

Sushma Swaraj arrives in Nepal to attend international donors conference

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Kathmandu: Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj will attend Thursday's international donor conference here on Nepal's reconstruction post earthquake.

Nepal had invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to participate as a special guest. Nepal Finance Minister Ram Sharan Mahat extended the invite to Modi on behalf of Nepal Prime Minister Sushil Koirala.

"We have received confirmation from the Indian side that Sushma Swaraj will lead the Indian team," Madhu Marasani of Nepal's finance ministry told IANS.

Senior Indian officials will travel with Sushma Swaraj to attend the conference where India is expected to announce aid or soft loan for Nepal or make a financial commitment.

India was the first country to respond after a terrible earthquake on April 25 left around 10,000 people dead and caused widespread destruction. New Delhi sent search and rescue teams, helicopters and military personnel.

India has already extended over Rs.4.5 billion (Nepal Rs.6.5 billion) assistance to Kathmandu following the quake.

"Towards Resilient Nepal" is the theme of the conference that will be inaugurated by Prime Minister Koirala, who will pitch for commitments from governments to rebuild his country.

Sushma Swaraj, who will arrive here on Wednesday, will call on President Ram Baran Yadav and Koirala.

Nepal is holding the conference in a bid to raise funds for its reconstruction work and to rebuild the structures damaged by the quake.

According to officials, Nepal needs around \$7 billion for rebuilding half a million houses, thousands of other structures and infrastructure.

Representatives from 60 countries, donor community and development partners will be at conference, according to Nepal's finance ministry that is coordinating the conference.

Finance Minister Mahat said: "The economic growth rate this fiscal ending mid-July is expected to be the lowest in eight years, at 3.04 percent."

- PTI