

India will stick to July 18 understanding on n-pact: Pranab

Allaying apprehensions of any compromise with its strategic autonomy, India Friday said that the bilateral civil nuclear cooperation pact it is negotiating with the US 'will adhere as closely as possible' to the July 18, 2005 understanding and March 2, 2006 separation plan.

New Delhi also called for further easing of restrictions by Washington on high technology exports to India that can narrow down the current US deficit in total bilateral trade of around \$32 billion.

'We remain committed to implementing the understanding expeditiously in a way that it adheres as closely as possible to the framework of the July 2005 Joint Statement and the March 2006 Separation Plan,' External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee said here while alluding to the 'landmark India-US nuclear understanding.'

Mukherjee was inaugurating a conference on promoting business between India and the US in legal regulatory framework at Hotel Intercontinental here. The conference has been organised by the Indo-American Chamber of Commerce and the Centre for American and International Law.

Mukherjee's remarks have an added significance as India and the US have recently claimed progress in their negotiations as they inch closer to a 'final agreement' on the 123 civil nuclear cooperation pact.

By saying that implementation of the deal will stick 'as closely as possible' to the July 18, 2005 joint statement and March 2, 2006 separation plan presented by India to sift its civilian and military reactors, the minister indicated that [New Delhi](#) was ready to be flexible in negotiating the 123 pact that will lead to the resumption of nuclear commerce with Washington.

Despite some progress, differences on key issues like India's right to nuclear testing and access to reprocessing technologies are still to be sorted out. US' chief interlocutor on nuclear deal Nicholas Burns is expected to come here later this month for a 'final' agreement.

The heart of the nuclear deal, the minister stressed, lay in India's search for energy security and is part of larger energy dialogue which focuses on oil and gas, coal, power, energy efficiency and renewable energy and new technologies.

Referring to the 'unique turn' in India-US relations in recent years, the minister spoke about the ongoing transformation in bilateral strategic partnership that has generated 'a considerable degree of expectation and excitement, not just in New Delhi and Washington, but in different capitals around the world.'

'It is no wonder, therefore, that the strategic partnership between the two countries has truly matured into one of considerable substance,' the minister said.

Underlining a reinvigorated economic partnership between India and the US, Mukherjee said that a further easing of high technology restrictions by the US will help bilateral trade multiply manifold and help narrow the US' trade deficit with India.

About former US ambassador Robert D. Blackwill's famous description of India-US trade 'as flat as

chapatti', the minister pointed to the new buoyancy in economic ties that has taken bilateral trade from a modest \$5.6 billion in 1990 to \$31.92 billion in 2006.

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