

**'2+2 postponed due to scheduling issue'**

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. AFP/ MARK WILSON

The abrupt postponement of the first 2+2 dialogue between India and the U.S., which was earlier scheduled to take place on July 6, has nothing to do with any disagreement between the two countries, a spokesperson of U.S. State Department told *The Hindu*.

"This scheduling change has nothing to do with trade, sanctions, or any other policy issues. We remain firmly committed to our partnership with India and look forward to rescheduling the 2+2 as soon as possible," the spokesperson said, when asked whether the postponement of the July 6 event was linked to disagreements between India and U.S. on sanctions against Iran and trade.

"The U.S.-India relationship is a major priority for this administration, and we look forward to continuing to strengthen[ing] our partnership," the official said.

**Pompeo's Korea visit**

Sources familiar with the developments said that the postponement of the dialogue is linked to other travel plans for Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, who has emerged as the point man for Mr. Trump's risky foreign policy ventures. He will be travelling to North Korea on July 6, according to *The Financial Times*. He is also in charge of preparations ahead of a possible meet between Mr. Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin in mid-July.

Mr. Pompeo and External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj agreed that the 2+2 dialogue between the two countries "would be rescheduled as soon as possible at a mutually convenient time and location," when they spoke on the phone on Wednesday, the spokesperson said.

"Secretary Pompeo conveyed to Minister Swaraj his regret at the postponement of the 2+2 dialogue previously scheduled to take place on July 6," the official said, adding that India's central role in U.S. national security is enshrined in the President's National Security Strategy which has noted that "We welcome India's emergence as a leading global power and stronger strategic and defence partner."

Meanwhile, the U.S. has proposed that a meeting between Defence Minister Nirmala Sitharaman and Defense Secretary James Mattis could take place on July 6. However, India has reservations about going down that path, it has been learnt, though New Delhi is yet to respond officially to the proposal.

"The rescheduling of the 2+2 dialogue is purely a scheduling issue, and other speculations are unfounded," said Mukesh Aghi, president and chief executive officer of the U.S.-India Strategic Partnership Forum. "Tremendous progress is happening on strategic issues and you will see it soon," he said.

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