

After postponing twice, US says talks with India 'still a priority'

REUTERS

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US Ambassador to the United Nations Nikki Haley said on Thursday that a top-level strategic dialogue with India will take place as soon as possible, after Washington put off the meeting for a second time in months.

The talks were expected to cover issues, including US sanctions against Russia and Iran, arms sales and trade.

India and the US have built close political and defence ties and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Defence Secretary Jim Mattis were due to hold joint talks with their Indian counterparts in Washington on July 6.

But Pompeo called Minister for External Affairs Sushma Swaraj on Wednesday night to say that the US had to postpone the meeting because of unavoidable reasons, the Ministry said.

The '2+2 talks' are the highest level of dialogue between the US and India and were agreed by US President Donald Trump and Indian Prime Minister Narendra



Nikki Haley, US
Ambassador to the UN

Modi last year. Haley, who is on a visit to New Delhi, told Reuters that the talks were a priority and would happen soon.

"It's not just that it's going to happen, they are now willing to come here if they need to, or travel to make sure the two plus two happens. It is a priority. It's something that needed to happen. It's important," she said.

No new dates have been announced.

The meeting was originally planned for April but had to be put off because Trump fired Secretary of State Rex Tillerson the previous month and Pompeo

went through confirmation hearings before the US Congress.

Among the issues on the agenda for next week's talks were arms sales, including the transfer of Sea Guardian surveillance drones to the Indian navy, the first such sale of unmanned aircraft.

'Major priority'

Haley said the ministers would discuss how Washington can continue to support India "as a provider of regional security, particularly in and around the Indian Ocean."

"These discussions will undoubtedly involve issues like joint exercises and military hardware and technology. But the strategic partnership we hope to build is bigger and more durable than that," Haley told the India Observer Research Foundation think-tank in New Delhi.

Haley, a member of Trump's Cabinet, said the postponement of the meeting in Washington had nothing to do with any policy issues.