



■ Sushma Swaraj.

Sushma to begin Central Asian tour from tomorrow

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NEWDELHI: External affairs minister Sushma Swaraj will undertake a three-nation Central Asian tour from August 2 to 5 in a bid to step up India's engagements with a region that is critical to the country in terms of both trade and resources, people familiar with the visit said.

The minister will visit Kazakhstan on August 2 and 3, Kyrgyzstan on August 3 and 4 and conclude her visit to the region with a trip to Uzbekistan on August 4 and 5 August. President Ram Nath Kovind is slated to visit Tajikistan later this year.

"...the visit will provide an opportunity to hold in-depth discussions with the political leadership on a wide range of global, regional and bilateral issues," said a ministry official who asked not to be identified.

The membership of the Central Asian republics in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), their plans to join the Eurasian economic union, and their connectivity to West Asia, especially Iran, make the region crucial for India's economic and strategic interests.

"With our growing interest in Eurasia, Central Asia occupies great significance, not only for resources but also for our trading arrangements," said Sachin Chaturvedi, director general at the Research and Information System for Developing Countries, a New Delhi-based think tank.

Swaraj will hold a bilateral meeting with her counterparts Kairat Abdrakhmanov of Kazakhstan, Erlan Abdyldaev of the Kyrgyz republic, and Abdul Aziz Kamilov of Uzbekistan.