

Nuclear deal, trade top Canada PM's India mission

Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper's three-day visit to India from Sunday will be dominated by talks over a nuclear deal and new trade pacts in a bid to warm a relationship that turned frosty when Ottawa cut off atomic trade after New Delhi's 1974 nuclear test.

Accompanied by Foreign Minister Lawrence Cannon, International Trade Minister Stockwell Day and Parliamentary Secretary Deepak Obhrai, Harper lands in [Mumbai](#) Sunday night from Singapore after attending the Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum (APEC) summit.

He will meet top Indian industrialists at a luncheon at the Trident Hotel in Mumbai Monday before leaving for New Delhi.

Harper will hold talks with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on a range of bilateral issues including trade and investment and prospects of civil nuclear cooperation besides the global financial crisis as well as climate change.

The two sides are likely to talk about a Canada-India Free Trade Agreement or other incremental steps to lower trade barriers between them.

A slew of agreements are expected to be signed, including a foreign investment protection agreement and on energy and farming cooperation in a bid to expand bilateral trade now languishing below \$5 billion.

When Harper meets Manmohan Singh, the focus will be on the bilateral civil nuclear deal the two sides have been negotiating for some time. The talks are expected to give finishing touches to the deal but it may not be signed during Harper's visit, said informed sources.

Ahead of his visit, Harper struck a positive note saying his trip will ring in a 'new era of partnership' between the two countries.

The nuclear deal, pointed out a source, is necessary to transform the relationship as it is the one big issue that had estranged [New Delhi](#) from Ottawa all these years.

The prospects of a nuclear rapprochement brightened after Canada supported India in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) last year. Leading NSG members like the US, Russia and France signed bilateral deals with India.

With the nuclear deal on mind, Atomic Energy of Canada Ltd's CEO, Hugh McDiarmid, and officials from Cameco, the leading uranium miner, are accompanying Harper to India.

'Certainly, we're looking forward to having the opportunity to do business in India,' Cameco spokesman Lyle Krahn said recently. 'It's a large market opportunity for any uranium fuel supplier.'

A few days ago, an opinion piece in The Globe and Mail, a leading Canadian daily, argued that a nuclear accord on the lines of the Indo-US deal last year was needed to keep Canada's nuclear industry alive.

Harper will also attend cultural and educational events with an eye on the one million-strong Indian diaspora in Canada. He will also visit Amritsar to pay respects at the Golden Temple on the last day of his trip.

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