

Jaishankar to visit Pakistan soon/Jehlum Post News Network/New Delhi/ Feb 13, 2015/In an ice-breaking move after a



six-month hiatus in Indo-Pak ties, Prime Minister Narendra Modi today spoke to his Pakistani counterpart Nawaz Sharif after which it was announced that Foreign Secretary S Jaishankar will visit Islamabad when he will "push bilateral agenda". Using cricket diplomacy, Modi called leaders of four SAARC nations which, along with India, are participating in cricket World Cup starting on Sunday. He conveyed best wishes to their teams. Thereafter, Modi announced that Jaishankar will undertake a "SAARC yatra" soon to strengthen relationship with them. The "yatra" will take him to Pakistan with which India broke off foreign secretary-level talks in August last at the eleventh hour because the Pakistan High Commissioner

here held consultations with Kashmiri separatists. Sharif welcomed the foreign secretary's proposed visit "to discuss all issues of common interest", Pakistan Prime Minister's Spokesperson said in Islamabad. Briefing reporters, External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson Syed Akbaruddin said, "Obviously, no one misuses an opportunity available," when asked if the Foreign Secretary will use the visit to discuss bilateral issues. "Sure, we have a bilateral agenda with all the SAARC countries and we will pursue that bilateral agenda too within the constraints of short visit to each of these countries.... Every leader and diplomat uses every opportunity to push its bilateral agenda," he said when repeatedly asked about Foreign Secretary's visit to Pakistan and if he will discuss bilateral issues. However, he emphasised that the Foreign Secretary's "yatra", at the instruction of the Prime Minister, will be mainly with a focus on SAARC agenda as outlined by Modi at the SAARC Summit in Kathmandu in November last. This included a dedicated SAARC satellite, South Asian University and simplified medical visas, he said.

Significantly, Modi's telephonic call to Sharif today came hours after US President Barack Obama spoke with the Pakistani Prime Minister. Asked about Sharif's remarks to Obama that India's permanent membership in the reformed UN Security Council was unacceptable to Pakistan as it has not complied with UN resolutions on Kashmir, Akbaruddin said every country was entitled to their views. However, since the matter was being discussed in UN General Assembly, no country has a veto power regarding the issue, the Spokesperson added. During his call, Modi joked with Sharif about playing a warm-up World Cup match in 1987 alongside Imran Khan, cricketer-turned-politician who is now Pakistan's top opposition leader, official sources said. In response, Sharif reportedly laughed and said, "Kash vo din dubaara aata (I wish those days would come back)".

Earlier in the day, Modi had tweeted that he "Spoke to (Afghan) President Ashraf Ghani, (Bangladesh) Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and (Sri Lankan) President (Maithripala) Sirisena. Conveyed my best wishes for the Cricket World Cup". Noting that five SAARC nations are playing and are excited about the World Cup, Modi said, "(I) am sure WC will celebrate sportsman spirit and will be a treat for sports lovers." "Cricket connects people in our region and promotes goodwill. Hope players from SAARC region play with passion and bring laurels to the region," he said. Australia and New Zealand will host the 11th ICC Cricket World Cup starting tomorrow and India and Pakistan will face each other in their opening game on Sunday. The Spokesperson also said the Prime Minister has used cricket as a metaphor for connectivity, noting that Modi practices "multi-layer diplomacy" including at the level of the leaders and people-to-people.

The Prime Minister's remarks today came a day after Pakistan High Commissioner Abdul Basit met Jaishankar. The meeting was described as a courtesy call by the officials. "It was a very cordial meeting where both of them discussed the status of Indo-Pak ties," sources said. Asked when will Jaishankar begin his 'yatra', the Spokesperson did not give any direct answer and only said "not in next two weeks".Agency