kyiv and Washington on its timing and optics. On the bilateral front, the visit, his first to Russia since 2019, and the first "annual" summit in three years, resulted in a number of outcomes. There was a reaffirmation of India-Russia ties as well as Mr. Modi's obvious personal **rapport** with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Mr. Modi also received Russia's highest civilian award. He praised Mr. Putin's efforts to strengthen bilateral ties, that had appeared to be flagging, given the war in Ukraine, and growing Russia-China ties. In formal talks, the leaders focused on bettering the economic and trade relationship, which has often been a neglected part of the largely government-to-government engagements, and announced a bilateral trade target of \$100 billion by 2030, which should be easily met given India's massive increase in oil imports from Russia specially discounted due to western sanctions. Mr. Modi also won an assurance from Mr. Putin that Indian recruits enlisted in the Russian Army will be allowed to return to India. Unlike in the past, the visit lacked any announcements of military purchases that have been the mainstay of ties, due partially to Russian delays in

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supplies of deals already announced after the invasion of Ukraine and to also avoid international **censure**. Mr. Modi's statement that there was "no solution on the battlefield" to the conflict, as well as his decision to travel further to Vienna, were seen as attempts to balance the trip, his first since the conflict began.

In an increasingly **polarised** world, this was easier said than done, especially as Mr. Modi's visit happened even as Ukraine was hit by a devastating missile attack. There were also NATO, western alliance leaders and Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy **converging** in Washington for a summit that was aimed, **albeit** unsuccessfully, at showing Russia's isolation. It is another matter that the stance reeks of **hypocrisy**, as the NATO countries have failed to show similar concerns over the killing of innocents in Gaza due to Israel's **relentless** bombardment. The U.S. State Department and Ukraine have been openly critical of Mr. Modi's visit, and New Delhi's task will be to limit the damage in ties with the U.S. and Europe. In the long term, India will have to **assert** its interests and convince the West that it is **futile** to force India to choose, or to push a country known for its independent stance, to become a camp follower in this conflict.

Vocabulary

1. Wobbly

Synonyms: Unsteady, shaky, unstable

Antonyms: Stable, steady, firm

2. Rapport

Synonyms: affinity, harmony, camaraderie, understanding, bond

Antonyms: discord, conflict, estrangement, disagreement

3. Censure

Synonyms: Criticize, reprimand, condemn

Antonyms: Praise, approve, commend

4. Polarised

Synonyms: divided, separated, and split

Antonyms: unified, harmonized, and integrated

5. Converging

Synonyms: meeting, merging, uniting

Antonyms: diverging, separating

6. Albeit

Meaning: Albeit" means "although" or "even though." It's used to introduce a concession or contrast.

7. Hypocrisy

Synonyms: deceit, insincerity, double-dealing

Antonyms: sincerity, honesty

8. Relentless

Synonyms: persistent, unyielding, tenacious

Antonyms: yielding, lenient

9. Futile

Synonyms: fruitless, pointless, vain

Antonyms: effective, productive

10. Assert

Synonyms: declare, affirm, maintain, state

Antonyms: deny, retract, relinquish





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The Hindu

13/07/2024

Crash course: On the health of transport vehicles in India

There must be better monitoring of road-worthiness of transport vehicles

On July 10, in Uttar Pradesh, a private double-decker bus **collided** with a milk tanker, killing 18 people. Local reports claimed the bus's insurance had not been renewed and that it lacked an alarm system to alert the driver if the bus **drifted** from its lane, among other issues. Should the State government's inquiry bear these details out, they will highlight the importance of the multidimensional nature of road safety, which banks on road and highway design, presence of roadside businesses, speed and access control, and visibility, among other factors, to protect lives. The details should also highlight the **reluctance** of municipal authorities and local bodies to **scrutinise** public and licensed private infrastructure until lives are lost. According to the National Crime Records Bureau, 1.71 lakh people died and 4.23 lakh were injured in 4.46 lakh road accidents in 2022. A 2023 IIT Delhi report estimated there were 11.3 road-accident deaths per lakh population in 2021, which, after accounting for official data inconsistencies and underreporting, is constitutive of a public health crisis. Speed control is particularly important: it is implicated in most deadly road accidents in the country. Following the bus accident, police also told news agencies the collision had flung passengers out of the bus. Public officials know how to control speed in urban and rural areas — with strategically placed speed-

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breakers and roundabouts and increased police monitoring, for example. Similarly, it should be clear which portions of the Automotive Industry Standards that the bus's condition at the time of the accident violated.

There are three ways forward. First, local authorities must enforce existing standards and have skilled personnel and proper equipment for this purpose. They must also be allowed to impose **harsher** penalties on transport service operators who fail to meet safety requirements. Municipal bodies must also be prevented from **diluting** standards **painstakingly** specified by engineers in order to, say, facilitate local businesses. Second, the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways needs to collect and publish better, ideally complete, data on vehicle registrations, safety certificates, testing centres, criteria, and reports and audits. It also needs to improve the quality of data about injuries and deaths, both of which remain undercounted. Finally, there is a need for greater public awareness of how the health of transport vehicles is ascertained and for access to each vehicle's latest test report. This may be a bridge too far given both the generally **complacent** attitude towards quality control and **unscrupulous** operators' ability to escape sanction — but it remains the bridge that will have to be crossed.

Vocabulary

1. Collided

Synonyms: crashed, bumped, clashed, smashed

Antonyms: separated, avoided

2. Drifted

Synonyms: Wandered, meandered, strayed, veered

Antonyms: Stayed, remained

3. Scrutinize

Synonyms: examine, inspect, study

Antonyms: ignore, neglect

4. Reluctance

Synonyms: unwillingness, hesitation, disinclination

Antonyms: willingness, eagerness

5. Harsher

Synonyms: rougher, stricter, more severe

Antonyms: gentler, milder

6. Diluting

Synonyms: weakening, thinning, attenuating

Antonyms: concentrating, strengthening

7. Painstakingly

Synonyms: meticulous, thorough, careful

Antonyms: careless, sloppy

8. Complacent

Synonyms: self-satisfied, smug, content, satisfied

Antonyms: dissatisfied, discontent, uneasy, restless

9. Unscrupulous

Synonyms: dishonest, unethical, deceitful

Antonyms: scrupulous, honest, ethical

