

Modi not expected to meet Yunus on UNGA sidelines

September 19, 2024

Online Desk : Prime Minister Narendra Modi is not expected to meet Bangladesh interim government chief Muhammad Yunus on the margins of the United Nations General Assembly next week, people familiar with the matter said on Wednesday. Earlier this month, the Bangladesh side made a formal request for a meeting on the sidelines of the General Assembly, which both leaders are set to attend. Dhaka was keen on a meeting in the hope it would help clear the air over irritants that have emerged in bilateral ties since the fall of the Sheikh Hasina government, the people said on condition of anonymity. The people said such a meeting is not part of the Indian side's agenda. Besides, Modi will have a packed schedule for his three-day visit to the US, as he is set to attend the Quad Leaders' Summit in Wilmington, Delaware, on September 21 and address the Summit of the Future at the UN General Assembly on September 23, according to Hindustan Times report. "The PM is expected to have some bilateral meetings on the sidelines of the General Assembly in New York but a meeting with the head of Bangladesh's interim government isn't on the schedule," one of the people cited above said. Besides scheduling issues, comments by Yunus on India-Bangladesh relations in a recent interview and near-daily remarks by members of the interim government in Dhaka perceived as critical of India have not gone down well in New Delhi.

In the interview, Yunus criticised former premier Sheikh Hasina for commenting on developments in Bangladesh while in exile in India. He suggested Bangladesh could seek her extradition and said India should move beyond the "narrative" that every political party other than Hasina's Awami League is "Islamist". Other members of the interim government, including de facto foreign minister Touhid Hossain, have repeatedly raked up the possibility of seeking the extradition of Hasina, who fled to India after stepping down on August 5. Hossain also acknowledged any such move would create an "embarrassing situation for the Indian government". India's leadership has said Hasina was granted approval to come to the country at short notice. Hasina has been largely incommunicado while in India, where she is at an undisclosed safe location. The external affairs ministry has refused to be drawn out on any possible Bangladeshi request for her extradition, describing it as a hypothetical matter. The people cited above said a meeting between Modi and former US president Donald Trump too was not part of the Indian side's agenda though an encounter between the two leaders in New York could not be ruled out.