

Indian aid for Palestine diplomatic institute

Narendra Modi

Prime Minister Narendra Modi will fly from Amman in Jordan on February 10 to arrive in Palestine where he is expected to lay the foundation stone of a new diplomatic training institute, a source familiar with the planning of the visit said. Mr. Modi's visit will be the first by an Indian Prime Minister to Palestine and comes weeks after India voted in favour of Palestine's rights over Jerusalem in the United Nations General Assembly.

"The Government of India has already sanctioned US\$4.5 million for the Indo-Palestine Diplomatic Institute which will be a unique institute in the region and it is one of the several events that are likely to feature in the PM's visit to Ramallah," said the source, requesting anonymity.

Officials say the visit is aimed at de-hyphenating India's policy towards Israel and Palestine that was reflected in Mr. Modi's 2017 visit to Tel Aviv when he skipped Palestine. Continuing with the same strategy, Mr. Modi is expected to reach Amman and land in Ramallah in the West Bank territory of Palestine in a helicopter.

"India has traditionally provided humanitarian and educational support which also included IT training for younger generation of Palestinians, and the visit is expected to boost bilateral ties," the source said. A new agreement on IT-training was sealed during President Mahmoud Abbas's visit to Delhi on May 16, 2017 when both sides signed five agreements. Continuing India's commitment, New Delhi also pledged \$1.25 million humanitarian assistance to UNRWA (UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) in 2016. India's support to UNRWA is in contrast to U.S. policy to the organisation as President Donald Trump has announced slashing of American funds to UNRWA.

The visit to Ramallah will be part of a three-nation tour to the Arab world that Mr. Modi will undertake during February 9-12.

(With inputs from Suhasini Haidar)

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