

Iran for developing strategic partnership with India

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New Delhi: Iran hopes Prime Minister Narendra Modi will undertake his visit to Tehran very soon as this would help the two nations draw up a joint strategy against geo-political challenges and set up joint ventures worth billions of dollars in the petrochemicals, fertiliser and surface transport sectors.

Iranian Ambassador Gholam Reza Ansari said an invitation to Modi to visit Iran has already been extended. "We hope that it materialises soon to give the required impetus to bilateral ties and to firm up a strategic partnership," Ansari said, adding that Modi and Iranian President Hasan Rouhani had a "useful meeting" in the Russian city of Ufa on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit.

Lauding India for extending all possible help to Iran during the sanctions regime that is now coming to an end with an agreement on Tehran's nuclear programme, Ansari told IANS: "It has brought us together. India opened a credit line which helped in easing economic pressure on the regime," adding that India's dues of \$8 billion can be utilized for setting up major developmental projects in Iran.

Bilateral trade even during the sanctions period stood at \$15 billion and can rise manifold with the lifting of sanctions.

"A great potential of cooperation exists between India and Iran. Iran offers access to India through the Chahbahar and Bandar Abbas ports and through the north-south corridor to Central Asia, Afghanistan, Russia, the Caucasus region and even Turkey.

This apart, Iran and India also share identical views on Afghanistan, the envoy stated.

Referring to the nuclear deal that Iran signed with the six big powers, the ambassador said that Iran had always stated that its programme was for peaceful and civilian purposes.

Noting that Iran has always opposed military solutions, Ansari claimed that Oman and Qatar had endorsed the deal while Saudi Arabia still has some reservations, but assured that every effort would be made to engage with the kingdom and remove its misgivings.

"The nuclear accord is a great historic development. This development has taken place when the regional political and security situation has worsened. Afghanistan, Syria, Yemen and Libya are in turmoil. It has been proved that military means have offered no solution to the crisis in the Middle east and other regions. The need of the hour is to face the threat of the ISIS (Islamic State), which is erasing borders and trying to create a Calaphite regime. We need strong determination as well as cooperation to eliminate this menace," the envoy stated.

On Syria, he said that Russia and the United States, along with Iran, are drawing up a new plan to end civil war in the country. "One-third of the Syrian population has fled to neighboring nations. It is time to solve this issue realistically," he said, adding: "The new plan is likely to be placed before the UN very shortly."

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