

PM Narendra Modi to inaugurate Afghan-India friendship dam on Saturday

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New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi will visit Afghanistan on Saturday where he will hold talks with President Ashraf Ghani and inaugurate the Afghan-India Friendship Dam, earlier known as Salma Dam, in Herat province.

Announcing the visit, External Affairs Ministry Spokesman Vikas Swarup said the meeting between Modi and Ghani will also provide an opportunity to discuss the current situation in Afghanistan and how the two countries can cooperate further for promoting peace and stability in that country.

Afghanistan is part of Modi's five-nation trip beginning June 4 which will also cover Qatar, Switzerland, the US and Mexico.

Asserting that the completion of the dam project represents culmination of years of hard work by about 1,500 Indian and Afghan engineers and other professionals in very difficult conditions, Swarup said it also highlights India's continued commitment to Afghanistan's reconstruction and development. He said the dam will help irrigate 44,000 hectares of land.

In an oblique reference to Pakistan, the MEA spokesperson said unlike those who contributed to terrorism and instability in Afghanistan, India always stood by Kabul.

Last year, Modi and President Ghani had jointly dedicated to the Afghan nation the new Parliament Building constructed under India-Afghanistan development cooperation.

"India is consistently ranked by Afghan people as a country which has stood by them and is of greatest help to them. At the same time, doing all these projects, we had to face lot of challenges.

"Not just geographical challenges but also security challenges because of the kind of situation you have in Afghanistan. Repeated attempts were made to disrupt the peace and stability of Afghanistan...cross border terrorism, you know from where," said Swarup, without naming Pakistan.

India has invested in excess of USD 2 billion in the last few years in Afghanistan. "Our commitment to Afghanistan remains despite these challenges," he said.

Asked what message will the Prime Minister give during his address at the US Congress, he said it would be of partnership, mutual respect and accommodating each other's concerns.

He said the Prime Minister would be pressing for deeper ties between the world's largest democracy and the world's oldest democracy.

"When the PM addresses the combined House and Senate, the message he would convey is that the relations between the two largest democracies in the world need to strengthen, need to further diversify so that we are both fully equipped to handle the challenges of 21st century," he said.

- PTI