

Counter-terror pact, n-deal, AfPak top PM's US agenda

India and the US are set to unveil a new template for expanding their partnership by firming up a new counter-terror framework and signing a clutch of agreements in areas ranging from agriculture and green energy to trade and health when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh meets US President Barack Obama in Washington Tuesday.

The completion of the remaining steps in the nuclear deal, a civil liability legislation by India and clinching a pact for reprocessing spent fuel, a key US commitment under the 123 agreement, will also be high on the agenda.

Accompanied by External Affairs Minister S.M. Krishna and senior officials, Manmohan Singh begins his four-day trip to Washington Sunday as the first state guest of the Obama White House.

The visit promises to be high on both style and substance.

'This could be an occasion to renew the partnership. We are expecting the visit will take the relationship to a higher level,' Foreign Secretary Nirupama Rao said here Friday.

Manmohan Singh will enunciate his vision of the India-US relationship Monday in two major addresses - at the Council for Foreign Relations and the Woodrow Wilson Institute. Later that day he will speak to the business communities of India and the US.

The next day, Manmohan Singh will be accorded a ceremonial reception on the lawns of the White House before he sits down for wide-ranging talks with his American host. A glamorous white-tent reception on the South Lawns of the White House awaits him and his spouse, Gursharan Kaur, in the evening.

Washington set the tone for the visit by describing India as a 'rising global power'. Unlike the Bush presidency, when the nuclear deal was the centrepiece of the bilateral agenda, there is no one big idea this time. Instead, there will be four or five big ideas, key challenges of the 21st century, on the table, says US ambassador to India Timothy J. Roemer.

'It's going to be low-key visit compared to the 2005 visit when the nuclear deal was struck. There is no one big ticket item this time round, but there will be a lot of small ticket but high value items,' Lalit Mansingh, former foreign secretary and a former envoy to the US, told IANS.

On what he expected to achieve in Washington, Manmohan Singh told the Washington Post: 'Nuclear cooperation, cooperation in education, closer linkages between the university systems of our two countries, cooperation in health - working together to devise new vaccines.'

Ahead of his visit, Manmohan Singh expressed the hope that the US will be 'more liberal' in transferring technologies to India to make their civil nuclear deal fully operational.

'We have a landmark agreement with the US on nuclear cooperation. We would like to operationalise it and ensure that the objectives for the nuclear deal are realised in full,' he said in an interview with Newsweek-Washington Post in New Delhi. The interview will be published Sunday, the day he lands in Washington.

Nuclear cooperation would be high on his agenda when he meets Obama Nov 24.

Manmohan Singh and Obama are expected to firm up a truly global partnership on issues ranging from giving an institutional framework to their counter-terror cooperation and curbing greenhouse emissions to wrapping up the remaining steps of the nuclear deal and the multibillion dollar defence contracts.

At least 10 pacts are expected in areas ranging from terrorism, intellectual property rights, trade and investment, agriculture, health and green technologies, reliable sources told IANS.

The Manmohan Singh-Obama Education Initiative will be announced during the visit, official sources said.

Loosening remaining restrictions on high-tech trade post the nuclear deal and ironing out obstacles in the way of bilateral investment will be also be on the table. Bilateral trade has gone up nearly seven times from \$5.6 billion in 1990 to about \$43 billion in 2008.

A definite declaration on concluding a reprocessing pact, one of the key US commitments under the 123 India-US nuclear agreement, together with an announcement of the start of atomic trade is also on the cards.

Terror will be high on the agenda during the visit, which takes place on the eve of the first anniversary of the [Mumbai](#) attacks.

The issue has shot into headlines once again with the FBI's arrests of a US citizen and a Canadian of Pakistani origin in Chicago plotting terror attacks against India.

An all-encompassing counter-terror framework revolving around enhanced intelligence sharing and sharing of surveillance and interdiction technologies could well be the showpiece of the visit, said the sources.

The two leaders are also expected to take a harder look at the two countries that are giving them a headache on a daily basis: Pakistan and Afghanistan.

With Pakistan not doing enough to prosecute the Mumbai attackers and address New Delhi's concerns on cross-border terror, Manmohan Singh will ask Obama to bring more pressure on Islamabad to act.

'We will raise our concerns about terror groups operating from Pakistan. The US fully understands the depth of our concerns,' Nirupama Rao said when asked whether Pakistan will figure in the discussions between the two leaders.

A closer cooperation on AfPak issues, coupled with a joint statement on India's larger role in regional and global affairs, may well be one of the highlights of the visit, said a highly-placed source. This could offset the impression in [New Delhi](#) that Washington was ready to give a monitoring role to Beijing on India-Pakistan ties.

We have a stake in the success of the AfPak strategy, the foreign secretary said.

'There is one big ticket that still remains, that is, the US declaring support for India in the Security Council,' Mansingh said. Let's see whether that happens, he said.

'We will definitely raise the issue. We will continue to see the support of the US for our candidature for a seat in the UN Security Council,' Rao said.

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