

India, France sign declaration on N-energy, ink defence pact

India and France have signed a declaration on nuclear energy, seen as a prelude to a larger pact on civil nuclear cooperation that will help the former access international technology and fuel denied to it for over three decades. French President Jacques Chirac, in India on a two-day visit, and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh also signed a defence pact, that includes the joint manufacture of military hardware, and seven other bilateral documents spanning cooperation in diverse fields like space, tourism, education, culture and civil aviation.

The two leaders also set themselves the target of doubling bilateral trade and said steps would be taken to increase the flow of French investment into India.

A Joint Statement issued after the talks described the declaration on the development of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes as an "important step forward" towards concluding a bilateral agreement in this area.

The declaration could be a prelude to a formal pact providing India access to nuclear technology and fuel from France — a key member of the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and a leading producer of nuclear electricity.

"India's access to civilian-nuclear technology... is indeed necessary in order to drive and fuel India's economic development," Chirac told reporters at a joint press conference with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at Hyderabad House.

"Our support to India is principled support.... India must be allowed to achieve its necessary economic development without facing the strangleholds of economic and energy constraints," he said. "This is necessary for driving the country's economic development without polluting the atmosphere with greenhouse emissions."

Prime Minister Singh reiterated India's "commitment to honour the letter and spirit" of the agreement signed by him and President George Bush in Washington July 18, 2005. "I confirm that all facilities procured by India through international cooperation on civilian nuclear energy will of course be subjected to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards," he said.

The offer to ease decades-old technology-denial regimes to enable nuclear commerce with India is somewhat similar to the India-U.S. civil nuclear energy cooperation deal agreed upon in July last year.

Manmohan Singh underlined India's status as a responsible nuclear power and thanked Chirac for "France's support for the ongoing effort to enable full civilian energy cooperation between India and the international community".

For Chirac, the visit provided an opportunity to recast the image of France and Europe in India — one of the world's fastest-growing economies and a swelling market for consumer goods — which has entered into a major strategic partner with the U.S.

"I have argued that great things are happening in India and that India must be heard," Chirac told



Prime Minister Manmohan Singh with French President Jacques Chirac during their meeting in New Delhi on February 20.

India's leading businessmen in an address at the Vigyan Bhavan convention center. "The results of India in the past 15 years has my admiration," he said while referring to the development and growth since the economic liberalisation programme started in the early 1990s.

Recalling the pledge made by the two leaders to double bilateral trade to nearly \$10 billion within five years, he said they had identified infrastructure, IT, pharmaceuticals, environment, advanced and new technologies, food processing, automobiles and aeronautics as priority sectors for forging business partnerships.

The pact on defence cooperation includes "building upon and expanding cooperation in the defence and military fields, defence industry, production, procurement, research and development of defence material, joint exercises, professional exchange and training".

An agreement on production of satellites for third countries was also signed between Antrix Corporation, the commercial arm of the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), and European Aeronautic Defence and Space's Astrium.

Another agreement between Indian Airlines, India's state-run domestic carrier, and Airbus SAS of France was signed for the purchase of 43 aircraft. In September, the Indian government had approved the purchase valued at \$2.2 billion.

Three memorandums of understanding on promotion of tourism, energy efficiency and management education were also inked between the two sides.

The two countries also further fine-tuned convergences on major global issues and agreed to work together for an early conclusion of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism.

Chirac, whom Singh described as "a true friend of India", reiterated France's support for India's candidature for permanent membership of the U.N. Security Council. ■

Agreements and MOUs

- Agreement on defence cooperation.
- Statement of Intent on Cooperation between the Ministry of Commerce and Industry and the Ministry of Economy, Finance and Industry on cooperation between enterprises.
- MoU on tourism cooperation.
- Declaration by India and France on the development of nuclear energy for peaceful purposes.
- MoU between India's Bureau of Energy Efficiency and Agence de l'Environnement et de la Maîtrise de l'Energie.
- Agreement between Indian Council for Cultural Relations and Sciences Po, Paris.
- Agreement between ANTRIX Corporation and EADS ASTRIUM relating to W2M satellite.
- MoU between Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad, and ESSEC Business School Paris (École Supérieure des Sciences Économiques et Commerciales).
- Airbus purchase contract between Indian Airlines and Airbus.