

PM Modi holds talks with Uzbek Prez; terror, Afghanistan discussed

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Tashkent: On his first visit to Central Asian countries, Prime Minister Narendra Modi today held talks with Uzbek President Islam Karimov on key bilateral and regional issues including the situation in Afghanistan as the two countries inked three pacts to boost cooperation between their foreign offices and in the field of culture and tourism.

Modi, who arrived here in the Uzbek capital on the first leg of his eight-day visit to Central Asia and Russia, was received at the airport by his counterpart Shavkat Miromonovich Mirziyoyev and was accorded a ceremonial welcome.Â

During the talks, Modi and Karimov discussed ways to enhance strategic, economic and energy ties apart from reviewing key regional issues including the situation in war-torn Afghanistan.

Addressing a joint press event, Modi said,â€•I have begun my journey in Uzbekistan underlining its importance for India, not just in this region, but also in Asia.

President Karimov and I discussed various initiatives to further enhance connectivity between India and Uzbekistan.â€•

He said they also discussed international and regional issues including the situation in Afghanistan and reiterated the importance of peace and stability in the country.Â

And in this context, Modi said both the leaders talked about the rising threat of extremism and terrorism in the â€œextended neighbourhoodâ€• of the two countries.Â

Noting that in recent years, India and Uzbekistan have built a strategic partnership on the foundation of mutual respect and shared interests, Modi said he conveyed his keen interest to sustain regular high level dialogue between the two sides.

â€œI briefed President about the International North South Transport Corridor and proposed that Uzbekistan consider becoming a member,â€• Modi said.

The International North-South Transport Corridor is a ship, rail and road route for moving freight between India, Russia, Iran, Europe and Central Asia.Â

Noting that the two countries have built a strategic partnership, Modi said, â€œThis includes expanding economic cooperation, combating terrorism, advancing stability in the region and promoting regional integration.â€•

â€œWe also discussed regional and international issues, including the situation in Afghanistan. We also have shared concerns on the rising threat of extremism and terrorism in our extended neighbourhood,â€• the Prime Minister said.Â

The two leaders agreed to intensify cooperation in key areas of defence and cyber security. In this regard, the bilateral Joint Working Group on Counter Terrorism will meet later this year.

Modi and Karimov also discussed steps needed to implement the contract for supply of uranium from mineral-rich Uzbekistan signed last year.

The pact was signed for supply of 2,000 metric tonnes of the yellow cake.Â On ways to raise economic engagement between the two countries, Modi said,â€•I conveyed to him that there is a strong interest in Indian business to invest in Uzbekistan.

There is immense potential in a broad range of areas in Uzbekistan.Â â€œI have urged him to make the process and the policies for Indian investments here smoother. President responded positively to my suggestion.â€•

Modi noted that President Karimov was also supportive of strengthening ongoing cooperation in the areas of agriculture, information technology and energy.

The two leaders discussed various initiatives to further enhance connectivity between the two countries and in this context.

Modi also sought Uzbek Presidentâ€™s support for India joining the Ashgabat Agreement. The pact is a transit agreement established in 2011 between Uzbekistan, Iran, Turkmenistan and Oman.

Noting that the pacts inked today in the field of culture and tourism will bring people of the two countries closer, Modi said, â€œFew countries can match Uzbekistan in nurturing Hindi and Indian culture.

Tomorrow, I look forward to meeting a vibrant group of Indologists and Hindi linguists.â€• Prime Minister Modi also presented President Karimov with a specially commissioned reproduction of â€˜Khamasa-i-Khusrauâ€™ by the great 13th century sufi poet Amir Khusrau who was born in Uttar Pradesh and whose father hailed from Uzbekistan.Â

Written in Persian and profusely decorated and illuminated with various colours, the work is a part of the manuscripts collection of National Museum, Delhi.

Modi said India will expand cooperation in capacity building through increase in the number of training offers in India.

â€œConsistent with our commitment, the Uzbekistan-India Information Technology Centre has been upgraded this year,â€• Modi said and welcomed President Karimovâ€™s assurance to ensure speedy completion of the Entrepreneurship Development Centre being set up in Tashkent.

â€œTomorrow, I will be paying a visit to the Monument of Independence and Humanism and the Memorial of Late Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri. We are thankful to the people of Tashkent and Uzbekistan, for preserving the legacy of our former Prime Minister.

â€œThis has been a very rewarding visit. It has sown the seeds of a rich harvest in the years ahead,â€• Modi said.Â Modi is here on his first-leg of six nation visit including Russia where he will be attending Summits of BRICS and Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).Â

From Uzbekistan, Modi will go to Kazakhstan tomorrow. He will then travel to Russia on July 8, before flying to Turkmenistan on July 10, Kyrgyzstan on July 11 and Tajikistan on July 12.

The SCO Summit, to be held in Ufa in Russia, may see India getting the membership of the six-nation grouping comprising China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, which could be a major highlight of the visit.

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