



US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (R) shakes hands with Indian Foreign Minister Sushma/MEAIndia

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Defence Secretary Jim Mattis arrived India Wednesday to hold the inaugural two-plus-two (2+2) talks with their Indian counterparts, focus of which will be to deepen strategic ties and resolve differences over India's defence engagement with Russia and crude oil import from Iran.

Reflecting the importance of the talks to be held on Thursday, Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj received Mr Pompeo, while Indian Defence Minister Sitharaman welcomed her US counterpart Jim Mattis at the airport.

Ms Swaraj and Ms Sitharaman will hold the twice-postponed dialogue with Mr Pompeo and Mr Mattis. Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunford is also part of the US delegation.

<https://twitter.com/MEAIndia/status/1037360981163163648>

The External Affairs Minister will have a separate bilateral meeting with Mr Pompeo while Ms Sitharaman will have a one-on-one meeting with Mr Mattis on Thursday morning before the delegation-level two-plus-two talks.

Twelve officials from each side are expected to attend the talks which will be followed by a working lunch. In the afternoon, Ms Swaraj, Ms Sitharaman, Mr Pompeo and Mr Mattis will call on Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

As Secretary Pompeo arrived in Delhi from Islamabad, India will also try to get his view about his engagement with the new government in Pakistan headed by Prime Minister Imran Khan, official sources said.

In the talks, the sources said, India will also try to "sensitise" the US that any cut in the import of Iranian oil in compliance with the US sanctions may impact the country's overall economy as the crude oil from that country is much cheaper.

India is also expected to apprise the US about the importance of the Rs. 40,000 crore deal it is about to finalise with Russia to procure a batch of S-400 Triumph air defence missile systems. The US has been indicating that it does not want India to go ahead with the deal.

The sources said both sides will also discuss the long-pending Communications, Compatibility, Security Agreement (COMCASA). The COMCASA will help India obtain critical and encrypted defence technologies for Indian defence platforms from the US. The sources said the text of the agreement is almost ready.

They said both sides will also explore ways to enhance engagement between their navies in the Indo-Pacific region and try to resolve tariff-related issues.

On import of Iranian oil, the sources said India may also convey to the US that some of its refineries are dependent on certain kind of crude oil and making technical adjustments in them may require huge investments as well as time.

After withdrawing from the Iran nuclear deal, the US has imposed sanctions on Iran. It has told India and other countries to cut oil imports from the Gulf nation to “zero” by November 4 or face sanctions.

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