

Jim Mattis likely to push for Indian troops in Afghanistan

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U.S. Defence Secretary Jim Mattis landed in India on Monday for his maiden three-day visit, the first by a Cabinet member of the Trump administration.

Officials said the focus was on deepening the defence partnership and expanding the high-technology cooperation, and among the key focus areas of discussion would be the situation in Afghanistan.

In the light of U.S. President Donald Trump's renewed engagement in Afghanistan and call for a greater Indian role, Mr. Mattis could be expected to push for Indian troops in Afghanistan.

India has already extended a \$3-billion aid to Afghanistan and also provides training to its military and other assistance. The two sides could also discuss the new Chinese posturing in the region and terrorism originating from Pakistan, officials said.

The Defence Secretary will hold a restricted dialogue with his counterpart, Nirmala Sitharaman, followed by delegation-level talks on Tuesday. After the talks, the two Ministers would issue press statements. Later Mr. Mattis will call on Prime Minister Narendra Modi and also meet National Security Adviser Ajit Doval.

The two sides are expected to conclude the agreement for holding a bilateral maritime exercise, focussed on providing humanitarian assistance and disaster relief.

Defence talks

They are also expected to discuss significant measures under the Major Defence Partner (MDP) status. They will also review high-technology cooperation under the Defence Technology and Trade Initiative (DTTI). An Indian delegation led by Secretary, Defence Production, who co-chairs the DTTI from India, was in the U.S. recently to prepare the ground.

However, the cooperation is contingent on India signing other foundational agreements, especially the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA). The U.S. has been pressing for early conclusion of the agreement but India has been cautious. Discussions are under way. Earlier, the U.S. Department of Defence had said the Secretary would emphasise that the U.S. viewed India as a "valued and influential partner, with broad mutual interests extending well beyond South Asia".

Both are likely to conclude formal agreement for holding a bilateral maritime exercise

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