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# India, Australia to sign nuclear deal as Abbott visits



[Parvez Jabri](#)September 4, 201435min



MUMBAI: Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott arrived in India on Thursday to sign a long-awaited deal to sell uranium to his energy-starved hosts and strengthen ties.

Abbott is expected to meet new Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and senior ministers during a two-day visit also aimed at boosting trade.

“We expect significant outcomes from the visit to further enhance our partnership,” said Sanjay Bhattacharya, Indian foreign ministry joint secretary, on the eve of Abbott’s arrival.

“For us, Australia is a major supplier of resources, particularly energy necessary for our development needs.”

India and Australia kick-started negotiations on uranium sales in 2012 after Canberra lifted a long-standing ban on exporting the valuable ore to Delhi to meet its ambitious nuclear energy programme.

Australia, the world’s third-largest producer of uranium, had previously ruled out selling the metal because nuclear-armed India has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

Trade Minister Andrew Robb, who is travelling with Abbott, said Canberra is now happy with India’s precautions to ensure Australian uranium exports would be used only for peaceful purposes.

“We have satisfied ourselves that the steps (for appropriate safeguards) are in place,” Robb said this week.

Abbott is expected to sign the agreement in Delhi on Friday when he meets fellow conservative Modi, who swept to power in May promising to open up Asia’s ailing third-largest economy to foreign investment.

Closed and his 30-strong business delegation arrived in Mumbai early on Thursday, according to the Press Trust of India, where he will meet Indian CEOs and speak at the University of Mumbai.

Before heading to Delhi, the premier will also meet Indian cricketing great Sachin Tendulkar and former Australian stars Adam Gilchrist and Brett Lee, ahead of Australia’s hosting of the World Cup next year.

Analyst and former Indian diplomat Neelam Deo said all eyes will be on the nuclear deal, which will boost future exports and heralds closer strategic ties. [India, Australia to sign nuclear deal as Abbott visits – Business Recorder](#)

“The deal has been in the works for years and was mostly negotiated by the previous Labor government,” Deo, director of Mumbai-based think-tank Gateway House, told AFP.

“The signing of the deal removes one of the only challenges to closer ties between the countries in the region.”

India, which is heavily dependent on coal for generating power, has 20-odd small nuclear plants with plans for more.

The deal with Australia would potentially ramp up those plans, as India struggles to produce enough power to meet rising demand and suffers crippling power shortages.

Australia's decision to overturn its ban on sales to India followed a landmark 2008 deal between Delhi and Washington for the United States to support its civilian nuclear programme.

Abbott is due to head on to Malaysia on Saturday for talks with Prime Minister Najib Razak, before returning home.

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