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Modi, Putin Hold Talks Amid Outrage Over Ukraine Strikes

By AFP

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Modi and Putin at the Russian president's residence at Novo-Ogaryovo outside Moscow **Gavriil Grigorov / POOL/ AFP**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi was set to hold talks with President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday, a day after the Indian leader arrived in Moscow amid global outcry over Russian strikes in Ukraine.

Modi, visiting Moscow for the first time since Russia launched its campaign in Ukraine in February 2022, will seek to nurture New Delhi's long-standing relationship with Moscow.

At the same time, he is courting closer Western security ties after being returned to power last month as leader of the world's most populous country.

"There are no surprises in preparation. The main thing is to create an atmosphere for meaningful interaction," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told state TV when asked about

the talks.

Modi landed in Moscow hours after Russia launched a massive barrage targeting cities across Ukraine Monday that killed more than three dozen people and heavily damaged a children's hospital in Kyiv, sparking condemnation from governments in Europe and North America.

Russia is a vital supplier of cut-price oil and weapons to India, but Moscow's isolation from the West and growing ties with Beijing have impacted its partnership with New Delhi.

Embed:

> Путин и Моди общаются за чашкой чая в резиденции президента в Ново-Огарево. pic.twitter.com/YADptg3Lta
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> — Кремлевский пул РИА (@Kremlinpool_RIA) July 8, 2024

Western powers have in recent years also cultivated stronger relations with India as a hedge against China and its growing influence across the Asia-Pacific, while pressuring New Delhi to distance itself from Russia.

The United States on Monday urged Modi to make clear in his talks with Putin that "any resolution to the conflict in Ukraine must... be one that respects the UN Charter with respect to Ukraine's territorial integrity."

Modi last visited Russia in 2019 and hosted Putin in the Indian capital two years later, weeks before Russia began its offensive against Ukraine.

India has largely shied away from explicit condemnation of Russia ever since and abstained on United Nations resolutions targeting the Kremlin.

Arms, oil and China

But Russia's fight with Ukraine has also had a human cost for India.

New Delhi said in February it was pushing Moscow to return several of its citizens who had signed up for "support jobs" with the Russian military, following reports some had been killed after being forced to fight in Ukraine.

Moscow's relationship with China has also been a cause for concern.

Washington and the EU accuse China of selling components and equipment that have strengthened Russia's military industry — allegations Beijing denies.

China and India remain intense rivals competing for strategic influence across South Asia.

India is also part of the Quad grouping with the U.S., Japan and Australia that positions itself against China's growing boldness in Asia.

New Delhi and Russia have maintained close links since the Cold War, which saw the Kremlin become a key arms provider to the country.

But Ukraine has stretched Russia's weapons supplies thin, pushing India to look for other sources for arms — including growing its own defense industry.

Russia's share of Indian imports of arms has shrunk considerably in recent years, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute.

At the same time, India has become a major purchaser of Russian crude, providing a much-needed export market for Russia after it was dropped by traditional buyers in Europe.

That has dramatically reconfigured their economic ties, with India saving itself billions of dollars while bolstering Moscow's war coffers.

India's month-on-month imports of Russian crude "increased by 8% in May, to the highest levels since July 2023," according to commodity tracking data compiled by the Center for Research on Energy and Clean Air.

But this has also resulted in India's trade deficit with Russia rising to a little over $57 billion in the past financial year.

From Russia, Modi will travel to Vienna for the first visit to the Austrian capital by an Indian leader since Indira Gandhi in 1983.

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