



PM's 5-day tour of South-East Asia to help consolidate defence, space ties

Elizabeth Roche

elizabeth.r@livemint.com

NEW DELHI

P rime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday embarked on a five-day visit to Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore to consolidate India's ties with three important strategic partners in the South-East Asia region. He is expected to sign key agreements in the areas of defence and space.

Modi's first stop will be Indonesia —the largest country in the region and a close maritime neighbour. According to estimates, the shortest distance between India's Andaman Islands and Indonesia's Aceh province is not more than 80



Prime Minister Narendra Modi in New Delhi on Tuesday. PTI

nautical miles. Indian naval ships make regular visits to Indonesian ports and joint patrolling of the seas has been going on for some years now.

A key highlight of the visit could be an agreement that

allows India access to the strategic island of Sabang at the northern tip of Sumatra and close to the Malacca Strait. That Indonesia could give India access to the island was indicated in a recent speech in New Delhi by the coordinating minister for maritime affairs of Indonesia, Luhut Pandjaitan.

India is looking to invest in the port and the economic zone here and, if this agreement is clinched during Modi's current visit, it will give Delhi a foothold in the region. It will come as a shot in the arm for the National Democratic Alliance government's 'Act East' policy. Such a foothold in the region is also expected to offer greater scope for the country to raise its profile in the Indo-Pacific region.