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The Economic Times

Pakistan apprehensive about Obama's India visit

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ISLAMABAD: Pakistan is apprehensive about the visit of US President Barack Obama to India, "especially over the symbolism hidden in the decision to pick Mumbai's Taj Mahal Hotel for starting the trip" as it was the focal point of terrorist strikes on the city, a media report here said on Sunday.

Obama will be in India for four days - Nov 6-9, beginning the visit from Mumbai.

The US president is likely to make a statement on the war against terror from the hotel, while "anxious eyes in Islamabad will meticulously examine how the American president manages ties with India without impacting long-term partnership with Pakistan", the Dawn said.

The daily said senior officials in Pakistan have been reassured by the Americans that, unlike British Prime Minister David Cameron's allegations of terror export from Pakistan, during his visit to India, "there would be no brazen anti-Pakistan remarks" from Obama.

"Nonetheless, they (senior officials) are worried that President Obama will try to ratchet up pressure on Pakistan to act against leaders of the banned Lashkar-e-Taiba and its reincarnations, and certainly to speed up the trial of suspects in the Mumbai attack," the daily said.

But the forthcoming statement on terrorism is not Pakistan's only concern, the report said.

What Obama, during his stay in India, "says or doesn't say on Jammu and Kashmir, Delhi's long-standing desire for permanent membership of the UN Security Council and India-US military cooperation would not only be important for Pakistan, but also for the future of Islamabad-Washington ties".

"The Pakistani leadership, with a belief that the Americans could facilitate talks on Kashmir, has desired that Mr. Obama speak about the human rights violations in Kashmir during his stay in India," the report said.

Efforts have also been made by Pakistan through diplomatic channels to convince Obama to meet Kashmiri leaders.

Diplomatic sources told the Dawn that Obama during meetings with Indian leaders will address the Kashmir issue and press for resumption of India-Pakistan talks.

While Obama may go to any extent for pleasing the Indians, he will be the last person to annoy the Pakistanis and risk losing their crucial support for ending Afghan war, Pakistani analysts believe.

The optimism in Pakistan's Foreign Office was reflected by spokesman Abdul Basit, while commenting on Obama's visit.

"We do not have any concern. Frankly speaking, the US president's visit should help promote stability and peace in South Asia. This is what we are expecting because the US is a major power and it has influence across the world," Basit said.

Former foreign secretary Shamshad Ahmed said: "Anything in India-US relations that affects Pakistan's interests will be crucial for us." He said he was a little concerned about Obama not visiting Pakistan along with India.