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Putin and Modi Meet to Reignite Russia-India Relationship

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Russian President Vladimir Putin (L) shakes hands with India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a photo opportunity ahead of their meeting at Hyderabad House in New Delhi on Dec. 11, 2014.

President Vladimir Putin visits India on Thursday in an attempt to revive a historic friendship that has faded over the years, seeking to improve cooperation in energy, defense and nuclear power.

He flies to New Delhi for his first summit with Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a time when Russia is at odds with the West over Ukraine, and its economy is stalling as oil prices tumble to their lowest point in five years.

The Indian leader, elected by a landslide six months ago, will host Putin for a one-day summit. In January, he will give U.S. President Barack Obama what is expected to be a far more lavish reception for India's Republic Day celebration.

"It is good for a rich fiancee to have a beautiful bride," Russia's Ambassador to New Delhi, Alexander Kadakin, said before the visit. "But they should not promise you a marriage

and then betray you."

Yet Moscow's eye has wandered too since its Soviet-era romance with New Delhi. Bilateral trade, at $10 billion, is now one-ninth of that between Russia and China — the focus of Putin's pivot away from an increasingly critical Europe.

"Russia is a tried and trusted friend — a country that has helped us in times of trouble," an Indian official said. "But that friendship hasn't delivered in terms of its economic potential."

The two leaders, who will hold a one-on-one meeting followed by intergovernmental talks, will also preside over the signing of a broad "vision" document laying out a roadmap for cooperation over an extended period, officials on both sides say.

Strategic deals will cover oil exploration and supply, infrastructure and an increase in direct diamond sales to India by Russian state monopoly Alrosa.

On defense, the two sides will seek to move ahead with long-delayed projects to develop a joint fifth-generation fighter jet and a multi-role transport aircraft.

Possibly the most ambitious area for cooperation will be in nuclear energy, where Putin is pushing for state-owned Rosatom to increase the number of nuclear reactors it could supply to as many as 25.

A 1,000-megawatt reactor is operating at the Russian-built Kudankulam power station in India's Tamil Nadu province, with a second due to come onstream in 2015. Final documents to build reactors three and four should be signed at the summit, diplomats said.

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