

Canada Denies Rumours Of Avoiding NAFTA Summit: Promises To Hold At End Of The Year

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Canada has denied rumours that it is averse to host a summit of the North American Free Trade Agreement partners. The office of Prime Minister Stephen Harper on Friday clarified that Canada will host the NAFTA annual summit "later this year," and denied reports that the Summit was in limbo over Canada's alleged friction with Washington on the issue of Keystone XL pipeline project.

"While no date has been announced for the meeting, we intend to host the North American Leaders' Summit later this year," Harper's spokesman Jason MacDonald told media, reported [Terra Daily News](#). Generally the partners of the NAFTA meet in February or March, for what is known as the "Three Amigos Summit" to discuss trade and security matters. The two decade old NAFTA trade bloc represents 450 million people and produces goods and services worth US\$17 trillion, according to the U.S. government's figures.

But there were reports suggesting that the delay in the United States to grant approval for the cross-border controversial Keystone XL pipeline for moving oil from the Alberta oil sands to refineries along the U.S. Gulf coast, had become an irritant. Despite Republicans in the US House of Representatives pushing for the Keystone XL pipeline project, President Barack Obama had threatened to veto the measure.

Agenda in Progress

The PM's spokesman added that the agenda for the Summit is being finalised and denied that visa row with Mexico or pipeline issue with the USA had anything to do with the trilateral relationship. White House spokesman Josh Earnest also said: "It is my understanding that the North American summit has been postponed from early this year to later this year."

The White House official dismissed suggestions that the Keystone project was hurting ties with Canada. He said the relationship with Canada is deeper and broader than the construction project. At the NAFTA Summit, 2014 in Mexico City, the three nations had agreed on issues ranging from trade flow within North America to protecting the region's Monarch butterfly and enhancing cooperation on security.

Rejuvenating the Bloc

Meanwhile, a [Globe and Mail](#) report mentioned two recent studies that called for rejuvenating the "spirit of NAFTA" with steps to augment continental co-operation across the board. The first report was jointly authored by former World Bank president Robert

Zoellick and retired general David Petraeus with an ambitious agenda for action to harness the immense energy potential of North America and speedy approval of the Keystone XL pipeline. The second study, authored by the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, also echoed similar sentiments but skirted the controversial Keystone issue. Both studies acknowledged the subdued state of affairs in the relations with an outlook that little would change in the short term.

(The writer can be reached with feedback at kalyanaussie@gmail.com)

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