

INDIA TO HOLD FIRST 2+2 WITH RUSSIA ON DECEMBER 6

Relevant for: International Relations | Topic: India - Russia

Strengthening ties: Vladimir Putin with Narendra Modi at the BRICS Summit in Brasilia on November 13, 2019. File Photo

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Defence Minister Rajnath Singh are likely to hold their first “2+2” format talks with their Russian counterparts Sergey Lavrov and Sergey Shoygu, along with Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is expected to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Delhi for the annual summit on December 6, as well as the inter-governmental joint commission meeting, sources confirmed here.

Officials said the India-U.S. 2+2 meeting, with Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin that was earlier to be held in Washington in November, may be put off to January, owing to scheduling difficulties including the winter session of Parliament that ends on December 23.

The 2+2 format agreed to during a Modi-Putin phone conversation in April is particularly significant, given that India conducts joint foreign and defence ministerial only with its closest ‘Quad’ partners — the U.S., Japan and Australia.

According to an expert, conversely, Russia thus far has the 2+2 format for “problem solving” with countries such as Japan, France and earlier with the U.S. The 2+2 is also expected to look further afield in building India’s ties with Central Asia and Russia’s engagement in the Indo-Pacific, the sources said. Newly appointed Ambassador Pavan Kapoor will join the consultations.

According to officials privy to the planning of the intensive India-Russia exchanges, a number of agreements on defence, science and technology and trade are expected to be announced during Mr. Putin’s visit. The most closely watched will be defence agreements that could be launched, given considerable heat in Washington already over India’s purchase of the \$5.43-billion S-400 air defence system, and the debate over placing U.S. sanctions for its delivery this month.

Outgoing Ambassador to Russia Venkatesh Varma had told Tass news agency earlier this month that orders for additional Sukhoi (Su30-MKI), MiG 29 jets and 400 more T-90 tanks are in the works.

He pointed out that a “fundamental change” in the defence relationship since 2018 has taken bilateral contracts from \$2-3 billion per year to \$9-10 billion, making Russia India’s “top defence partner”.

Two major defence deals awaiting conclusion are the AK-203 assault rifles and the Igla-S very short range air defence systems. However, the deal for Ka-226T light utility helicopters, announced by the two leaders earlier, is unlikely to see conclusion, one official said. India and Russia are expected to sign the Reciprocal Exchange of Logistics Support Agreement and a Navy-to-Navy cooperation MoU.

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