

# Foreign secy in US to lay 2+2 groundwork

**Jayanth Jacob**

jayanth.jacob@hindustantimes.com

**NEW DELHI:** Foreign secretary Vijay Gokhale and other senior Indian officials will hold discussions with their US counterparts in Washington this week to prepare the ground for the first two-plus-two dialogue between the foreign and defence ministers of the two countries, to take place in New Delhi in September, people familiar with the development said.

Gokhale, accompanied by Gourangalal Das, joint secretary (Americans) in the external affairs ministry, left for the US on Tuesday evening.

“The foreign secretary, with US officials, will discuss a host of bilateral issues, and the upcoming two-plus-two dialogue in September that is expected to bring a new momentum in ties, especially in the areas of security and defence ties”, one of the people said.

The discussions will also touch on a wide range of topics such as the “peace-process in Afghanistan, counter-terrorism issues, designation of terrorists at the United Nations, India’s membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, and trade issues,” the above cited person said.

For the inaugural United States and India two-plus-two dialogue on September 6, US sec-

retary of state Mike Pompeo and defense Secretary James Mattis would be travelling to India meet their counterparts, external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj and defence minister Nirmala Sitharaman.

“Pompeo and Mattis look forward to meeting with their Indian counterparts...to discuss strengthening strategic, security and defence cooperation as the US and India jointly address challenges in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond,” state department spokesperson Heather Nauert said in July.

Both Swaraj and Sitharaman were to visit Washington for the first two-plus-two dialogue on July 6 with Pompeo and Mattis.

The two-plus-two dialogue was postponed because Pompeo had to visit North Korea.

The meeting had been earlier scheduled for April this year, but was put off after Trump fired then secretary of state Rex Tillerson.

“The United States and India relationship is based on strong foundations and two sides see this as an important part of their ties,” said Lalit Mansingh, former foreign secretary and ex-Indian envoy to the US.

“The forthcoming two-plus-two dialogue at the level of the foreign and defence ministers would bring a new direction in the relationship that spreads across various sectors,” Lalit Mansingh added.