

Missile systems' delivery likely in 24 months; 8 other pacts inked Modi, Putin seal \$5bn S-400 deal

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India is all set to acquire the S-400 Triumf, arguably the world's most lethal surface-to-air missile system, from Russia, overriding a threat of sanctions from the US. The pact for the \$5-billion acquisition signed between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday along with eight other agreements ranging from nuclear power to space exploration.

"The decisions taken today will further enhance our cooperation and contribute to the restoration of peace and stability in this challenging world," Mr Modi said at a joint press event with Mr Putin.

The S-400 deal was the only military pact inked on Friday and yet New Delhi played it down in order to avoid offending the US.

India has already requested the US for a waiver to escape American sanctions on Russian military exports. The US said that its sanctions do not want to hurt military capabilities of its "allies or partners".

Prime Minister Modi and Mr Putin, who held their annual summit, did not mention the S-400 deal in their respective press statements. Government officials also did not publicly announce the inking of the deal. However, official sources confirmed that it was signed.

Air Force chief B.S. Dhanoa told reporters, "As and when the government approves it, delivery (of the missiles) will be in



Prime Minister Narendra Modi hugs Russian President Vladimir Putin before their meeting at Hyderabad House in New Delhi on Friday. — PRITAM BANDYOPADHYAY

24 months."

The S-400 is one of the world's most advanced long-range air defence systems. It can engage up to 36 targets at a time and simultaneously launch 72 missiles. China was the first nation to buy the S-400 missile system in 2014. Russia has already started deliveries of an undisclosed number of the S-400 missile system to Beijing.

According to reports, India will establish five squadrons of the S-400 missile system

A top Indian official said, "Now that the contract is signed I presume the time-line (for the payment mechanism) has to be fairly soon."

The official also asserted

OTHER PACTS

▶ Isro and the Federal Space Agency of Russia MoU for Indian human spaceflight programme Gaganyaan	▶ Agreement for railways 'speed-upgradation project'
▶ Agreement to eradicate terrorist networks, their sources of finance, arms and fighters	▶ Joint investments in mineral fertiliser production in Russia and India
▶ Cochin Shipyard pact with Russia to boost water transport	▶ Agreement on encouraging the use of national currencies in trade
	▶ Pact to continue developing cooperation on Brics remote sensing satellite constellation

that the negotiations for S-400 precede US sanctions against Russia by a long

period. "It is fulfils a certain defence requirement

■ Turn to Page 4

\$5bn S-400 deal sealed

■ Continued from Page 1 of the country and, therefore, the government has taken the decision in the national interest," he said.

Mr Modi and Mr Putin also discussed global issues including the role of the United States with whom Moscow's ties have considerably soured. Mr Putin is also understood to have even asked Mr Modi for tips on implementing the GST (Goods and Services Tax), which Russia is hoping to roll out soon.

On the S-400 deal, an Indo-Russian joint statement issued said, "The (two) sides welcomed the conclusion of the contract for the supply of the S-400 long-range surface-to-air missile system to India."

In fact, this was the only official reference to the deal which was made way below in the joint statement. There was no mention of it when Prime Minister Modi and President Putin addressed the media on Friday afternoon at Hyderabad House in the Capital after discussions between them held at the 19th edition of the Annual Bilateral Summit.

Russia will also fully support India in the Gaganyaan manned space programme expected to be launched in 2022 and the countries are also set to begin a "Ganga-Volga Dialogue" to revive and give a major impetus to civilisational and people-to-people links between the two countries.

Moscow also said that it was ready to ramp up oil

▶ **Apart from Afghanistan and Syria, the two countries also discussed the situation arising from the US withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal**

▶ **Moscow also offered to sell its commercial aviation aircraft to India and also offered New Delhi mining opportunities**

production to stabilise global oil prices, with PM Modi telling President Putin that rising global oil prices had impacted the Indian economy.

In another move, Moscow also offered to sell its commercial aviation aircraft to India and also offered New Delhi mining opportunities in the Russian Far East.

Another proposed deal between India and Russia for construction of guided-missile frigates was also discussed, sources said.

After the talks, Mr Modi said Indo-Russian ties were New Delhi's "top priority" and referred to the "special and privileged strategic partnership" between the two countries, adding that Russia has always "stood by" India.

The two sides also discussed the menace of terrorism and the situation in Afghanistan, with the issue of terror sanctuaries in Pakistan coming up in that context, sources said.

While the joint statement "denounced terrorism in all its forms" and "con-

demned all kinds of state support to terrorists including cross border terrorism and providing safe havens to terrorists and their network", there was no direct reference to Pakistan and this has raised a few eyebrows. Russia's ties with Pakistan have improved significantly in the past few years.

Apart from an MoU between the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and the Federal Space Agency of Russia 'ROSCOSMOS' in the field of human space flight programme, a pact was signed on an "Action Plan for Prioritization and Implementation of Cooperation Areas in the Nuclear Field".

The joint statement said, "The (two) sides noted the progress achieved in the construction of the remainder of the six power units at Kudankulam nuclear power plant (NPP) as well as the efforts being made in the components manufacturing for localisation."

On trade ties, the joint statement said, "The (two) sides reviewed the progress on the achievement of the goal to increase two-way investment to \$ 30 billion by 2025."

Apart from Afghanistan and Syria, the two countries also discussed the situation arising from the US withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal. Both Moscow and New Delhi felt it was important to keep Iran in a deal to ensure it does not develop nuclear weapons.