

US-Pak N-deal unlikely during Sharif-Obama meet

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Washington: The White House has confirmed that President Barack Obama will discuss "nuclear security" with Pakistan Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif during his visit here, but again discounted the possibility of a nuclear deal.

"I would significantly reduce your expectations about that occurring on Thursday," Obama's spokesman Josh Earnest told reporters Monday when asked if would completely rule out a security deal with Pakistan.

Last week too in response to questions about reports that the US was exploring a deal to limit Pakistan's nuclear arsenal and "that there may be a breakthrough in this regard" during Sharif's visit, he had given a similar answer.

"The expectation that we have is that a deal like the one that's been discussed publicly is not something that's likely to come to fruition next week," Earnest said last week when asked whether Obama and Sharif would discuss a nuclear deal.

"But the United States and Pakistan are regularly engaged in a dialogue about the importance of nuclear security," he said. "And I would anticipate that dialogue would include conversations between the leaders of our two countries."

"At this point, the United States has been engaged with Pakistan, as well as the rest of the international community on issues related to nuclear safety and security," Earnest said.

Earnest said Monday that Obama was looking forward to welcoming Sharif to the White House Thursday.

"Obviously there are a range of issues that are important for us to discuss, including the announcement that the President made last week about our strategy in Afghanistan moving forward,"

"We certainly have an important security relationship and the security cooperation between our two countries in beneficial to the safety and security of the citizens in both our countries," Earnest said.

"And I'm confident that will be the focal point of discussions."

Earlier, a White House statement said Sharif's visit will highlight the enduring nature of the US-Pakistan relationship and provide an opportunity to strengthen our cooperation on issues of mutual concern."

These included "economic growth, trade and investment, clean energy, global health, climate change, nuclear security, counterterrorism, and regional stability."

"The President looks forward to discussions with Prime Minister Sharif on ways we can advance our shared interest in a stable, secure, and prosperous Pakistan," it added.

Meanwhile, according to Dawn newspaper Pakistani Foreign Secretary Aizaz Chaudhary told the Pakistani media that Pakistan has made low-yield nuclear weapons in response to India's actions under its cold-start doctrine.

This, the Pakistani daily, said "is the first concrete explanation from a senior Pakistani official on how Islamabad plans to deal with India's so called cold-start doctrine, now re-named the pro-active strategy."

Sharif himself told reporters in London that "We will protect the national interests of Pakistan during my meetings with US leadership," according to Dawn.

Asked about US media reports about plans to limit Pakistan's nuclear arsenal, Sharif was quoted as saying: "We should not forget who the prime minister was in 1999 when we became a nuclear power."

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