



JPNN| New Delhi | Dec 11, 2014 | Russian President Vladimir Putin today held talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi to further boost cooperation between the two strategic partners in crucial sectors like defence, energy and trade at a time when Russian economy was facing Western sanctions. Putin, who arrived here last night, is likely to push for enhancing supply of military hardware to India as well as expansion of bilateral economic engagement in a range of areas. It is the first annual summit meeting between Putin and Modi. The two leaders had met on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Brazil in July and during the G-20 summit in Australia last month. "Times have

changed, our friendship has not. Now, we want to take this relation to the next level & this visit is a step in that direction," Modi tweeted last night. The talks at the highest level have been taking place since 2000 alternately in Moscow and New Delhi. "The bond between the people of Russia & India is very strong. Our nations have stood by each other through thick and thin," the Prime Minister said in another tweet. In his talks with Modi, both in restricted and delegation level formats, Putin is likely to seek deeper economic engagement with India with an aim to minimise impact of sanctions against Russia by the US and its Western allies over the Ukraine issue. India, which is the third largest oil importer after the US and China -- has been pushing for greater involvement in major gas and oil exploration projects in Russia and both the leaders are set to discuss the issue.

Russia is one of the top oil producers globally and has huge reserves of natural gas. India's exports, particularly food items, to Russia have gone up since sanctions were imposed against that country by Western nations for its interventions in the crisis in Ukraine. India has been maintaining that it cannot be party to any economic sanctions against Russia. Both the leaders are likely to discuss improving supply of rough diamonds by Russia to India. Russia is the world's top producer of rough diamonds and India is one of its largest importers. Agency