

India, Iran pledge to maintain trade levels

Ties intact:India and Iran signed a variety of pacts during President Hassan Rouhani's visit in February. Sandeep Saxena

Striking a defiant note against the U.S.'s demands to "zero" out oil imports and end engagement with Iran, Indian and Iranian officials said they would "maintain the momentum" of bilateral cooperation between them.

External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj will also travel to Tehran for the next Joint Commission meeting in November, an official statement said, which is the month U.S. sanctions on energy trade would go into effect.

"Both sides reviewed and positively assessed the progress in implementation of decisions taken during [President Rouhani's visit], especially for enhancing connectivity and strengthening cooperation in trade and economic issues and in the promotion of people-to-people exchanges. It was agreed to maintain the momentum of mutually beneficial multifaceted bilateral cooperation and exchanges between the two sides []" the Ministry of External Affairs said at the end of talks between visiting Iran deputy Foreign Minister Seyyed Abbas Araghchi and Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale, adding that both sides had discussed "issues that have arisen over the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)."

On May 8, the United States pulled out of the 6-nation JCPOA, and decided to reimpose sanctions on Iran, due to be implemented in two batches; on August 6 and November 4, with U.S. officials asking all countries including India to bring oil imports from Iran to zero.

Monday's meetings with Iranian diplomats came a day ahead of talks with a senior U.S. team including Assistant Secretary of the Treasury Marshall Billingslea and State Department official Andrew Peek where the U.S. will discuss its demand for compliance with sanctions to "isolate Iran." Speaking to a small group of journalists after the meeting, Mr. Araghchi said he "had a very good sense" from his meeting that India and Iran will continue their cooperation despite the U.S. threats.

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