

Counter-terror deal, trade, 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 deepening their strategic dialogue on key global issues, including non-proliferation and climate change, when Prime Minister Manmohan Singh meets US President Barack Obama in Washington Tuesday.

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 and later that day in his address 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 Tuesday morning before he sits down for wide-ranging talks with his American host. A glamorous white-tent banquet on the South Lawns of the White House awaits him and his spouse 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.

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.'

'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.

But the show and rhetoric will not overshadow the substance when the leaders of the world's two largest democracies sit down for talks Tuesday, 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.

Unveiling the agenda, Rao said the two leaders are expected to discuss a host of international issues, including reform of international institutions, the global financial crisis, disarmament, environment and the creation of an inclusive global architecture.

Besides big-ticket strategic issues, the two sides are set to make 'development' the centrepiece of their engagement, with the American promise of making India a world power acting as an inspiration.

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 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, if not migraine, 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,' Rao said when asked whether Pakistan will figure in the discussions between the two leaders.

Despite differences in approach on AfPak strategy, the two leaders are set to consult closely in restoring stability to the Taliban-wracked Afghanistan with India backing the continued presence of American troops in Afghanistan as a way to maintain civic peace.

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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