

## 2+2 TALKS

# India-US sign key defence deal, talk visa and terror

---

**SHUBHAJIT ROY**

NEW DELHI, SEPTEMBER 6

---

STRENGTHENING STRATEGIC cooperation, India and the US Thursday signed the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COM-CASA) which paves the way for transfer of communication security equipment from the US to

India that will facilitate “interoperability” between their forces — and potentially with other militaries that use US-origin systems for secured data links.

The pact was inked after the first 2+2 dialogue between the two countries, where External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj and Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman met visiting

**CONTINUED ON PAGE 12**

# India-US

American counterparts, Secretary of State Michael Pompeo and Secretary of Defense James Mattis, at the Jawaharlal Nehru Bhawan.

While there are more than 50 bilateral dialogue mechanisms between the two governments, this is the highest level of engagement after the summit-level engagement between the Prime Minister and the US President.

A joint statement said, "They welcomed the signing of a Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) that will facilitate access to advanced defence systems and enable India to optimally utilise its existing US-origin platforms."

The general agreement signed by the US is called the Communication and Information on Security Memorandum of Agreement (CISMOA) but the name was changed to COMCASA to reflect its India-specific nature.

It is part of a set of three military agreements that the US considers "foundational" for a functional military relationship. In August 2016, India had signed the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), which allows the military of each country to replenish from the other's bases. Negotiations on the third agreement, Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement for Geospatial Cooperation (BECA), have not yet begun.

As reported by *The Indian Express*, the two sides decided to establish a hotline between the External Affairs Minister and the US Secretary of State, and another between the Defence Minister and Secretary of Defense. "The two sides further decided to establish secure communication... to help maintain regular high-

level communication on emerging developments," the joint statement said.

Swaraj said, "Secretary Pompeo and I decided to remain in touch regularly through the new hotline between the Foreign Ministers that we will establish." Pompeo said that the Indo-US ties have entered a "new era of growth" under President Donald Trump and called the 2+2 dialogue "important and successful".

To keep an eye on Chinese submarines and ships, both sides reviewed the growth of bilateral engagements in support of maritime security and maritime domain awareness. Towards that end, the ministers "committed to start exchanges between the US Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) and the Indian Navy, underscoring the importance of deepening their maritime cooperation in the western Indian Ocean," the joint statement said.

This is expected to lead to stationing of a Navy liaison officer at the NAVCENT in Bahrain, sources said.

Mattis said India is a "stabilising force," a key country to make the Indo-Pacific "safe and secure". He also advocated increased "maritime awareness" and said "successful and productive discussions" will bolster the defence relationship.

All four ministers welcomed the inclusion of India by the United States among the top tier of countries entitled to licence-free exports, re-exports, and transfers under License Exception Strategic Trade Authorization (STA-1) and also committed to explore other means to support further expansion in two-way trade in defence items and defence manufacturing supply chain linkages.

Pompeo, who came from Pakistan, pitched for "elevating

the security cooperation". Swaraj said counter-terrorism cooperation has acquired a "new qualitative edge and purpose". Welcoming the recent designations of Lashkar-e-Taiba terrorists by the US, she said they underscore the international community's scrutiny over the threat of terrorism emanating from Pakistan which has affected India and the United States alike.

"In the 10th anniversary of the 26/11 attacks, we recognised the importance of justice and retribution for the mastermind behind this terrorist attack," she said.

Stressing that India supports President Trump's South Asia Policy, she said, "His call for Pakistan to stop its policy of supporting cross-border terrorism finds resonance with us." Both sides agreed to deepen cooperation in international forums like the United Nations and the Financial Action Task Force.

Denouncing use of terrorist proxies in the region, they called on Pakistan to ensure that the territory under its control is not used to launch terrorist attacks on other countries. "On the eve of the 10-year anniversary of the 26/11 Mumbai attack, they called on Pakistan to bring to justice expeditiously the perpetrators of the Mumbai, Pathankot, Uri, and other cross-border terrorist attacks", the joint statement said.

On the vexed issue of H1B visas, Swaraj said: "I sought Secretary Pompeo's support to nurture our people-to-people links. Specifically, I conveyed our expectation for a non-discriminatory and predictable approach to the H1B visa regime, given its high impact on innovation, competitiveness and people-to-people partnership, all of which are a vital source of strength for our relationship."