

■ Putin pledges to aid India's defence upgrade ■ India eyes new S-500
■ Moscow assures 'uninterrupted' oil flow ■ Modi stresses energy co-op

India, Russia sign 16 pacts, set trade target of \$100bn by 2030

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NEW DELHI, DEC. 5

The India-Russia ties are like the "Pole Star" and have stood the test of time, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Friday after talks with his "friend", Russian President Vladimir Putin, at the Hyderabad House in the national capital. During Mr Putin's visit, India and Russia inked 16 pacts, including one on a mobility agreement that is expected to help meet Russia's labour needs and another on combating irregular migration.

After the summit talks, India and Russia "agreed on an economic cooperation programme until 2030" that Mr Modi said will make bilateral trade and investment "diversified, balanced, and sustainable".

A joint statement issued mentioned the intention to "increase India's exports to Russia" and mentioned "timely achievement of the revised bilateral trade target of \$100 billion by 2030". Later in the evening, Mr Modi expressed confidence that this target will be achieved even before 2030.

During the summit talks, Mr Modi and Mr Putin discussed strengthening ties in a wide range of sectors such as trade, defence, agriculture and food security, including the manufacture of urea and long-term supply of fertilisers, energy security, connectivity, culture, people-to-people exchanges and tourism.

The Prime Minister also hailed the Russian leader's contribution in the past two-and-a-half decades to bilateral ties. In a strong message to the West amid steep American tariffs on India for importing Russian oil,



Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin during a joint press statement after their meeting at Hyderabad House in New Delhi on Friday. — PTI

Kashmiri Wazwan on banquet menu

New Delhi: Russian President Vladimir Putin left for Moscow late Friday evening after attending the banquet. Footage showed Prime Minister Narendra Modi seated next to the Russian leader at the banquet. According to reports, the menu served at the banquet included Kashmiri Wazwan dishes and the Russian crimson-coloured hearty soup called "Borsch".

Mr Modi termed "energy security" as a strong and important pillar of the India-Russia partnership.

Thanking the Prime Minister for the hospitality during the visit, Mr Putin promised all Russian support to modernise and strengthen the Indian armed forces, including air defence, aviation and naval capabilities. India is reportedly eyeing more Russian S-400



External affairs minister S. Jaishankar and Russian minister of internal affairs Vladimir Kolokoltsev exchange a memorandum of understanding during a joint press statement at Hyderabad House on Friday. — PTI

air defence missile systems and even perhaps the next-generation S-500.

Mentioning the "biggest" Kudankulam civil nuclear energy power plant project between the two nations, Mr Putin, despite Western sanctions on Russian oil, pledged to continue "uninterrupted shipments of fuel for the fast-growing Indian economy". He also said Mr Modi had submitted a

"whole list" of challenges to him on the trade and market accessibility front and that Moscow will work to resolve it to boost Indian exports to his country.

The Russian President further added that the "impressive package" of pacts signed "signal that our countries are important partners". He said his country is working to

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Rahul & Kharge left out of Prez dinner; Tharoor invited, get flak

AGE CORRESPONDENT
NEW DELHI, DEC. 5

A fresh controversy erupted on Friday after the Congress said that Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and party president Mallikarjun Kharge have not been invited to the President's banquet for Russian President Vladimir Putin, and took a swipe at its own MP Shashi Tharoor for accepting the invitation.

Setting the record straight, Congress general secretary Jairam Ramesh said, "There has been speculation whether the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha and the Leader of the Opposition in the Rajya Sabha have been invited for tonight's dinner. The two LoPs have not been invited."

Responding to Mr Tharoor getting an invitation, Congress leader Pawan Khera said, "Ask Mr Tharoor. It's quite surprising that an invitation was sent and the invitation was accepted. When our leaders are not invited, but we are, we need to question our own conscience... We should understand why the game is being played."

Earlier, Mr Tharoor said there was a time when the chairman of the external affairs committee was routinely invited, but that practice seems to have stopped for some years.

"It has been resumed... I have been invited. Yes, I will definitely go," Mr Tharoor said.