

India and China plan to start people-to-people exchange mechanism

ASHOK TUTEJA

NEW DELHI, 12 DECEMBER

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi is all set to visit India for jointly inaugurating the high-level India-China people-to-people exchanges mechanism with External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj on 21 December, according to diplomatic sources.

The mechanism is expected to go a long way in promoting cultural, economic, academic and other links between the two ancient civilisations.

During his three-day visit, Wang is scheduled to attend a series of engagements in the Indian capital, including attending an India-China media forum and a think-tank conclave, sources added. He is also likely to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi and visit Aurangabad during the visit.

Sources said the two countries were keen to make 2019 even better for normalising ties and promoting people-to-people exchanges. A lot of bilateral exchanges were planned between the two countries in 2019, including a visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping. But the President's visit would take place probably after the Lok Sabha elections in India.

The visit comes within a month of Wang holding the 21st round of boundary talks with National Security Adviser Ajit Doval in Chengdu in China's Sichuan province. Wang and Doval are the designated Special Represen-



tatives (SRs) of the two countries on the vexed boundary issue. The two SRs had decided to maintain peace and tranquillity along the India-China border and expedite a solution to the boundary issue. The two countries are also close to arriving at an agreement for setting up a hot line between their defence ministries.

Last week, Foreign Secretary Vijay Gokhale held talks with Chinese Vice-Foreign Minister Kong Xuanyou and reviewed the progress made in bilateral ties.

Sources said there has been a perceptible improvement in India-China ties since PM Modi met the Chinese President in Wuhan for an informal summit in April. Since then, the two leaders have met thrice this year, their last meeting having taken place in Argentina on the margins of the G-20 Summit recently.

"Both countries are working very hard to implement the consensus reached between the two leaders (Modi and XI)," sources added, noting that efforts were on by both sides to put last summer's Doklam military stand-off behind them.