

India lets US know: Buying Russia missile system

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NEW DELHI, JULY 13

INDIA HAS told the United States that it will go ahead with the procurement of the S-400 Russian missile system despite the threat of sanctions by Washington under the recently passed Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA).

"With Russia, we have had a continuous relationship of defence procurement of seven decades. We told the US Congress delegation which met me in Delhi that this it is US legislation and not a UN law," Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said Friday.

"We have had this relationship, an enduring relationship with the Russians and are going ahead with buying the S-400," she told reporters in South Block.

"The US Secretary of Defence and Secretary of State have taken a position understanding of India's position. They realise that with India, we need to have a different position," she said.

"If there are objections raised

on technical issues (regarding procurement of S-400), we are willing to explain it to the Americans. Our negotiations have gone for several years on S-400 with the Russians," Sitharaman said, adding that the deal with Moscow is at an "almost conclusive stage" now. The missiles will come within two-and-half years and four years of signing the deal.

She reiterated that the postponement of the 2+2 meeting with the US scheduled for July 6, was not related to trade disputes or any other bilateral dispute but only as Washington "did not find the dates suitable". She said the 2+2 meeting, which will involve the foreign and defence ministers and their American counterparts, is now likely to be held in first week of September.

Speaking on the joint development of Fifth Generation Fighter Aircraft (FGFA) with Russia, Sitharaman clarified that India had conveyed to Moscow in February that it would not participate in the detailed design and development stage of the fighter jet but would "go ahead and can buy it when they are

done". Delhi had participated in the initial design and development of the FGFA, and then negotiated for two years before arriving at this decision.

About the opening of roads in military cantonments, Sitharaman said that she had held three review meetings after a month of passing orders to open the roads which has been closed by local military authorities (LMA) without following due procedure. She clarified that roads passing through a military station, unit lines, ammunition dump and military bases were not included in her order and the LMA still have the right to fully or partially close any road after following the due procedure.

Rejecting reports that there was delay in raising the Mountain Strike Corps for the China border, she said "nothing to do with the finances" and "we are not underplaying it". She also sought to dismiss the notion that procurements by her ministry had suffered due to shortage of funds. She said the modernisation of defence forces was on track in the last two financial years.