

PM Modi arrives in Germany on first leg of his four-nation tour

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Berlin: Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrived here today on the first leg of his six-day, four-nation tour of Germany, Spain, Russia and France aimed at boosting bilateral economic engagement with them and inviting more investment for India's transformation.

"Reached Germany. I am sure this visit will lead to beneficial outcomes & deepen India-Germany friendship," Modi tweeted in English and German after landing here.

His Germany visit, which he described as a "new chapter" in bilateral relations, will begin with a meeting with Chancellor Angela Merkel at her country retreat of Schloss Meseberg.

Both leaders will discuss issues of mutual interest in an informal setting over dinner at the 18th-century palace, nearly 80 km northwest of Berlin.

"I am confident that this visit will open a new chapter in our bilateral cooperation with Germany and further deepen our strategic partnership," Modi said in a Facebook post ahead of his visit.

Modi said he and Merkel will "chart out a future roadmap of cooperation with focus on trade and investment, security and counter-terrorism, innovation and science and technology, skill development, urban infrastructure, railways and civil aviation, clean energy, development cooperation, health and alternative medicine."

Describing Germany as a valuable partner, the Prime Minister said, "German competencies fit well with my vision for India's transformation."

The more formal part of the visit will begin tomorrow when Modi is welcomed with military honours at the Chancellery, following which he will hold talks with Merkel as part of the fourth round of the bi-annual India-Germany Intergovernmental Consultations [IGC]. The last IGC was held in New Delhi in October 2015 when bilateral ties were significantly scaled up.

In Berlin, the two leaders are expected to clinch a host of agreements and are likely to deliberate on several pressing global issues, including the situation in the South China Sea, China's 'One Belt, One Road' initiative and the growing threat of terrorism.

Prime Minister Modi and Chancellor Merkel will have a luncheon meeting with senior business leaders before inaugurating the Indo-German Business Forum tomorrow.

The deadlocked Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and the European Union (EU) is likely to take centre-stage at this meeting, with Germany-based CEOs keen to push for a further opening up of the Indian market.

The India-Germany Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT), among India's 23 BITs with EU countries, had lapsed in March

this year. Trade between the two countries stands at 17.42 billion euros in 2016, up only marginally from 17.33 billion euros the previous year.

Germany is the seventh largest foreign direct investor (FDI) in India and the total FDI from April 2000 until December 2016 amounted to USD 9.54 billion. A total of 1,800 German companies are operating in India.

The German embassy in Berlin had launched the Make in India Mittelstand (MIIM) Programme in September 2015 to facilitate the German Mittelstand (SMEs) to do business in India.

Currently 73 German Mittelstand (SMEs) companies are being facilitated through MIIM Programme for their market entry and investment in India.

Out of these, 46 companies have progressed well in India investment plan, the embassy claims.

Modi will end his German tour with a courtesy call on German President, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, before leaving for Spain tomorrow evening.

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