

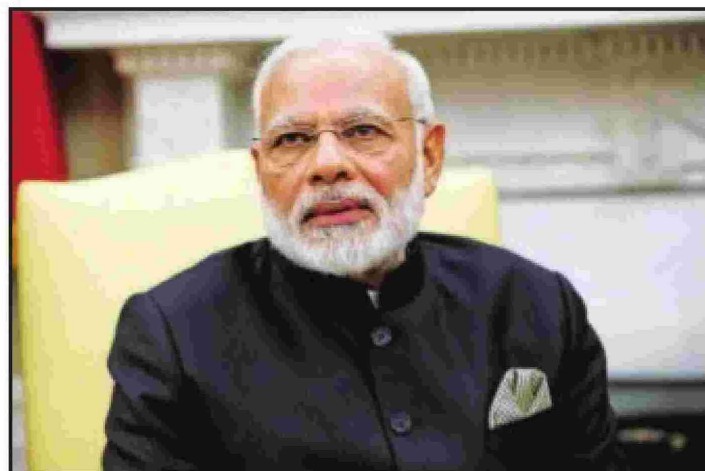
Countering China to be high on India-Japan agenda during Modi's visit

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China will be the elephant in the room when Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Japanese counterpart Shinzo Abe meet in Tokyo for the annual India-Japan Summit on 28-29 October.

As part of the growing defence cooperation between their two countries primarily to meet any threat from China, Modi and Abe are expected to discuss the



potential export to India of the Japanese Maritime Self-Defence Force's US-2 amphibious aircraft.

Expansion of the joint exercise between the Indian Army and Japan's Self-Defence Forces and a proposal to upgrade '2+2' security talks to the ministerial level will also be high on the agenda of the two leaders, diplomatic sources indicated on Friday.

The '2+2' is currently held at the level of foreign and

defence secretaries on both sides. Both Modi and Abe are keen to upgrade it to the level of foreign and defence ministers.

Regarding the US-2 aircraft deal, sources noted that India and Japan have been engaged in negotiations over it for more than last two years. Both sides desire to seal the deal for the aircraft at an early date.

The Defence Ministry in India has expressed interest in acquiring up to a dozen air-

craft, with tentative plans to station the short-take-off-capable search-and-rescue/maritime surveillance planes off the Andaman and Nicobar Islands in the Bay of Bengal. New Delhi is said to be considering buying two US-2 aircraft in fly-away condition, whereas the remaining are to be built in India with a local partner.

Further economic cooperation, such as facilitating infrastructure construction across India, particularly the

underdeveloped North-Eastern region, through Japanese official development assistance, and the early start of operation of the high-speed railway line between Mumbai and Ahmedabad with Japan's 'Shinkansen' (Bullet Train) technology, will also be among the items that will be taken up for discussion by the two leaders.

Tokyo is striving to bolster cooperation with Asian and African countries based on the "Free and Open Indo-

Pacific Strategy" promoted by Abe, with the aim of keeping in check the growing maritime assertiveness of China.

Sources said Japan was hopeful that India would get involved deeply in multilateral relationships with nations friendly to Tokyo, including the United States and Australia, while affirming the importance of fundamental values such as freedom of navigation and rule of law.