

Modi, Merkel Modi in Germany: 'Very good interaction' with Chancellor Merkel, says PM

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Berlin: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday described his interaction with German Chancellor Angela Merkel as "very good." Modi, who is in Germany on the start of his six-day, four-nation tour, met Merkel at her country retreat near Berlin for informal talks over a private dinner.

The two leaders enjoyed the sunshine with a walk in the grounds of Schloss Meseberg, an 18th century Baroque castle in the Brandenburg district of Germany which is the official state guest house of the German Chancellor. They held discussions on a range of bilateral, regional and global issues like the Brexit consequences, trade and radicalisation in the context of recent terror attacks in Europe.

Both leaders also exchanged views on China's 'One Belt, One Road' initiative and climate change.

"Had a very good interaction with Chancellor Merkel," Modi said in a tweet after his meeting which began by signing of the visitors' book at Schloss Meseberg.

The meeting has been described as a very informal affair, with the more formal engagements of Modi's two-day visit to Germany set to kick off today.

"The interaction lasted nearly three hours, and covered various areas of mutual interest including smart cities, skill development, clean energy etc. There was appreciation for India's economic reform agenda, including GST (Goods and Services Tax)," a Prime Minister's Office statement on the meeting said.

"The leaders had discussions that covered the bilateral agenda and how Germany can partner with India on its flagship programmes.

There was appreciation of India's reform agenda, particularly GST," India's Ambassador to Germany Mukta Dutta Tomar told reporters at a briefing here last night.

Highlighting that this is Modi's second bilateral visit to Germany since 2015, she said that the ease of doing business in India and the fast track mechanism set up in 2015 to assist German businesses work in India received appreciation from the German side.

"In fact, there has been foreign direct investment of 2 billion dollars (from Germany) in the past two years. The figures speak for themselves," she said.

Regional and inter-global issues were also discussed during the three-hour-long interactions -- some at the delegation level and some one-to-one between Modi and Merkel.

"The consequences of Brexit (the UK's exit from the European Union) and how it would affect India and Germany were covered by the two leaders," Tomar said, adding that the prime minister reiterated the utmost value that India attaches to the EU's cohesiveness, which is a major factor of stability in global politics.

The issue of radicalisation and terrorism and each country's experience in dealing with it was discussed, with recent terrorist events in Europe also mentioned in this context, she said.

Peace in Afghanistan and the importance of an the "Afghan-led and owned reconciliation and development process" was touched upon, with the prime minister expressing appreciation over the German presence in Afghanistan and calling for a consolidation of efforts in the country, Tomar said.

The Belt and Road Forum in Beijing earlier this month, where Germany was represented by its economy and energy minister, also featured in the exchange, during which the Chancellor explained German participation and India reiterated its stand against the initiative, she said.

"Our position is well known on this issue," the ambassador said, in reference to India's opposition to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, the flagship project of President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road initiative, which passes through Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (PoK).

odi arrived in Berlin earlier on Monday at the start of his six-day, four-nation tour of Germany, Spain, Russia and France.

Formal talks between India and Germany to begin today

Modi will today hold formal talks with Merkel as part of the fourth India-Germany Intergovernmental Consultations (IGC) where he will be joined by his delegation of senior ministers, including Minister for Science and Technology Harsh Vardhan, Commerce Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, Energy Minister Piyush Goyal and Minister of State for External Affairs M J Akbar.

The prime minister will receive a ceremonial welcome with military honours at the Chancellery, the office of the German Chancellor, following which he will begin discussions with Merkel across a range of economic and political issues.

At the IGC, the two leaders are expected to clinch a host of agreements and sign MoUs to open a "new chapter" in Indo-German relations.

"Several MoUs are expected to be signed. This would obviously broaden the scope and expand the canvas of bilateral cooperation that we have with Germany," the Ministry of External Affairs said in a statement.

India and Germany have over 25 working groups, including in areas such as climate change, energy, infrastructure, and tourism.

Germany is the largest trade partner for India in the European Union (EU) and one of the leading sources of foreign direct investment (FDI) into the country.

There are more than 1,600 German companies and 600 German joint ventures in India and the German economic profile supports excellence and expertise that match with India's development priorities of Make in India, Clean India, Skill India, Digital India, Smart Cities, the MEA said.

"We will chart out a future roadmap of cooperation with (the) 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," the prime minister had said in a Facebook post before he left for Berlin yesterday.

Modi and Chancellor Merkel will also hold a meeting with senior business leaders before inaugurating the Indo- German

Business Summit 2017 later today.

"Economic relations with Germany is the most important pillar of our partnership. It has preponderance over other areas," the MEA said.

Modi will end his Germany visit with a courtesy call on German President, Dr Frank-Walter Steinmeier, at his official residence of Castle Bellevue before leaving for Spain.

Modi arrived in Germany yesterday at the start of his four-nation tour, which will cover Spain, Russia and France besides Germany.

From Berlin he heads to Madrid, where the premier will hold a bilateral summit with Spanish Premier Mariano Rajoy and call on Spanish King Felipe VI as well as interact with a select group of Spanish CEOs keen to invest in India.

"There is significant potential for deepening bilateral trade and investment ties. We seek active participation of Spanish industry in various Indian projects including infrastructure, smart cities, digital economy, renewable energy, defence and tourism," Modi had said ahead of his visit.

The first meeting of the India-Spain CEOs Forum will be held on the sidelines of the Spanish leg of the visit.

Terrorism is gravest challenge facing humanity, Europe must play lead role to deal with menace: PM

In an interview with German newspaper, 'Handelsblatt', he had urged Europe to play a lead role in tackling the menace of terrorism.

"Europe has been hit hard by terrorism. To our mind, terrorism is the gravest challenge facing humanity. Europe must play a lead role in developing an effective global response under the aegis of the United Nations to deal with this menace," he said.

On Indo-German ties, he said India sees Germany as an important partner in the national flagship programmes of Make in India, Skill India, Start-up India, Clean India and Smart Cities.

"We are keen to attract German Mittelstand [small and medium enterprises] to partner with us in our Make in India programme. We are committed to provide a supportive business ecosystem to those who join us in our growth story," he said.

"We have established dedicated platforms to support German companies and investments in India. There is strong commitment from the leadership on both sides to strengthen economic relations. I am very optimistic about this partnership," he added.

In reference to Germany as the host of the G20 summit in Hamburg in July, the PM offered India's full support for a successful outcome.

"The G20 has emerged as a premier forum for coordination on international and financial matters. Our expectation is that G20 would be able to enhance global growth," he noted.

- (With PTI inputs)