

# India to boost **military** relations with **Russia**

**FRAMEWORK** Countries to set up a new division that will be headed by a three-star officer

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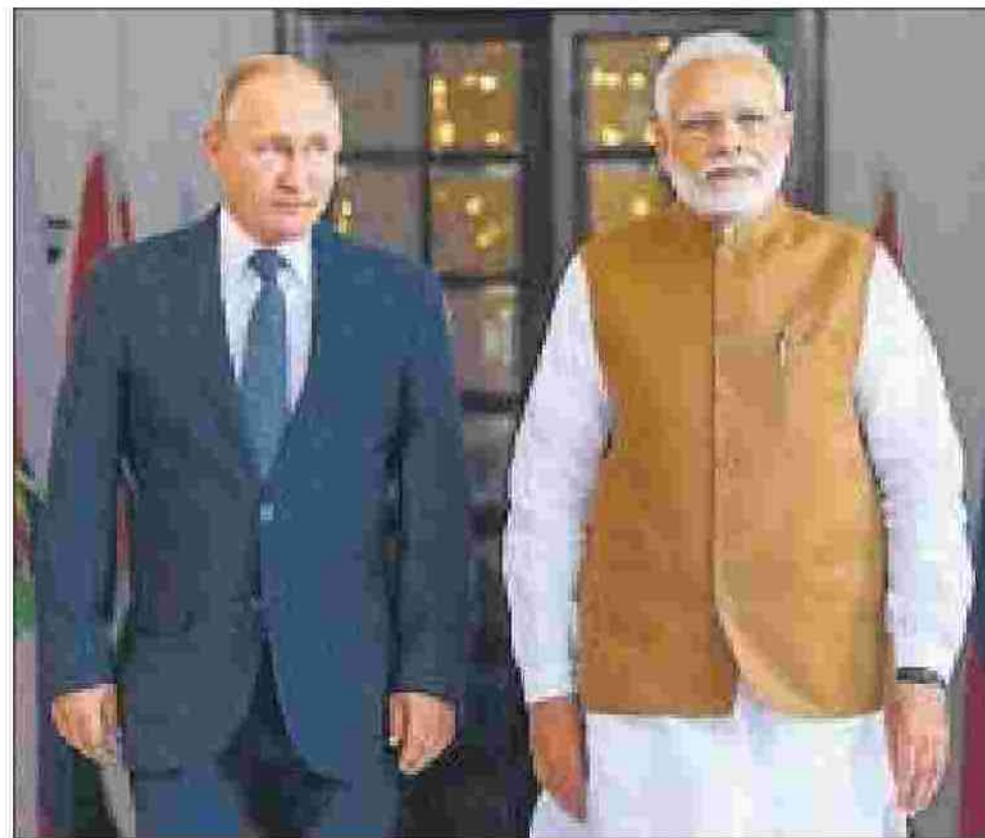
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**NEWDELHI:** India is stepping up its military relationship with its biggest arms supplier, Russia, by creating a new framework for bilateral cooperation that will focus on heightened military-to-military engagement, two officials familiar with the plan said, asking not to be identified.

The countries are creating a new division under the framework of the Indian-Russian Intergovernmental Commission on Military Technical Cooperation, the sole purpose of which will be to promote “strong proactive military level engagement”, said one of the officials cited above. The engagement will cover several critical areas, including joint training, high-level exchanges, staff talks and military exercises.

The Indian-Russian Intergovernmental Commission on Military Technical Cooperation is being renamed as part of the initiative. It will now be called Indian-Russian Intergovernmental Commission on Military and Military Technical Cooperation (IGC-MMTC).

The addition of the word ‘Military’ in the cooperation nomenclature seeks to emphasise that military-to-military ties are as important as military technical cooperation related to weapons



■ PM Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin earlier in October stressed that military-technical cooperation was an important pillar of the two sides’ strategic partnership. PTI FILE

and systems.

“The template for cooperation we are seeking to create is part of our overall vision for the India-Russia relationship. We intend to pursue the military-to-military relationship more vigorously. Some exchange programmes will be renewed after decades,” the second official said.

The three-star officer, who will head the new vertical, will be drawn from the defence ministry’s Integrated Defence Staff

(IDS). The IDS is a single-point organisation for jointmanship in the ministry that integrates policy, doctrine, war fighting and military purchases.

New Delhi has been steadily upping the scale of military cooperation with Russia. Russia is the only country with which India holds a joint tri-service exercise — the first of these was held at Vladivostok last October, when more than 900 soldiers, sailors and air warriors from the Indian military took part in the exercise

with over 1,000 personnel from the Russian defence forces.

In a joint statement issued after Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian president Vladimir Putin met in Delhi for their annual summit on October 5, the two sides stressed that “military and military-technical cooperation between the two countries is an important pillar of their strategic partnership.”

“It’s important for India to further strengthen its military strategic partnership with Russia that has been a reliable friend for decades. Remember they sent their submarines to the Bay of Bengal during the 1971 war to counter the US Seventh Fleet.

The geopolitical scenario has changed but we need to strike a balance in our relationship with Russia vis-à-vis the US,” said former Northern Army commander Lieutenant General BS Jaswal (retd).

The IGC-MMTC will meet in December, a few months after India inked a ₹39,000-crore deal with Russia for S-400 Triumf air defence missile systems despite the threat of US sanctions. India is seeking a waiver from the US and simultaneously figuring out an alternative payment route to sustain bilateral defence trade with Russia because the sanctions have created banking hurdles. The first payment for the S-400 purchase will be done soon.