

FIRST PUBLIC REMARKS AFTER TRUMP DOUBLES TARIFF

PM draws the line: Won't compromise on our interests, ready to pay heavy personal price

Agri, dairy sticking points in trade talks, Modi says farmer interest top priority



PM Narendra Modi releases a stamp commemorating the birth centenary of M S Swaminathan in New Delhi, Thursday. Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan, Swaminathan's daughter Soumya Swaminathan were also present. *ANI*

HARIKISHAN SHARMA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 7

IN FIRST public remarks after US President Donald Trump doubled the tariffs on India to 50 per cent ahead of more negotiations for a trade deal that has run into Indian red lines in sensitive areas such as agriculture and dairy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Thursday that the country “will never compromise on the interests of its farmers, livestock rearers and fisherfolk”. He said he knew he “personally will have to pay a very heavy price”, but he was “ready for it”.

In his address at the M S Swaminathan Centenary International Conference in New Delhi, Modi said, “*Hamare liye apne kisanon ka hit sarvochch prathmikta hai. Bharat apne kisanon ke, pashupalakon ke aur machhuaron bhai-behnon ke hiton ke saath kabhi bhi samjhauta nahin karega. Aur mai jaanta hoon, vyaktigat roop se mujhe bahut badi keemat chukaane padegge, lekin mai iske liye taiyaar hoon. Mere desh ke kisanon ke liye, mere desh ke machhuaron ke liye, mere desh ke pashupalakon ke liye aaj Bharat taiyaar hai.*” (For us, the interests of our

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India's strategy: Remain quiet, don't give in, wait it out for now

PVAIDYANATHAN IYER
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 7

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump may have doubled the tariffs on India to 50 per cent, but New Delhi is not alarmed or unduly perturbed; rather the government seems to be prepared to wait it out for the next few weeks or more — deal with his increasing frustration by remaining calm.

Simultaneously, it has taken an unequivocal call that Trump cannot tell India not to trade

with Russia or distance itself from BRICS.

“These are India's sovereign decisions. We will never sacrifice our sovereignty,” said a source aware of the developments. “We are willing to negotiate on tariffs and trade with the US, but Trump has continuously shifted the goal-post. Buying defence spare parts or oil from Russia, which is India's all-weather and consistent friend, or being a member of a global grouping like BRICS — these are issues which are not

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BRACING UP

India must continue trade talks with US. But who it does business with must be guided only by national interests

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THE WORLD

PUTIN SAYS HOPE TO MEET TRUMP, WHITE HOUSE PRESSES FOR PEACE DEAL

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Can give Modi some advice: Netanyahu on dealing with Trump



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with India's Ambassador to Israel J P Singh, in Jerusalem. *PTI*

SHUBHAJIT ROY
JERUSALEM, AUGUST 7

CALLING PRIME Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump his “terrific friends”, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Thursday that he would give

Modi “some advice but privately” on how to deal with Trump.

At the same time, he said, “There is a basic understanding in the relationship between India and the US. The basis of the relationship is very solid. It will be in the interest of India and the US to arrive at a common ground

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NSA Ajit Doval with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow Thursday. *Screengrab*

In Russia, NSA Doval says Putin to visit India, working on dates

DIVYA A & SHUBHAJIT ROY
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 7

A DAY after US President Donald Trump doubled the tariff on India to 50 per cent, citing “direct or indirect import of Russian Federation oil”, New Delhi on Thursday re-confirmed the visit of Russian President Vladimir Putin later this year, even as the dates are still being worked out.

National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, who is in Moscow for an official visit, said during his meetings there that the dates for Putin's visit to India were being worked out. While some reports said the visit was likely this month itself, sources said on Thursday that no specific date or time has been indicated by the NSA in his engagements.

“NSA Doval, during his visit to Moscow, has said that the dates for President Putin's visit to India are being worked out. The time of end-August being cited in some media reports is incorrect,” said a source.

While Indian officials have said earlier that Putin will visit India this year, the timing of the reiteration by the NSA is important, in the context of the fraught

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Submit declaration on claim, give names of electors: EC to Rahul

KIRAN PARASHAR & DAMINI NATH
BENGALURU, NEW DELHI, AUGUST 7

RESPONDING TO Congress leader Rahul Gandhi's allegations of a “huge criminal fraud” in elections, the Karnataka Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) wrote to him on Thursday, asking him to submit a formal declaration under oath backing his “vote chori” (vote theft) charge, along with the names of electors allegedly wrongfully included in the voter list, so that proceedings could be initiated.

Similar missives were also sent by the CEOs of Maharashtra and Haryana, after Gandhi, who is the Leader of Opposition in Lok Sabha, alleged incorrect and duplicate inclusions in the electoral

rolls of these states too. The Uttar Pradesh CEO issued a statement denying Gandhi's allegation that two electors of Bengaluru were also registered in UP.

Apart from the State CEOs writing individually to Gandhi, the EC made a more public reference to the matter in a post on X: “If Shri Rahul Gandhi believes what he is saying is true, then he should sign the declaration/ oath as per Rule 20(3)(b) of the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960, and submit the same to CEO of Karnataka by today evening itself so that necessary proceedings can be initiated. If Shri Rahul Gandhi does not believe in what he is saying, then he should stop arriving at absurd conclusions and misleading the citizens of India.”

At a press conference in New Delhi, Gandhi alleged that there

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Duty-free access to US cotton, agri items' quota likely on talks table

RAVIDUTTA MISHRA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 7

DUTY-FREE MARKET access to US cotton, accepting agricultural items under limited quotas — these are among the possible concessions that the industry has suggested ahead of the crucial round of negotiations later

this month when the US team is expected to arrive in India, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

Earlier this month, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal had sought suggestions from industry executives on ways to sweeten the trade deal with the US.

While some sectors have proposed incentives to accommo-

date US products, industry sources said the recent escalation in tension between New Delhi and Washington — due to additional tariffs over the Russian oil trade — is turning popular sentiment against a trade deal.

Importing duty-free US cotton is one of the areas being suggested to the government, which

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Process fair: SC rejects Justice Varma's plea against in-house probe

ANANTHAKRISHNANG
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 7

THE SUPREME Court Thursday dismissed Allahabad High Court judge Justice Yashwant Varma's petition challenging the in-house inquiry instituted by the then Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna over alleged discovery of unaccounted cash at his official residence in New Delhi — when he served as a Delhi High Court judge — during a fire in March this year.

A bench of Justices Dipankar Datta and A G Masih rejected Justice Varma's arguments against the constitutionality of the in-house procedure. It said there was no deviation from procedure but for making public the



Allahabad High Court judge Justice Yashwant Varma

video and photographs of the burnt cash.

Underlining the authority of the CJI to act in such circumstances, Justice Datta, writing for the bench, said, “The CJI, as the leader of the judiciary, apart from his various other duties owes a duty to the people of the country to keep the justice delivery system pure, clean and unpolluted... it is unreasonable to even think that despite an incident of the present nature, the CJI would wait

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FROM PAGE ONE FULL REPORTS ON WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

PM draws the line: Won't compromise on our interests

farmers are the highest priority. India will never compromise on the interests of its farmers, livestock rearers and fisherfolk. And I know that I personally will have to pay a very heavy price for this, but I am ready. Today, India is prepared — for the farmers of my country, for the fisherfolk of my country and for the livestock rearers of my country.)

“We are continuously working on the goals of raising farmer income, reducing cost of cultivation, and creating new sources of income,” he said. “Our government recognises farmer strength as the foundation of the nation's progress.”

“Dr MS Swaminathan taught us that agriculture is not just

about crops. Agriculture is life itself. The dignity of every individual connected to the field, the well-being of every farming community, and the protection of nature — these form the very strength of our government's agricultural policy,” Modi said.

“We must weave together science and society, place the interests of the small farmer at the heart of our efforts, and empower women who work in the fields. Let us move ahead with this very goal in mind, with the inspiration of Dr Swaminathan guiding us all,” he said.

Commenting on the Prime Minister's remarks, Agriculture Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan said, “National interest is para-

mount, farmers' interest is paramount. Prime Minister Modi's clear message is: Country first, farmers first. Every decision taken under his leadership gives top priority to national interest and farmers' interest. There is trust because Modi is there... This is the firmness of leadership... These are not just words, but a resolution.”

In the ongoing trade talks with the US, India has made it clear that agriculture and dairy remain non-negotiable. As reported by The Indian Express, New Delhi is unlikely to concede to Washington's push for market access to genetically modified (GM) crops such as corn and soya.

“Some things are non-negotiable on principle. We can't im-

port GM,” a source said, indicating India's firm stance.

Agriculture continues to be one of the most contentious areas between the two countries, with the US Trade Representative (USTR) repeatedly raising concerns over India's restrictions on GM imports, calling them discriminatory.

On Wednesday, Washington ramped up pressure ahead of a scheduled visit by US trade negotiators to New Delhi on August 25. It doubled duties on several Indian goods — raising overall tariffs to 50 per cent — citing India's continued crude oil trade with Russia. A 25 per cent penalty will be added to the reciprocal tariffs announced on August 1, but with

a 21-day buffer before implementation.

In a statement, the White House said the additional “25 per cent ad valorem duty” was being imposed to address a national emergency triggered by Russia's actions in Ukraine. The executive order stated that this step was necessary due to India's “direct or indirect” imports of Russian oil and that higher tariffs would more effectively address the situation.

The sharp tariff hike puts India at a disadvantage compared to regional competitors such as Vietnam, Bangladesh, and even China, who now face lower or more favourable trade terms.

New Delhi responded strongly to the move, calling the US action “unfair, unjustified, and unreasonable.” The government said it would do whatever is required to safeguard its national interest.

● Duty-free access

would also benefit domestic manufacturing amid declining cotton production in the country. Notably, Bangladesh, which has signed a deal with the US, had also offered a similar concession. The US market accounts for nearly 30 per cent of India's total apparel exports. A government official said that quotas for American agricultural items have also been considered, but these do not include genetically modified (GM) products. There is significant resistance to GM crops in India, and only one GM crop — Bt cotton — is approved for cultivation. However, no GM food crop is commercially grown in India.

Queries emailed to the Commerce and Industry Ministry on the issue remained unanswered till press time.

Meanwhile, following the steep tariff announced by the US, the industry has sought immediate relief — like expansion of the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) scheme to more sectors, and the Interest Subvention Scheme (ISS) Join FREE Whatsapp Channel <https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029Van2VRb6RGJOKH6oBd0F>

for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs).

An exporter who did not want to be named said that established brands are not cancelling orders, but have begun putting them on hold, pending the outcome of negotiations slated for later this month.

“Everybody [US importers] is saying, give us at least three weeks to revert — so, till the US negotiators reach India by August 25, and then maybe some relief could come. Indian exporters can absorb five to seven per cent tariff. Pharma has margins, so the challenge is less there. But in most other areas, margins are low. Other items — say proprietary items like what Apple produces — can withstand the pressure, but footwear and textiles have little margin and the competition is intense,” the exporter said.

Another exporter said that higher tariffs could increase exports during the 21-day window. However, if the 50 per cent duty comes into effect, Indian goods will be worse off as compared to China, Bangladesh, Vietnam and most of the other competitors.

An executive operating in the gems and jewellery sector said the industry has sought support from the government on the lines of the intervention during Covid, as concerns over imports of rough diamonds still remain and Indian goods may not remain competitive in the US market after 25 per cent tariffs.

The Indian Express reported on August 3 that the government has kicked off an exercise to thrash out concessions across sectors that can be offered in the tariff negotiations later this month. Key economic ministries have been asked to examine what they can still afford to offer to sweeten India's deal when the US team visits its on August 25.

Meanwhile, India has stepped up its oil imports from the US, with imports jumping over 270 per cent year-on-year in the first four months of 2025. According to data released by the Directorate General of Commercial Intelligence and Statistics, India imported 6.31 million tonnes of US crude in January–April, a sharp increase from 1.69 million tonnes in the same period last year.

● India's strategy

related to trade with the US and are non-negotiable,” the source said. India is one of the first few countries to have kick-started talks with the US on a trade agreement, and an interim deal was expected before August 1.

“We were progressing really well and were very close to a deal,” said another source. “Yes, there are red lines given the nature of our economy. Agriculture and dairy concern the livelihoods of a large population of poor farmers; there is little to no flexibility in opening up these sectors,” the source said.

“But our negotiators are taking part in the talks with the US in good faith and with authority — when we concede on a particular subject, we stick to it. It has not been the same on the part of the US. It has happened that US officials agreed on some issue, but then changed their stance due to lack of political clearance; at times, they have been apologetic about this too... Having said this, Join FREE Telegram Channel <https://t.me/+jUYKq0AFHBawMGQ1>

the negotiations have been very constructive; we were within striking distance of an agreement. But diplomatic and non-trade issues have cropped up,” said another source without elaborating on the specifics of the trade talks.

What has kept New Delhi guessing is why Trump is ratcheting up the pressure given the pivot India-US relations took two decades ago and the arc of the strategic cooperation between the two countries.

“One explanation is that he is quite frustrated that India is holding up... unwilling to bend, when many other countries have,” said a top political functionary aware of the negotiations between India and the US.

One of the two sources quoted above said there could be another reason why Trump is irritated. “The US President has repeatedly said he helped bring peace between India and Pakistan — that he stopped the war. We never acknowledged it, because it is absolutely not true. In fact, the government has denied it,” the

source said.

From New Delhi's perspective, countries negotiating with Trump fall under two categories. First, countries like Bangladesh and Pakistan which couldn't really put up stiff resistance, and did not stand up to his pressure tactics; they are learnt to have given huge concessions, including possibly political conditions. Then, there are countries like China and Canada; they speak up, openly challenge and even retaliate.

“India has found its own way — the middle way to resist. We do not criticise in public, but we stand up and do not buckle under pressure, all of this without making much noise,” the sources said, describing it as “quiet non-submission.”

High tariffs by the US will hurt exports, but taking the economy in a very static sense, imports are seen to be far more critical than exports today. “Exports can, should and will power the economy in the coming years. We will wind our way through this carefully...,” one of the sources said.

● Justice Varma

for Parliament to take action.”

The bench said that while it is up to Parliament whether or not to activate the process of removal of a judge, “left to him, the CJI upon being informed of a Judge's remissness does have the authority — moral, ethical and legal — to take such necessary action as is warranted to keep institutional integrity intact. Any adverse impact on the credibility of the institution could prove dear.”

The court rejected the contention that the CJJ's office could not have made any observation while forwarding the report of the in-house inquiry to the President and Prime Minister. “It is keeping in view such concerns (about impact on credibility of the institution) and the legal position of the President being the ultimate appointing authority of Judges and the Prime Minister being the head of the Council of Ministers, upon whose aid and advice the President acts under our Constitution, coupled with receipt of complaints from the office of the President that we find the provision in paragraph 7(ii) of the (in-house) procedure requiring the CJJ to write to the President and the Prime Minister along with the report of the Committee to be quite in order, legal and valid,” it said. “We repeat, the office of the CJJ is not to be regarded as a post office that the report should only be routed through the CJJ without his observations.”

The ruling said that the in-house procedure was discussed and affirmed in multiple cases and had become the law of the land. “The procedure that has been laid down... is fair and just

which does not compromise judicial independence either, a basic feature of our Constitution.”

The court said that “a judge by his conduct of being fair and just is supposed to earn for himself as well as the judiciary the trust and respect of the members of the bar as well as the litigants and all other stakeholders”.

“If a complaint of misconduct committed by a Judge is received and if an inquiry conducted under the procedure, the allegations against such a Judge are found to have sufficient substance, he cannot claim any immunity — either by citing abrogation of his Fundamental Rights or breach of the constitutional scheme for removal of a Judge by initiating proceedings for impeachment — that his conduct is not open to be commented upon by the Committee or even by the CJJ,” it said.

On the challenge to the procedure, the bench said, “Right from the constitution of the committee till intimations were given to the President and the Prime Minister by the CJJ — we have neither been shown nor is it a fact proved that either the CJJ constituted committee or the CJJ acted in any manner in deviation of the procedure, except when the photographs/video footage were uploaded on the website of the Supreme Court.”

“We wish to observe here that placing incriminating evidence available against a Judge under probe in the public domain is not a measure provided in the procedure, either expressly or by implication,” it said. Referring to case law which “holds in clear terms that the inquiry under the procedure is for the information and satisfaction of the CJJ and the report of

inquiry is confidential and, therefore, such report cannot be made public,” the court said, “That being the clear position, we are inclined to hold the entire process under the procedure too as confidential having ascertainment of truth as one of its objectives. The demands of being fair and transparent, in such cases, have to yield to the confidential nature of the process. Thus, uploading of the photographs/video footage on the website of this Court cannot be viewed as a necessary requirement of the 'In-house Procedure' and, thus, approved.”

“But, then again, nothing really turns on the uploading of the photographs/video footage since the Petitioner, as observed above, did not have any grievance in relation thereto which is obvious from his failure to question such uploading at an appropriate time thereby allowing a situation to grow where the Court is faced with a fait accompli. Even in this writ petition, no relief is claimed in respect of such uploading.”

Justice Varma's counsel had argued that the CJJ ought to have given him a personal hearing before forwarding his recommendation/tendering his advice to the President and the Prime Minister. He also cited the personal audience given to a Calcutta High Court judge by the then CJJ when he was facing inquiry under the in-house procedure.

Rejecting this, the bench said, the personal audience given to the Calcutta High Court Judge “was a step going beyond the procedure.” “Here, the CJJ has scrupulously followed the procedure which does not envisage a hearing to be given to the Judge under probe...,” the court said.

● NSA Doval

ties between India and the US over Russian energy imports.

“We are very excited and delighted to learn about the visit of President Putin to India. I think that the dates are almost finalised now,” Doval said during his meeting with Russian Security Council Secretary Sergei Shoigu in Moscow, according to a report by Russian news agency *Sputnik*.

“Russia is committed to a deeper cooperation with India to build a fair world order... strengthening strategic partnership with India is a priority for Russia, which is based on trust... and consideration for each other's interests,” Shoigu was quoted as saying.

In a statement, Moscow said Doval also met Putin. The two

sides discussed ways to further strengthen the “special and privileged strategic partnership” and emphasised the importance of “joint efforts in preparation of the bilateral summit by the end of this year,” it said.

Earlier this week, Russia had spoken out for India, saying “sovereign countries have the right to choose their trading partners”. On Tuesday, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov had termed the calls to “force countries to sever trading relations” with Russia as “illegitimate”.

This will be Putin's first visit to India since the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The visit is part of a protocol between India and Russia for reciprocal annual visits by their leaders. However, the visits stopped after

the Ukraine war began, resuming only in July last year when Modi travelled to Moscow with the message that “a solution cannot be found on the battlefield”.

During his visit, Modi invited Putin to India for the 23rd India-Russia Annual Summit this year. He also met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in Kyiv last August and asked him to sit with Putin to “find a way out”.

Meanwhile, Kremlin aide Yuri Ushakov said on Thursday that Putin and Trump would meet in the coming days — the first summit between leaders of the two countries since 2021. The announcement came a day after Trump's envoy, Steve Witkoff, held talks with Putin in search of a breakthrough to end the Ukraine war, now in its fourth year.

● Netanyahu

and resolve the tariff issue. Such a resolution will be good for Israel as well as both countries are our friends.” His remarks came a day after Trump doubled the tariff on India, citing its purchase of Russian oil.

In an almost 45-minute interaction with a group of Indian journalists, Netanyahu disclosed that Israel supplied military equipment to India before Operation Sindoor and “all of them worked well”. He underlined that Israeli equipment used during Operation Sindoor were “battle proven”.

Calling for greater cooperation on intelligence sharing, counter-terror and high-technology, he said he would like to “quickly wrap up mutual defence and economic agreements”.

And in significant remarks on the war in Gaza, Netanyahu said, “Our plan is not to occupy or annex Gaza. Our goal is to destroy Hamas and get our hostages back, and then hand over Gaza to a transitional government. It is clear that we will never hand it over to the Palestinian Authority or Hamas. We will provide overall security. There will be a security perimeter provided by us.”

“We want to end the war very soon. It will be over speedily. If Hamas concedes and lays down their arms and free the hostages, it will be over tomorrow. Even Palestinians in Gaza are fighting Hamas,” he said.

“We want to make Gaza a demilitarised zone. We are looking at ending the war very soon. We are focusing on winning the war. Israel believes Trump should get the Nobel Peace award for ending conflicts and for facilitating Abraham Accords,” he said.

On India-Israel defence cooperation, Netanyahu said, “Israel supplied military equipment to India before (Operation Sindoor). All of them worked well. Israeli equipment used during Operation Sindoor were battle proven. We don't develop them in

labs, but on the battlefield. So they are battle-tested. We have robust defence cooperation. It is on a pretty solid foundation.”

Asked about cross-border terrorism, he said, “It is a problem. India is a huge country and it is not easy to have surveillance all over. We are ready to help India on air surveillance systems. Besides intelligence, we need the physical capability to get the terrorists before they strike. You always have to be ahead of the curve. You don't allow them to break you, you have to act before what is likely to come and is being hatched by them.”

On India's ties with Israel, Netanyahu said, “Our relationship with India is very strong and I am saying this from my heart. We are seeking to seize the opportunity for the future.”

“Under Prime Minister Modi's leadership, India's so-called policy of neutrality has changed and India and Israel are witnessing great friendship,” he said.

He said the “IMEEC corridor (India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor) will open up new opportunities in the fast changing geopolitical situation. Israel is looking forward to implementation of the IMEEC and we are ready to cooperate in the project. It will be a corridor for future economic growth in the region. I am very optimistic about it.”

On reports and visuals of the food crisis in Gaza, for which he is facing immense criticism from the international community amid allegations of starvation, Netanyahu said, “We have supplied over 2 million tonnes of food. However, the supplies were interdicted. We let thousands of trucks carrying food go to Gaza. I decided to open up the transit routes for aid trucks. The problem has been with the distribution. Hamas caused the humanitarian crisis.”

“There are examples of children starving, which are fake. The hostages are facing starvation,” he said, referring to the remaining 50 people in captivity in Gaza. *(The reporter is in Israel at the invitation of the Israeli embassy in New Delhi)*

● EC hits back

was “vote chori” of over 1 lakh votes in Mahadevapura Assembly segment, which is a part of the Bangalore Central Lok Sabha seat, during the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. The Congress, he said, had deployed a dedicated team of 30-40 people who combed through the electoral roll (of 6.5 lakh electors) of this segment to find that over 1 lakh entries were dubious — either because the names were registered in multiple constituencies, or had fake addresses, or had submitted invalid photographs at the time of registration.

The Congress won nine of the 28 Lok Sabha seats in Karnataka in the 2024 elections.

“It is understood that during a press conference held today, you

had mentioned about the inclusion of ineligible electors and exclusion of eligible electors in the electoral rolls... You are kindly requested to sign and return the enclosed declaration/ oath... along with the name(s) of such elector(s) so that necessary proceedings can be initiated,” Karnataka CEO V Anbukumar said in his letter to Gandhi.

He said “electoral rolls are prepared in a transparent manner” and had been shared with the Congress representative. “As far as the conduct of elections is concerned, election results can be questioned only by a way of an election petition before Honourable High Court,” he said.

The declaration/ oath states that any false declaration is a punishable offence under

Section 31 of the Representation of the People Act, which provides for imprisonment of up to one year, or fine, or both, for making false declarations. It also attracts Section 227 of the BNS, under which giving false evidence in a judicial proceeding is punishable with imprisonment of up to seven years and a fine. If the false evidence is given outside a judicial proceeding, the punishment may extend to three years and a fine.

Meanwhile, a Congress delegation is set to meet the Karnataka CEO on Friday afternoon to submit a memorandum.

Responding to Gandhi's allegation that two electors from Bengaluru were registered in multiple states, including Uttar Pradesh, the UP CEO said a search

showed that the electoral rolls of the constituencies named by Gandhi did not list the names of these two electors.

An EC official said Gandhi's allegations appeared to justify the ongoing Special Intensive Revision of electoral rolls. On the specific allegations of voter fraud, the official said these would be looked into as and when Gandhi submits them in writing to the concerned CEOs.

On the issue of many voters having the same address, another EC official, while not commenting on Gandhi's specific allegations, said that “notional addresses” are allotted to electors who live in areas that do not have well-defined ward, street, and house numbering — a practice followed in the past as well.

10 GOVT & POLITICS

Brazil President dials PM as Trump hikes tariff to 50%

DIVYAA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 7

A DAY after US President Donald Trump imposed an additional 25% tariff on India, taking the total to 50%, Brazil's President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva dialed Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday and discussed enhancing cooperation in trade. Incidentally, Brazil too faces 50% tariffs from the US.

A statement released by the Prime Minister's Office on Thursday evening said both countries agreed to enhance cooperation in trade, technology, energy, defence, agriculture, health and people-to-people ties.

"Had a good conversation with President Lula. Thanked him for making my visit to Brazil memorable and meaningful. We are committed to deepening our Strategic Partnership including in trade, energy, tech, defence, health and more. A strong, people-centric partnership between Global South nations benefits everyone," PM Modi posted on X after the call.

As per reports, Lula da Silva had earlier said he planned to call the leaders of India and China to discuss a joint response to tariffs imposed by President Trump. He had said he will initiate a conversation with the BRICS group on tackling Trump's tariffs. The Brazilian President is expected to call his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping in the next few days to discuss the tariff issue.

Trump called the BRICS "anti-American" and threatened the member nations with additional 10% tariffs last month, when the group gathered in a summit in Rio de Janeiro.

The development also comes on a day when New Delhi reiterated Russian President Vladimir Putin's impending visit to India this year. PM Modi is also likely to visit China for the SCO Summit later this month.

NATIONAL SPACE DAY ON AUGUST 23

PM Modi to felicitate Shubhanshu Shukla, other Gaganyaan crew members

ANONNA DUTT
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 7

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi will felicitate Group Captain Shubhanshu Shukla, who returned from the International Space Station (ISS), in New Delhi on August 23 to mark India's second National Space Day, it is learnt.

The PM is also expected to meet the crew selected for India's first human space mission, Gaganyaan-4. Prashanth Nair, Ajith Krishnan and Angad Pratap will undertake the mission in 2026, along with Shukla.

National Space Day commemorates India's historic Chandrayaan-3 mission, which in 2023 achieved the first-ever landing on the Moon's south pole.

The decision to include all the crew members in the ceremony was deliberate. "It was felt that the ceremony should include not just Shubhanshu but all four, as

all of them are equally trained and qualified," said an official.

This event will also double up as a welcome ceremony for Shukla, who splashed down off the coast of California on July 15 after an 18-day mission aboard the ISS as part of the Axiom-4 crew. Since then, he has been in Houston, Texas, reacclimatising to Earth's gravity.

Sources said that post-mission debriefings with NASA, Axiom Space and SpaceX are underway, with some already held in the Indian Space Research Organisation's presence.

While on board the ISS, Shukla told the PM: "My friends here have asked when we can go on Gaganyaan."

The Gaganyaan-4 mission, under ISRO, will undertake three uncrewed missions (G1, G2, and G3), two crewed missions (H1 and H2), and three precursor missions leading to the Bharatiya Antariksh Station (G4, BAS-1, and G5).

No clarity on funding, HC stays Punjab land pooling policy 2025 for four weeks

MANRAJ GREWAL SHARNA
CHANDIGARH, AUGUST 7

THE PUNJAB and Haryana High Court on Thursday stayed the implementation of the Punjab Land Pooling Policy, 2025 for four weeks after the state government failed to explain how it planned to develop the estimated 7,800 acres of land in and around Ludhiana.

The oral order came from a division bench of Justices Anupinder Singh Grewal and Deepak Manchanda, which granted the state time till September 10 to file its response and stayed the policy until then.

During the resumed hearing of the petition filed by 72-year-old Ludhiana-based farmer Gurdeep Singh Gill, the court asked Punjab's counsel whether any Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) or Social Impact Assessment (SIA) had been conducted before publish-

ing the land pooling notification. Advocate General Maninderjit Singh, appearing for Punjab, submitted that the land was not being handed over to private developers but would be developed by state agencies.

However, the court was informed that it costs the government approximately ₹1.2 crore to develop one acre of pooled land. With over 7,800 acres proposed to be brought under the scheme near Ludhiana alone, the estimated cost exceeds ₹9,000 crore.

When asked how the state planned to mobilise these funds, Punjab had no answer.

Taking note of the absence of a clear position on the statutory assessments as well as the financial feasibility of the project, the bench granted Punjab four weeks to file a comprehensive reply. Until then, implementation of the policy will remain stayed.

The matter will now be heard on September 10.

IN PARLIAMENT

MONSOON SESSION

Govt wants to pass sports Bill, Opp seeks 'middle path' on SIR: Stalemate end in sight

LIZ MATHEW
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 7

WITH THE Union government keen on passing the National Sports Governance Bill in the Monsoon session, members from the Treasury benches suggested Thursday that it could be taken up for discussion and passage early next week.

The Opposition, which wanted the Bill to be referred to a Parliamentary committee for detailed study, may agree to participate in the discussions if a "middle path" is found to end the stalemate over a debate on the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar.

The Treasury benches as well as a section in the Opposition want the sports Bill to break the deadlock so that both Houses return to normalcy, sources said, adding that informal discussions have taken place on the matter.

"With the government having categorically stated that there will not be any discussion on the election process in Parliament, we have to find a middle path," said an Opposition leader.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju has told Lok



Opposition MPs protest in Lok Sabha. PTI

Sabha that a discussion on SIR can't take place in the House as the matter was pending before the Supreme Court and the rules did not allow a discussion on issues under adjudication.

"But a Bill such as the sports Bill and issues such as tariffs will have a far-reaching impact. There is a feeling among many parties that it will be worth discussing them even while keeping up the protest on SIR," said a key leader in the INDIA bloc.

This leader felt the government could favour a debate on

tariffs ahead of the arrival of US negotiators for trade negotiations on August 25.

Sports Minister Mansukh Mandaviya, meanwhile, insisted that the sports Bill does not exempt the Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) from the RTI Act, but admitted that the Act would apply only if a sports federation uses funds or grants from the government.

The BCCI has always resisted coming under the purview of the Act arguing that it's not dependent on government funds, unlike

other sports governing bodies.

"The Bill has not kept the BCCI out of RTI. The amendments suggested are just to align the provisions with the mother Act (RTI). As long as government money is not used, financial matters of a federation cannot be brought under RTI. But all other matters related to the federation will be under the Act," Mandaviya told *The Indian Express*. "Everything else, the functions, appointments and powers of every federation will come under the purview of the Act," he said.

When the National Sports Bill was tabled in Parliament on July 23, it had a provision to ensure that all sports bodies recognised by the Bill would be considered public authorities under the RTI Act. However, The Indian Express reported on August 7 that a clause — which stated: "A recognised sports organisation shall be considered a public authority under the Right to Information Act, 2005 with respect to the exercise of its functions, duties and powers under this Act" — has been omitted from the Bill via an amendment.

Sources in the government said they do not want to refer the bill to a Parliamentary commit-

tee and delay the process. "We want the Bill to be passed in this session. The government is ready to discuss it and the Opposition can have its suggestions," Mandaviya said.

Leaders of Opposition parties have written to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla and urged him to refer both the sports Bill and the National Anti-Doping (Amendment) Bill 2025 to a joint committee of Parliament.

Although the Bill was listed in Thursday's list of business, sources in the government said it did not want the Bill to be passed amid protests over the SIR.

"There were suggestions that it could be taken up next week in the House or later before the Monsoon session ends," said a Congress leader.

With INDIA bloc leaders set to hold a protest march to the Election Commission office on Monday, the discussion could happen Tuesday, government sources suggested.

"However, a decision on ending the stalemate and cooperating with the government for legislative business is to be taken after consultation with our allies in the INDIA bloc," added the Congress leader.

LS passes 2 Bills on Manipur, FM slams Opp for disruption

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 7

LOK SABHA on Thursday passed the Manipur Goods and Services Tax (Amendment) Bill, 2025, and the Manipur Appropriation (No. 2) Bill, 2025, amid loud protests by the Opposition over the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Bihar.

Both pieces of legislation were cleared by voice vote without discussion.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who moved the GST Amendment Bill, described it as a "constitutional necessity" meant to implement decisions already approved by the GST Council. The Bill replaces the Manipur Goods and Services Tax (Amendment) Ordinance, 2025.

"If it doesn't pass now, the state will have difficulty in implementing the amendments which have long been approved by the Council. Their revenue will get affected because they won't have the authority to charge (tax) on certain items," she said.

The amendment, among other changes, allows Manipur to levy state tax on undenatured extra neutral alcohol (ENA) or rectified spirit used for manufacturing alcoholic liquor for human consumption — following a 2023 recommendation of the GST Council to keep ENA outside the GST ambit.

Citing the imposition of



Lok Sabha members during the voting for the Bills. PTI



SCAN TO WATCH
LS PROCEEDINGS

President's Rule in Manipur, Sitharaman said: "There was a GST Council decision... all states had to change in their state Acts. This was done by all states. But because Manipur was under disturbance, it could not do it through the state legislature. So an ordinance was brought. Then another ordinance was brought after it expired. After that the state came under President's Rule. That ordinance has to become law. So we are amending the State Act. It is a constitutional necessity."

The House also cleared the Appropriation Bill to authorise expenditure from the Consolidated Fund of the State for 2025-26. Sitharaman announced an additional budgetary outlay of ₹2,898 crore for Manipur, including ₹1,667 crore for capital expenditure, ₹523 crore for rehabilitation of camp residents and ₹542 crore to

strengthen security.

Responding to Opposition sloganeering, the Finance Minister launched a sharp attack. "The Opposition keeps raising some or the other issues on Manipur. But when the government is presenting a budget for Manipur, doing something good for the state, they have no capacity or courage to listen. They shed crocodile tears for Manipur. But when we are giving money to the state, they don't want to hear. It's a shame," she said.

As the Opposition continued to raise slogans in the Well over the SIR issue, Jagdambika Pal, who was in the Chair, repeatedly urged them to allow the House to function. "You do not want to discuss the Bill. The issue of SIR pertains to the EC and the matter is also sub judice with the Supreme Court. It can't be discussed here," Pal said. The House was adjourned for the day soon after Bills were passed.

Amid din over SIR, Parliament passes Coastal Shipping Bill

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, JULY 7

AS THE Opposition continued their protest over the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in poll-bound Bihar, Rajya Sabha Thursday passed the Coastal Shipping Bill, 2025, through voice vote, which seeks to create a legal framework for vessels trading in coastal waters and repealing provisions of the older Merchant Shipping Act.

The Bill was passed in Lok Sabha on April 3, 2025.

The House was earlier adjourned until 2 pm soon after it assembled at 11 am amid protests over the ongoing SIR exercise in Bihar. When the House reassembled after lunch, Opposition MPs were once again on their feet raising slogans against the revision of rolls.

Amid the din, the discussion on the Bill, initiated by Union Minister for Shipping

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Union Minister Sarbananda Sonowal in Rajya Sabha. ANI

Sarbananda Sonowal, and the voting took place.

BJP's Darshana Singh and six other MPs spoke during the discussion. Only one Opposition member, NCP (SP)'s Fouzia Khan was asked to speak but she was not present.

Given an opportunity by the Chair, Leader of Opposition in Rajya Sabha Mallikarjun Kharge said, "Today, the country is passing through a dangerous period... we have to work together and for that, you should allow this discussion (on SIR). (If that happens), we will participate in all other discussions."

CPI(M) MP John Brittas, when asked to move amendments to the Bill, said that he would do so only if a discussion on the SIR was allowed.

Sonowal said that the Bill was a significant reform initiative, which will unlock the full potential of India's 11,098 km long coastline and to take share of India's cargo traffic to 230 million tonnes by 2030. "This (Bill) is designed to make coastal trade easier... it is a holistic, forward-looking framework in line with global practices and a part of the series of reforms in the maritime sector," said Sonowal.

The Bill contains six chapters and 41 clauses, he said, mainly about licensing and regulation of coastal trade and also creation of a national database for coastal shipping. After the Bill was passed, the House was adjourned for the day.

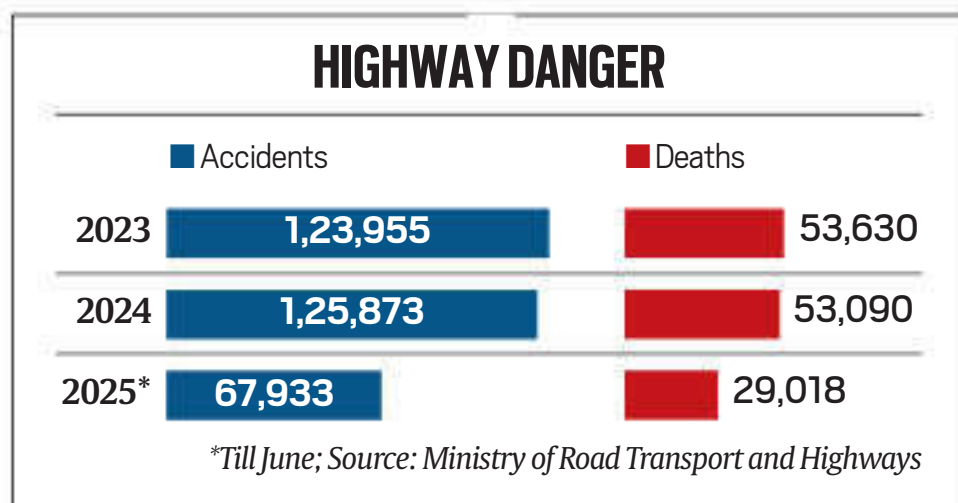
In first 6 months of 2025, over 29K killed in national highway accidents, more than 50% of last year: Data

DHEERAJ MISHRA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 7

ACCIDENT DEATHS on national highways this year appear to be on track to exceed the previous year's figure, shows data tabled by the Ministry of Road Transport and Highways in Lok Sabha on Thursday.

According to the data, 29,018 people died on national highways in the first six months of this year — this is more than 50% of the total fatalities of last year.

National highways in India



account for over 30% of road accident deaths, even though they comprise only 2% of the total road network.

The data shows 67,933 accidents took place on national highways up to June 2025.

In 2024, 53,090 people died

in 1,25,873 accidents across national highways. In 2023, 53,630 people died in 1,23,955 accidents.

The data is based on information sent by states and Union Territories to the Electronic Detailed Accident Report (eDAR) portal — a central repository for reporting and analysing such data.

The total number of road accident deaths in 2023 was more than 1.72 lakh. The Union government has set an ambitious target to halve such deaths by 2030.

Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari said the ministry is undertaking both

short-term and long-term remedial measures to reduce such deaths. These include road markings, signage installations, crash barriers, raised pavement markers, geometric improvements, junction redesigns, spot widening of carriageways and construction of underpasses or overpasses, among other measures.

The government has identified road engineering as one of the biggest factors of accident deaths.

Over the last few months, Gadkari himself has been critical about consultants involved in road designing and construction.

12 EXPRESS NETWORK

STILL MISSING

Was glacial lake breach over Dharali the trigger? Experts find some clues



Before & after flash floods in Dharali. National Remote Sensing Centre

NIKHIL GHANEKAR & AISWARYA RAJ
NEW DELHI, DEHRADUN, AUG 7

AS AUTHORITIES await clear satellite imagery to pinpoint the exact cause of the flash flood and wall of debris that destroyed Dharali village in Uttarakhand, a top expert has suggested the possibility of breach in a glacial lake that could have formed above the Kheer Ganga river.

Senior glaciologist Anil V Kulkarni told *The Indian Express* that satellite images from September 2022, a non-winter month, showed clues of past lake formations in the area where the Kheer Ganga originates from.

If a lake had indeed formed recently, it could have been breached due to movements in glacier mass, said Kulkarni, a distinguished scientist at Divecha Centre for Climate Change, Indian Institute of Science.

"The Kheer Ganga originates from glaciated terrain and September 2022 imagery shows that snow was melted, and one can clearly see landforms. A well-developed deglaciated valley can also be seen. This deglaciated valley is bounded by end moraine and a small river is passing between the end moraine and a side wall," he said.

An end moraine is typically the far or end portion of a glacier mass and is made up of rocks, debris and sediments. Kulkarni said a meandering stream was above the end moraine, indicating terrain that could have seen

lake formations in the past.

Kulkarni said there were indications that the lake might have formed due to a landslide from the end moraine. "The (Dharali) flash flood of mud flow might have been caused due to an outburst of the lake. This could also explain past floods in the Kheer Ganga River. The channel is very steep and hence it must have crashed down quickly," he said.

Another glaciologist said the affected area in Dharali is located on an alluvial fan, a geological feature formed by debris from past flood events.

Although the village is situated around 200 metres away from the river, increasing commercialisation in recent years has led to the development of several establishments directly on the alluvial fan, experts say, pointing to the growth of tourism-related activities and the construction of the Dharasu-Gangotri highway through the village.

The glaciologist said that a landslide had struck 2 kilometres uphill from Dharali earlier, which might have been reactivated.

Officials from NDMA said they were looking at a possible detachment of a glacial snout (the nose where glacier breaks) that could have carried massive quantities of debris downstream.

However, the officials added that they were coordinating with the National Remote Sensing Centre (NRSC) to analyse sharper images of the period leading up to the disaster.

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Australian Army Chief to visit on Aug 10 amid deepening Indo-Pacific military ties

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 7

CHIEF OF the Australian Army, Lieutenant General Simon Stuart, is set to visit India from August 10 to 14, during which he will hold high-level discussions with Indian Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi and other senior officials of the Ministry of Defence.

His visit comes four months after India's CDS travelled to Australia and held high-level meetings with Admiral David Johnston, Australia's Chief of Defence Force, and the Chiefs of Staff Committee. The talks focused on strengthening military cooperation, with emphasis on maritime security in the Indo-Pacific, joint exercises, capacity building, defence tech-



Lt General Simon Stuart

nology exchange, and new bilateral initiatives.

According to Army sources, this visit is of strategic significance, reaffirming the growing depth of the India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, particularly in the military domain, as both nations work to uphold a stable and rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.

India and Australia had earlier held the 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue in New Delhi in 2023, and the next edition is scheduled in Australia

in 2025. The Defence Policy Talks, held in July 2023 in Australia, had provided a timely platform for reviewing ongoing collaboration and identifying new areas for joint initiatives, the sources said, adding that these dialogues, along with working groups and staff-level talks, continue to drive forward-looking cooperation in capability development, logistics, interoperability, and strategic posturing in the Indo-Pacific.

"From this robust foundation, the Indian Army-Australian Army bilateral engagement has emerged as a key pillar in growing military partnership," a source said.

There has been growing operational cooperation between the Indian and Australian Armies. "Exercise AUSTRAHIND, launched in 2016, remains the

flagship bilateral field training exercise between the two Armies. Focused on counter-terrorism, close-quarter battle, and joint tactical operations, it has seen active participation from Indian Army, alongside Australia's 1st Brigade," the sources said, adding that the next edition is scheduled in Australia in November 2025.

The Army has also been an active participant in Exercise Talisman Sabre, a multinational exercise hosted by Australia. Lieutenant General Simon Stuart's visit to India reflects the Indian Army's rising profile as a credible partner in the Indo-Pacific and its commitment to shaping collective preparedness through meaningful cooperation," a source said.

In a Haryana village, recent discoveries hint at a 3,500-year-old past

SUKHBIR SIWACH
CHANDIGARH, AUGUST 7

REMAINS OF painted grey ware, stamped pottery, moulded bricks and a dome-like construction assumed to be a Buddhist stupa — these discoveries, recovered during an exploration of a Mauryan-era village in Yamunanagar district, suggest that human habitation in the region may date back nearly 3,500 years.

Officials of Haryana Archaeology and Museums Department said the findings are based on analyses of two reports — the department's on-site exploration report and a Ground Penetrating Radar (GPR) survey carried out by IIT Kanpur at Topra Kalan village in Yamunanagar district in January. IIT-Kanpur submitted its

findings to the state department in July, said Prof Javed Malik of IIT-Kanpur's Department of Earth Sciences, who had led the GPR survey.

The GPR survey, which aimed to map the site's subsurface features, had revealed the presence of ancient structures and other architectural elements, besides offering insights into the site's historical and archaeological significance.

According to Haryana officials, the survey had revealed buried architectural structures such as walls, platforms and room-like enclosures arranged in multiple orientations. These structures, they said, reach depths of 4-5 metres, indicating a well-organised ancient settlement. The survey also points to a possible dome-like structure, which could be a stupa,

and shallow wall formations that are between 0.2 and 0.8 m deep.

Banani Bhattacharyya, Deputy Director, Haryana Archaeology and Museums Department, tells *The Indian Express*, "On the basis of these discoveries during our exploration, we estimate the site dates back to around 1,500 BCE. These findings are highly significant for Haryana in the context of Buddhist sites."

Topra Kalan village is considered the original location of the Delhi-Topra Ashokan pillar, inscribed with the Mauryan Emperor's moral edicts. The pillar was moved to the national Capital in the 14th century by Firoz Shah Tughlaq.

The Haryana archaeology department has been conducting site exploration around Topra Kalan, located around 14 km from



A Ground Penetrating Radar survey being conducted by the IIT Kanpur at Topra Kalan in January. Special arrangement

Yamunanagar and 90 km from Chandigarh, for nearly two years now. Officials said this exploration was part of an exercise to identify ancient sites and monuments across the state's villages, and to

ensure their preservation.

Archaeologist Bhattacharyya says, "We have not dug up the site since it lies under a village (Topra Kalan). In 2024, we started exploring some nearby areas, including

mounds and low-lying places, and found ancient pottery and other cultural materials."

According to officials, state archaeologists have so far recovered remains of painted grey ware, black-and-red ware, black-on-red ware, black ware, stamped pottery, moulded bricks, beads and other objects.

According to Bhattacharyya, historical references, including those from Sir Alexander Cunningham, the first Director-General of the Archaeological Survey of India (ASI), and Huen Tsang, a prominent Buddhist scholar, suggest that Topra Kalan may have been a major centre of Buddhist activity back in the day.

Bhattacharyya notes, "The survey findings underscore the archaeological importance of Topra Kalan, highlighting the potential

for further exploration and excavation. The results also reinforce the historical accounts linking this site with Buddhist activity and long-standing habitation."

On the possibility of an excavation at the site, a senior official added, "An excavation at this site will pose significant challenges due to dense population in the area. Relocating residents will be a complex and sensitive undertaking."

Bhattacharyya said the locals had told the state team that they had discovered remnants of painted grey ware, red ware and other objects while laying the foundation of their houses. While some of these items were shared with state officials, the residents expressed their apprehension over being asked to vacate the area for an excavation.

Based on the latest findings, Sidhartha Gauri, co-convenor of the Yamunanagar chapter of the Indian National Trust for Art and Cultural Heritage (INTACH), an NGO that aims to protect India's cultural heritage, has proposed the reconstruction of four ancient stupas at the Ashoka Edict Park in Topra Kalan. In January, a 30-foot Ashoka Chakra replica was installed at the 27-acre Ashoka Edicts Park in the village by the state tourism department. The replica was officially recognised as the largest in India by the Limca Book of Records in 2020.

"The latest findings position Topra Kalan not only as a site of archaeological and religious importance, but also as a potential centerpiece in India's emerging Buddhist heritage tourism initiatives," adds Gauri.

One in five older Indian adults had diabetes in 2019, says study in *Lancet*

ANURADHA MASCARENHAS
PUNE, AUGUST 7

AT LEAST one in five people aged 45 and older had diabetes in India in 2019, according to a new paper published in 'The Lancet Global Health' journal. Significantly, two out of five people with diabetes (or 40% of those tested) were unaware of their condition. About 46% of the people diagnosed with diabetes regained control of their blood sugar levels, 59% achieved blood pressure control and 6% took a lipid-lowering medication to reduce the risk of cardiovascular diseases. "Moving forward with the epidemiological transition and economic development, we anticipate that this trend will continue," said Dr TV Sekher, professor at International Institute for Population Sciences, Mumbai, and one of the authors of the study. "Only half of these people

(those surveyed) are aware of their condition and even fewer achieve targets for glycaemic control, blood pressure control and use of lipid-lowering medications. Our findings emphasise the urgent need to scale up policies to better prevent, detect, manage and control diabetes among middle-aged and older adults in India," he said. The Lancet paper is based on the findings of the Longitudinal Aging Study in India (LASI) that surveyed nearly 60,000 adults aged 45 years and older between 2017 and 2019 to estimate the prevalence, awareness, treatment and control of diabetes. "LASI is a nationally as well as state-level representative survey and includes all health conditions of individuals. We were able to analyse them along with diabetes (like BMI, hypertension and so on). It has also analysed the difference between self-reported and measured diabetes prevalence," said Dr Sekher.

According to the findings, 20 million Indians have undiagnosed diabetes. Overall 8% of elderly (60-plus) population have been found to be undiagnosed. The prevalence of untreated diabetes among older adults (aged 45 and above) is 5% and that of under-treated diabetes is 47%. About 36% are adequately treated. The study also found that rates of diabetes were similar among men and women (19.6% of men vs 20.1% of women). Urban diabetes prevalence (30%) was approximately twice as high as rural prevalence (15%). "Around 60% of individuals are aware of their diabetes. So there is a need for better awareness campaigns and universal screening for diabetes. The silver lining is that among those who are aware about their diabetes, LASI found that 94% are undergoing treatment. This is the most important finding. Once people are aware, then treatment coverage is

₹500 crore dues: 650 pvt hospitals in Haryana halt Ayushman scheme

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE
CHANDIGARH, AUGUST 7

THE HARYANA chapter of the Indian Medical Association (IMA) Thursday announced the suspension of services under Ayushman Bharat-Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB-PMJAY) in the state over pending dues of empanelled hospitals despite an assurance from the state government to release the payments at the earliest. In Haryana, the IMA represents nearly 650 private hospitals empanelled under AB-PMJAY, a flagship scheme of the Narendra Modi-led government that provides a health cover of Rs 5 lakh per family per year for secondary and tertiary care.

IMA's Haryana secretary Dhirender K Soni said, "The government itself admits that ₹490 crore in dues are pending. By the time they will disperse this amount, the pendency will keep on increasing. What will private hospitals do? How can they sustain if they do not get reimbursements on time?". Soni said that talks were held Wednesday with senior state government officials, but it did not yield the desired outcome. In a statement, the Haryana branch of the IMA said that state health officials informed them they had received ₹245 crore from the government and that payments to empanelled hospitals were being processed on a first-in-first-out basis. The IMA termed the amount "insufficient."

IMA state unit president Dr Mahaveer P Jain said, "We have learnt that out of the sanctioned amount of ₹245 crore, only ₹30-40 crore has been released to the empanelled hospitals. If we start treating patients, then bills amounting to ₹5-7 crore will be raised daily. Now, we want that all the bills are cleared within 15 days". Earlier on Tuesday, the Haryana government had said that the claims of empanelled hospitals under the Ayushman Bharat scheme are being settled. On Wednesday, Additional Chief Secretary (Health), Sudhir Rajpal, held a detailed meeting with representatives of the IMA to address their concerns regarding delayed payments under the Ayushman Bharat scheme.



BRACING UP

India must continue trade talks with US. But who it does business with should be guided by national interests alone

FROM EDGING CLOSER to signing a trade deal in early July, to the imposition of a 25 per cent penalty on August 6, on top of a 25 per cent tariff levied just a few days earlier, India-US trade relations have now moved into uncharted territory. While the additional tariffs will come into play in 21 days, opening up a possible window for negotiations — US trade negotiators are slated to arrive in Delhi on August 25 — the weaponisation of tariffs by US President Donald Trump to achieve what seem to be both trade and non-trade objectives, has placed India at a considerable disadvantage when compared to competitors such as Vietnam and Indonesia. In the face of this mounting pressure, India must stand firm, put its national interest first.

Not surprisingly, Trump's action has evoked a strong response. Calling it “unfair, unjustified and unreasonable”, the Narendra Modi government has said it will take “all actions necessary to protect its national interests”. As it continues the trade talks with the Trump administration, it may be possible to offer more concessions in certain segments, there may be room for greater give and take. But, at the same time, Delhi should stay with its red lines in the face of mounting pressure in sectors such as agriculture and dairy — politically contentious areas, which are critical to the livelihoods of large sections of the Indian labour force. On Thursday, speaking at the MSSwaminathan Centenary International Conference in Delhi, Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphatically stated the government's position: “India will never compromise on the interests of its farmers, livestock rearers and fisherfolk”.

India's purchase of discounted Russian oil, which has ensured price stability in the global oil market, was a pragmatic move to secure its energy supplies. But with Trump raising the costs of continuing with this trade — as he attempts to curb the flow of money to Russian President Vladimir Putin, ostensibly to end the conflict in Ukraine — the same hard-headed realism must guide Delhi's approach now. Imports of Russian oil were at 1.6 million barrels per day in July, down 24 per cent from the month before, as per a report in this paper. The cost-benefit analysis of relying on one source of supply to such a large extent, however, must be seen only through the prism of India's interests — not dictated by Trump. Goldman Sachs, an investment firm, has estimated that the steep tariff on India could bring down economic growth by around 0.6 percentage points. But who India should trade with, or for that matter, which grouping it should be part of — Trump has in the past also taken umbrage at BRICS — should be guided by India's interests alone. Such issues should, in any case, not be part of trade talks between the two countries.

RESPECT THE MOUNTAIN

Uttarkashi tragedy is a warning. Development can ill afford to hurt the fragile ecology of Himalaya

THREE DAYS AFTER flash floods wreaked havoc in Uttarkashi district in Uttarakhand, more than 50 people from Dharali village, the epicentre of the disaster, are reported missing. At least four people have lost their lives as mountainsides collapsed and floodwater inundated homes and destroyed shops, hotels and other commercial establishments. Authorities have reportedly said that it will take about a week to gauge the scale of the calamity. However, it's clear that the devastation underlines multiple challenges for policymakers, including planning development in ways that do not hurt Western Himalaya's ecology.

The Central Water Commission initially ascribed the flash floods to a cloudburst. However, India Meteorological Department officials have reportedly contradicted this hypothesis, and the jury is out on the exact cause of the disaster. Uttarkashi's topography — much of the district is located on the southern slope of the Himalaya — combined with continuous rainfall, does make the region vulnerable to mudslides and flash floods. In the mountains, even small streams are known to swell up during the monsoons, change course and turn treacherous. In recent years, the melting of glaciers has exacerbated such risks. Nature's vagaries, however, are only a part of the reason for the sufferings of Uttarkashi's residents. The region is a part of the Bhagirathi Ecosensitive Zone (ESZ). The ESZ status, notified in 2012, was meant to provide a security net against unregulated development to a 4,100 sq km expanse between Gangotri and Uttarkashi town. The purpose of the notification has been defeated because the rights of passage of the region's rivers have been constantly violated. In their zeal to expand tourism, the Centre and the Uttarakhand government appear to have shown inadequate sensitivity to the vulnerabilities of the area, and repeatedly ignored the red flags raised by members of the committee that monitors the implementation of the ESZ norms. Experts reckon that the chipping away at rocks to widen roads and constructions on the floodplains could have made Tuesday's disaster more severe.

Constant rainfall and huge mounds of muck, almost like quicksand, have made the task of the rescue workers difficult. Bolstering climate resilience would require creating swifter and more effective responses to such exigencies. It would also call for establishing more automatic weather stations and utilising data from satellite-based observation systems to create early warning mechanisms. The writing on the wall has been clear since the disastrous flash floods of 2013 in Uttarakhand: Policymakers need to join the dots between climate change, the risks faced by people in the Himalayan region, early warning and disaster management systems and developmental initiatives. Tuesday's tragedy is a warning that this imperative cannot be put off for long.

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ROHIT LAMBA

THE AMERICAN TARIFF tantrum has arrived on India's shores, and we must not panic. On August 6, President Donald Trump signed an executive order doubling the already declared 25 per cent duty to 50 per cent on every Indian product entering US ports — from diesel and diamonds to t-shirts and turmeric alike. India has 21 days before the additional 25 per cent takes effect.

America buys nearly a fifth of what we export, worth \$87 billion last year. A blow this size can rattle factory floors, shake the rupee, and spook investors. Yet, India must view this punch as negotiable, and respond with calm, clarity and a plan. To be effective, we must first understand why India faces 50 per cent tariffs — almost the highest in Trump's global trade war.

Four factors explain Trump's escalation. First, the White House is burying what commentators in Washington DC call strategic altruism toward India — carve-outs justified by the promise of a long-term partnership. Second, and perhaps most critically, Trump appears personally offended that India didn't acknowledge the US's possible role in the May 10 India-Pakistan ceasefire. Third, there is an echoing of Silicon Valley's irritation with India's rules requiring data storage within its borders. Modern AI is ravenous for information, and India holds one-fifth of humanity's supply. Fourth, the administration wants to punish India's discounted Russian oil purchases, prioritising domestic political theatre over economic logic.

Reading between the lines, this represents high-stakes bargaining rather than permanent hostility. However, given the grip of tariff primacy in the White House and personality clashes between world leaders, New Delhi must prepare for tariffs to persist even after negotiations.

First, Delhi must target specific exemptions, not blanket relief. Reports suggest America has already granted over a trillion dollars in tariff exemptions. India should claim its share. Pharmaceuticals and smartphones appear exempt for now; we must push to include textiles, jewellery, and electronics. Second, it must mobilise allies within the US. Tariff walls often crack from within. American retailers facing expensive Christmas inventory will protest. We should feed them hard numbers showing how tariffs will increase US inflation and hurt American consumers. Third, India should prepare retaliation, but hold fire:

Trade disputes are now permanent features of global politics. The world's largest economy is willing to weaponise market access, and global supply chains will keep re-routing in search of certainty. For India, the answer is not panic, nor a stunt of hyper nationalism, but methodical statecraft: Negotiate firmly, build alliances, diversify always, and prioritise domestic competitiveness. This crisis could catalyse necessary changes. India might finally reduce its own high tariffs selectively, making our exports more competitive globally.

Publish a list of politically sensitive US exports worth billions — California almonds, Washington apples, Wisconsin motorcycles. Announce duties will apply only if talks fail. The threat alone creates pressure.

Four, bundle tariff reductions on luxury goods and automobiles with concessions America values: Increased purchases of US natural gas and controlled access for American financial technology firms. These don't compromise core interests while giving Washington an off-ramp. Five, while keeping strategic ties separate from trade disputes makes sense, Delhi has cards to play. Multi-billion-dollar drone purchases and the landmark GE-HAL fighter engine deal can proceed more smoothly once tariffs disappear — a carrot without weakening our Indo-Pacific deterrence. Six, India should support vulnerable sectors and extend credit to export-focused small businesses and boost incentives for garments and pharmaceutical companies. These are temporary bridges, not permanent subsidies.

Finally, it must manage personalities pragmatically. India must defend its dignity and strategic autonomy while protecting economic interests. Direct dialogue between Modi and Trump could help, even if core disagreements remain.

Beyond immediate tactics lies a larger chessboard. India cannot yield on agriculture and dairy — these sectors support hundreds of millions of livelihoods and ensure food security. What it must do is build coalitions with countries facing similar tariffs: Vietnam, Bangladesh, Brazil, and even close US allies like the EU and Japan. And, despite the current frost, even China. With the WTO proving ineffective, new partnerships must emerge.

Consider adopting China's proven workaround: Use Mexico and Canada as intermediate stops. A medical device manufactured in Gujarat, minimally processed in Tijuana, then shipped to Houston, faces Mexican rather than Indian tariffs. We sacrifice small margins for crucial market access.

Export diversification becomes essential. With the US taking 20 per cent of our merchandise exports, over-dependence creates vulnerability. Fast-track the pending EU trade agreement, implement the recent UK deal, and expand ties with Gulf countries and Latin America.

India's ace remains our services sector, Join FREE Whatsapp Channel <https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029Van2VRb6RGJOKH6oBd0F>

largely exempt from tariffs. Information technology and business services to the US generate massive revenues through people-to-people connections rather than shipping containers. The rise of Global Capability Centres — where American firms build their largest non-US offices in India — deepens this integration.

This model, built on Indian talent globally, must expand further. As technology blurs manufacturing and services boundaries, being embedded in critical knowledge chains worldwide increases our leverage beyond any tariff's reach.

Trade disputes are now permanent features of global politics. The world's largest economy is willing to weaponise market access, and global supply chains will keep re-routing in search of certainty. For India, the answer is not panic, nor a stunt of hyper nationalism, but methodical statecraft: Negotiate firmly, build alliances, diversify always, and prioritise domestic competitiveness.

This crisis could catalyse necessary changes. India might finally reduce its own high tariffs selectively, making our exports more competitive globally. We could accelerate manufacturing reforms that have been delayed for decades. Most importantly, we could build economic resilience that doesn't depend on any single nation's goodwill.

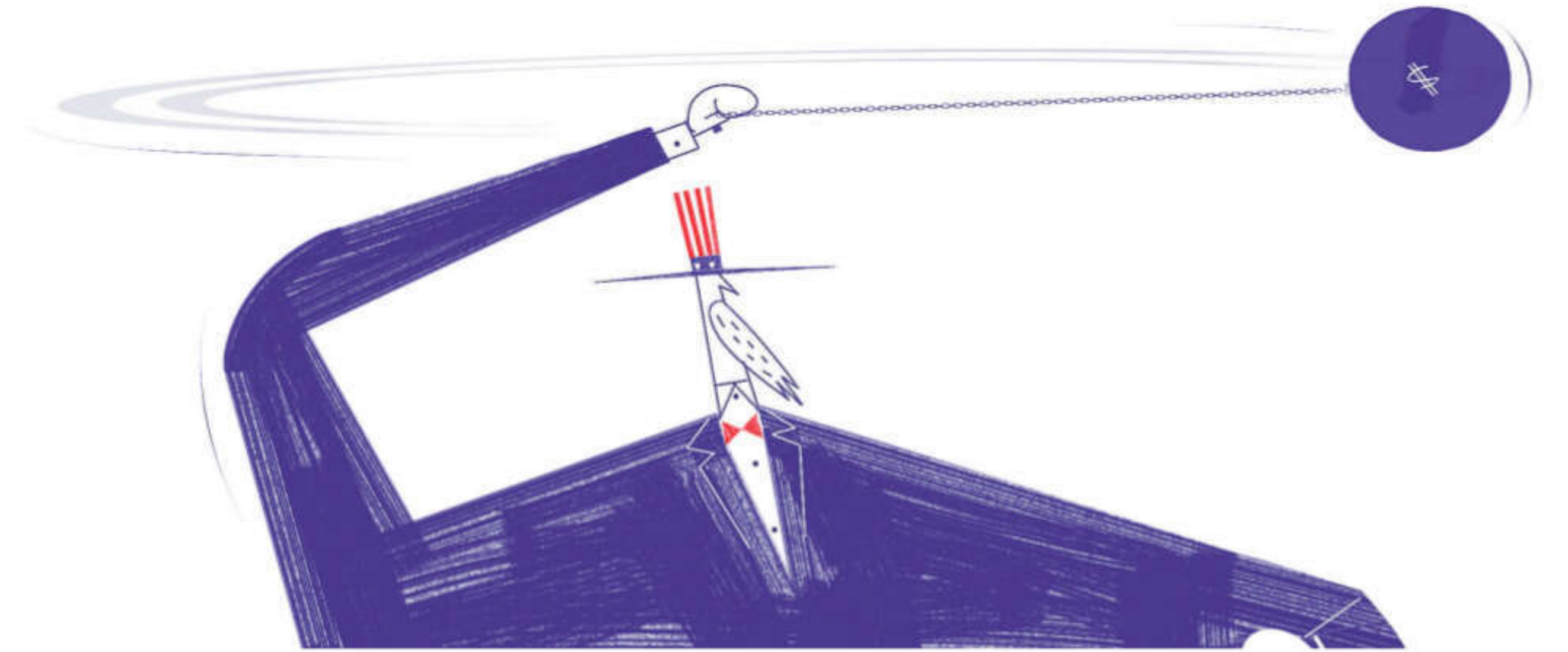
Deng Xiaoping's wisdom — “hide your strength, bide your time” — applies perfectly today. Avoid confrontation while building capabilities. Remember, leaders change, nations endure. With pragmatic planning, this tariff tantrum will be remembered not as a wound, but as the push that launched Indian trade strategy into its next, more confident phase.

The American market matters, but India's growth story doesn't depend on it alone. It has domestic demand, global diaspora networks, and emerging partnerships worldwide. And eventually, dignity and sovereignty, as Pratap Bhanu Mehta argued in these pages (‘Against imperialism’, *IE*, August 5), matter above all. Stay calm, negotiate smartly, and keep building. This too shall pass, leaving India stronger and more self-assured.

The writer is assistant professor of economics at Cornell University and the co-author of Breaking the Mould: Reimagining India's Economic Future

DIS/AGREE
THE BEST OF BOTH SIDES

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C R Sasikumar

US President Donald Trump has cited India’s dealings with Russia as a reason for doubling tariffs on India to 50 per cent. How should New Delhi navigate this predicament?

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A bargain with US is still possible

India-US relationship is too important to be derailed on the Russia oil imports issue. Delhi must avoid raising decibel levels



PANKAJ SARAN

INDIA HAS FINALLY come into the crosshairs of the Trump storm, having lived a reasonably charmed life in the initial weeks of his presidency. The magnitude of Donald Trump’s additional 25 per cent tariff, taking the total to 50 per cent, goes beyond the narrow confines of bilateral trade and economics. It has political ramifications, meant to hurt India.

When we look back, India was quick off the mark to engage with Trump 2.0, with visits by the External Affairs Minister for the inauguration ceremony and then by Prime Minister Narendra Modi himself within a month of Trump taking office. Behind the scenes, India was also quick to present a forward-looking trade package to American negotiators, having drawn lessons from his last term when Trump withdrew the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) for India. Geopolitically, India welcomed the US President’s intention to end the Ukraine conflict. It viewed the announcement of tariffs on China as a much-needed correction to Western indulgence of China. The personal chemistry between PM Modi and President Trump was taken as an accepted fact. Things seemed to be going well.

Admittedly, there was foreboding of tough times on trade and tariff matters. The pejorative references to India were becoming uncomfortably frequent and strident, and the memories of difficult negotiations under Trump 1.0 never went away. Yet, India escaped Trump’s notice as he set about turning against US allies, striking at the foundations of the trans-Atlantic alliance, challenging Canada’s sovereignty, not to forget renaming the Panama Canal and the proposal to buy Greenland.

The vocabulary and mood of the India-US relationship has changed. The romanticism of shared values is no longer visible. It has now boiled down to teaching a lesson and meting out punishment at the leadership level. We are told that the President is a man in a hurry, and is counting his time, not in weeks but days. The relationship has been dealt a severe blow, the likes of which has not been seen in recent memory. India has been stigmatised for allegedly funding Russia’s war effort, in addition to being called the “tariff king”.

Passing the blame for lack of progress in Eastern Europe on India or believing that punishing Delhi will bring Moscow to the negotiating table is obfuscation. Russia’s war machine is funded not by India. It is built on the billions of dollars of earnings from energy exports to Europe over decades, besides ongoing imports. The war machine will continue even if India were to bring its imports to zero. It is a well-advertised fact that top US and Russian negotiators were, till a few months ago, discussing potential US investments, trade and

economic cooperation with Russia.

A better attempt to enfeeble Russia would be to squeeze Beijing. Painting India and China with the same brush is a geopolitical self-goal. Moscow and Beijing are happy to see the US doubling down on India. India is not going to fall, but questions which were considered settled on the durability of friendship with the US have resurfaced.

Some in the West and the US project India’s purchase of oil from Russia as an exhibition of its pursuit of “strategic autonomy”. Nothing could be more inaccurate. India has justified its energy trade with Russia ad nauseum. There is a bigger concern at play. If this is an era where transactionalism and unilateralism form the basis of foreign policy and there are no taboos, why should India not brace for a scenario of the US striking a deal with China, or even a breakthrough in US-Russia relations? It is the existence of such uncertainties that strengthens, rather than weakens, the Indian impulse towards geopolitical hedging. The surreal hosting of the Pakistani army chief in the White House and other encomiums heaped on Pakistan, turning a deliberate blind eye to its sponsorship of terrorism in India with Chinese backing, make such hedging more imperative.

There is more to the tariff war launched against India than frustration with Russia. Other sources of anger seem to stem from India’s non-committal posture on buying certain high-value defence plat-

Passing the blame for lack of progress in Eastern Europe on India or believing that punishing Delhi will bring Moscow to the table is obfuscation. Russia’s war is funded not by India. It is built on the billions of dollars of earnings from energy exports to Europe.

forms, and the denial of any mediatory role played by the US during Operation Sindoor. There is frustration on Indian bargaining hard on agriculture and dairy imports on the trade track. Added to this are accusations relating to Indian immigration practices, cut back in visas, and people-to-people movement, considered a foundational element of the relationship. Several pressure points are being applied. The India-US relationship is being tested to its limits. It will get worse before it gets better.

For Indians, this is a useful reality check. National security and economic growth cannot be outsourced. India is far from being a rejectionist state, but its interests are real, not imagined. The tariffs imposed could lead to the outpricing of Indian goods, services and human resources from the US market; to a possible unravelling and dismantling of the connectivities built over the last few decades. How should India respond to the US President’s onslaught?

To begin with, keep calm, avoid raising decibel levels, and control the damage. There is a need to focus on internal reform and rebalancing. The India-US relationship is too important to be derailed. The two countries have had a history of talking straight to each other, which has seen them through seemingly unbridgeable positions in the past. Red lines cannot be shifted, but grand bargains are always possible. The past seven months of the Trump era have been marked by volatility and sharp turns. The next few months are likely to be much the same, because much of what Trump is doing is still work in progress.

The writer is convenor, NatStrat, former deputy national security adviser and former ambassador to Russia

Russia is a red line for India

New Delhi will have to take a hard call: For now, economy-greasing oil from Russia, and a plan for diversification in the future



MANJEET KRIPALANI

INDIA’S NATIONAL SECURITY Advisor Ajit Doval arrived in Moscow on August 5, to discuss regional stability, counter-terrorism, energy security and defence purchases. According to reports, Russian President Vladimir Putin is expected to visit India later this year. This will be Putin’s first trip to India in four years. The high-level activity in the Russia-India corridor is not matched by a similar engagement in the India-US space. On August 1, President Donald Trump threatened India with 25 per cent tariffs on its exports plus additional penalties of up to 500 per cent if New Delhi didn’t stop its purchases of Russian oil by August 7; on August 6, he doubled the threat to 50 per cent.

Is Russia the red line for India? It may well be. The US tariffs come at a time when India is re-entering the global commercial arena as an equal player. The country is currently negotiating free trade agreements (FTAs) with six countries, including the US, having successfully closed 16 trade agreements over the last five years. The ASEAN-India FTA is being considered for review; more than two dozen countries are in line to develop trade links with India. At home, India is building its industrial capacity and developing new markets and supply chains, eyeing the China+1 space.

Discounted oil purchases from Russia have kept India’s economy running, and prices stable. And Russia has been a reliable security partner. The S-400 air defence system performed admirably during India’s Operation Sindoor against Pakistan. Upgraded Russian equipment is still desirable in New Delhi, especially as it comes with technology transfers and possible co-production, unlike the US with its many restrictions. Doval is likely to ask for more. India has already contracted with Russia for \$50 billion worth of military purchases over the last 20 years.

In contrast, India has bought \$24 billion in US defence equipment since 2008, and at the Modi-Trump meeting in Washington in February, a promise to buy more was made. India’s own domestic defence industry is catching up; it has tripled in value to \$14 billion over the past decade, and is rapidly ramping up. Already 65 per cent of defence equipment is made domestically, compared to a 65 per cent import dependence from 10 years ago.

The allure of Russia for India has increased since Trump made nice with Pakistan immediately after Operation Sindoor, and the tariff threats have intensified public opinion in Moscow’s favour. This is a good time then, for India and Russia to accommodate each other.

Putin the strategist sees India cornered

by Washington, and will play to it. Russia has some frustrations with India which will be conveyed to NSA Doval. First, though bilateral trade has reached a record \$68.7 billion, over 90 per cent of it is oil, and India runs a massive deficit with Moscow. Second, US and EU sanctions against Russia have forced the rupee-rouble trade practice back into the bilateral, and now 90 per cent of all India-Russia trade is in local currencies. Russians are unable to invest much in India, as Moscow needs funds to run its own war-time economy. Third, on the Ukraine war, Russia has been less than happy with India’s make-peace-not-war statements.

Regionally, though Russia has managed to separate its historical proximity with India from its new and deep friendship with China, at the SCO, there are clear sides: Russia-China-Central Asia on one side, with India being the outlier. Bilaterally, India has specific needs from Russia, viz defence equipment. India would like to buy more, but Moscow is using large quantities of its production for the Ukraine war.

It doesn’t compare with India’s current unhappiness with Washington. Sanctions on traditional oil suppliers like Iran and Venezuela have cut off those supplies for India, and now penalties on Russian oil threaten to do the same, destabilising India’s growing economy. It has been a particularly unkind cut, as the Biden administration had

appealed to India to buy Russian discounted oil to keep energy markets steady.

Trump has been cavalier about the QUAD, which was meant to keep China in check in the Indo-Pacific. The next QUAD meeting, due to be held in India in October, may be a damp squib without the presence of the US President. Meanwhile, Trump’s irritation with BRICS, which he sees as nations colluding to displace the US Dollar’s dominance, will only increase as India takes the chair of the plurilateral in

2026. India has been holding off a reconvening of the Russia-India-China Trilateral, but if it does so, Trump will have one more grouse against India.

New Delhi will have to take a hard geopolitical call, and take the bargain available on the table: Economy-greasing oil from Russia for now, and a plan for future diversification. On Ukraine, India could take a stronger position, emphasising that the West acknowledge the fundamental reason for Russia’s war with its neighbour. India could project a harmonious partnership with Russia, with Putin visiting New Delhi in the next few months – a sure way to infuriate Trump. That may compel India to be a grown up and take the 50 per cent tariffs hit, till a renegotiation takes place or a trade agreement to mutual US-India satisfaction comes about. It will also force Indian companies to diversify into new, non-G7 markets, and invest more in research and development at home. An all-important domestic benefit to going the Moscow way: Standing up to Trump will give PM Modi a boost just before the Bihar election.

The writer is executive director, Gateway House: Indian Council on Global Relations

WHAT THE OTHERS SAY

“The Russian president had a friend in Donald Trump but a paranoid addiction to war prevents him from doing a deal.”

— THE GUARDIAN

Warning bells, unheard

As Uttarkashi reels from avalanches and floods, India must confront deadly consequences of unsustainable development in fragile Himalaya



RAVI CHOPRA

THREE CLIMATE-RELATED catastrophes devastated a short scenic stretch of the upper Bhagirathi (Ganga) river valley in Uttarkashi district on August 5. They devastated Dharali — a pretty Himalayan town along the Bhagirathi about 20 km before Gangotri, a portion of Harshil, six kilometres downstream, known for its apple orchards, and some nearby settlements, according to initial reports.

In the evening, the Central Water Commission released a brief disaster report. It described the first incident, around 1:00 pm, as a suspected cloudburst flood, “severely damaging” much of Dharali, sweeping away residential houses, shops and possibly affecting many people gathered in the town for a mela. A second cloudburst occurred around 3:00 pm in a small mountain stream valley, downstream of Harasil. A third flood, at 3:30 pm, submerged the Harshil helipad that could affect later relief efforts. About 100 Army personnel, assisted by The National Disaster Response Force (NDRF), State Disaster Response Force (SDRF), Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) and local police teams began prompt rescue operations.

Later, a Dehradun-based IMD officer denied the occurrence of a cloudburst in Uttarkashi district. News media revealed that a 50-60 ft-deep debris flood had submerged Dharali’s bazaar, about 20-25 hotels and homestays, and the much venerated, ancient Kalp Kedar temple. The district administration reported four deaths and about 60 to 70 missing, including about nine Army personnel. Detailed damage assessments are continuing.

Late at night, Navin Juyal, Uttarakhand’s most intrepid geological scientist, provided a scientific explanation of the disaster on his YouTube channel. The affected Dharali stretch lies at the base of a steep slope covered with towering deodar trees, amid rocks and boulders brought down by small mountain streams and frequent avalanches. The trees arrest the avalanches and their roots stabilise the slopes.

Several cirques or “hanging glaciers” – hollowed glacial ledges full of rocks, boulders and other debris left behind by receding glaciers in the past – dot the crests of the slopes. Five or six small streams emerge from these cirques and rush down the slopes. These streams can create havoc during periods of intense summer monsoon rains. Rising temperatures on the high crests melt the winter snows that quickly form massive avalanches, along with ice, rain water and the glacial moraines, as they rush down the stream valleys. The recent catastrophes were due to three such avalanches, all within 2.5 hours, Juyal explained.

In 2012, the Union government had notified the Gaumukh to Uttarkashi watershed of the Bhagirathi as an Eco-Sensitive Zone (BESZ). This was to preserve its pristine areas and regulate infrastructural activities in the region. Later central and state governments, however, have been lax in enforcing the reg-

ulations, despite the strenuous efforts by some members of an MoEF&CC appointed monitoring committee.

With the governments ignoring the BESZ notification, the Union Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoRTH) prepared plans to widen the National Highway in the BESZ to accommodate Gangotri’s summer tourist traffic. In 2020, Juyal, as a member of the Supreme Court directed High Powered Committee (HPC) to investigate the construction of the Char Dham highway, warned his committee colleagues, BRO engineers and senior Uttarakhand and central government officials of the high probability of repeated future avalanches due to global warming and climate changes.

In 2020, in its final report to the Supreme Court, the HPC recommended that the sensitive slopes not be disturbed. To protect the BESZ, particularly to conserve the deodar forest stretch, it recommended that an elevated highway stretch closer to the riverside be considered as an alternative to widening the highway. It would minimise felling of the deodar trees. Highway authorities have not only ignored the HPC recommendations, they have marked 6,000 precious deodar trees to be cut down.

Mountain researchers have been studying and issuing warnings for decades now, in print and at high-level conferences where decision-makers are participants, that the Himalayan region is more vulnerable to climate change than most other parts of the Indian subcontinent. They have identified specific sensitive areas in the Himalaya and the policies and actions needed to avoid disasters or minimise their impacts. They have pointed out that HEPs should not be built in para-glacial regions, human settlements and built structures be located at safe distances from flood-prone rivers, particularly small mountain streams that can suddenly turn treacherous, road widening along slopes steeper than 30 degrees should be avoided, and that carrying-capacity studies are desperately needed in the Himalayan towns and cities. Senior government officials pay lip service to these recommendations but do nothing to implement them.

The warning bells of the Kedarnath tragedy (2013), destruction of the Tapovan-Vishnugad hydro-electric project by the Raunthi Gad avalanche (2021), fissures in the ground and buildings in Joshimath (2023), glacial lake outburst flood (GLOF) in the Teesta valley (2023) and the repeated monsoonal landslides and floods in Himachal Pradesh are ignored by decision-makers in their headlong drive to push unsustainable infrastructure development in ecologically and geologically sensitive areas. As the saying goes, “You can’t wake a person who is pretending to be asleep.”

It is long past time for Indian citizens, bewitched by images of rapid economic growth, real for some but dreams for many, to wake up to the warning bells of climate change and demand safer, sustainable and equitable economic growth. Recognising and respecting nature’s boundaries is our safest, most logical route to survival and economic development.

The writer is a former director of the People’s Science Institute, Dehradun. He headed two Supreme Court nominated committees to investigate the Kedarnath flood (2013) and the Char Dham Pariyojana (2019-2022)

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DISCOUNT ON RUSSIAN OIL FOR INDIA FELL TO \$2-3 PER BARREL IN 2024-25

As Russian oil discount narrows, experts say India can afford import diversification

SIDDHARTH UPASANI
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 7

WITH US President Donald Trump doubling the tariff on Indian goods to 50 per cent, economists think India can afford to reduce its purchase of Russian oil due to the narrowing of the discount on offer and diversify its sourcing.

From around 2 per cent prior to the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the share of Russian oil in India's oil imports has increased sharply to 35-40 per cent, with Indian refiners lapping up discounted Russian oil that was shunned by developed nations. However, the tariff war instigated by Donald Trump — initially with a focus on addressing the US' trade deficit with other nations — has seen the imposition of so-called secondary tariffs on India for its purchase of Russian energy and defence equipment. On July 30, Trump threatened a 25 per cent on India and an additional unspecified 'penalty' for its Russian trade. On Wednesday, the penalty was revealed to be a further 25 per cent tariff on Indian goods that will come into effect on August 27.

According to a note by Barclays economists led by Aastha Gudwani, the purchase of discounted Russian oil helped lower India's oil import bill by around \$7 billion-10 billion in



Crude oil tanker Nevskiy Prospect, owned by Russia's tanker group Sovcomflot, transits the Bosphorus in Istanbul, Turkey.

Reuters File

2024 to \$186 billion.

"As of now, the discount on oil imports from Russia having narrowed to around \$3-8/barrel lower than Middle eastern grade. Media reports suggest that Indian refiners would be pushed to pivot towards traditional West Asian suppliers and new players such as Brazil to make up for lost Russian supplies, with price increases around \$4-5/barrel. With global oil prices in 2025 so far settling around \$9/barrel lower than 2024, such a diversification of oil supply sources is unlikely to hurt India's oil import bill," they added in the note.

Meanwhile, Nomura economists Sonal Varma and Aurodeep Nandi estimate the implied discount on Russian crude oil for Indian refiners de-

clined to around \$2.2 per barrel in 2024-25 from over \$12 per barrel in 2022-23. As such, if India chooses to reduce its purchase of Russian oil, India's annual import bill may only rise by around \$1.5 billion, they calculated.

Morgan Stanley economists were in agreement, estimating that the discount India got on Russian crude oil in 2024-25 was only \$2-3 per barrel.

Diversifications' secondary impact

To be sure, Indian refining companies began cutting their purchase of Russian oil even prior to Trump's threat of a 'penalty'. In July, India's crude imports from Russia averaged 1.6 million barrels per day, as per

EXPLAINED
E Diversification not impossible

ACCORDING TO Nomura, moving from Russia to other countries for oil may set back India by only about \$1.5 billion per year. As per data and analytics firm Kpler, India's crude imports from Russia in July were down 24 per cent from June.

data from Kpler, a global trade data and analytics firm, down 24 per cent from June.

However, a move by India to procure more oil from countries other than Russia could push up prices globally, which would raise the import bill. While difficult to estimate, Nomura economists think that given India imported 1.8 billion barrels of oil in 2024-25, India's annual import bill could rise by around \$1.8 billion for every \$1 increase in global crude prices.

"Domestically, the government will likely keep pump prices constant, which means there is likely to be minimal inflation and growth impact from any shift in oil procurement. This also means that the ultimate cost of any transition will most likely have to be borne by public sector oil marketing companies, and eventually by the government if

it needs to compensate them for these under-recoveries at a later stage," Nomura said, adding that it did not see a "major upside risk" to the Indian government's fiscal deficit target of 4.4 per cent of GDP for the current fiscal.

Meanwhile, reduced demand for Russian oil from Indian refiners, especially state-run ones, is already beginning to reflect in prices, with Homayoun Falakshahi, head of crude oil analysis at Kpler, pointing out on Wednesday that private refiners were "still scooping barrels, but at a lower pace. Four Aframaxes are currently waiting to discharge at Jamnagar and Vadinar". An Aframax is a type of oil tanker.

According to Falakshahi, India's negotiations with the US could lead to New Delhi agreeing to raise its oil and gas purchases. The energy trade between the two countries is worth around \$7.5 billion a year.

"This has already started to be the case, with the country's imports of US crude on the rise lately to an average of 225 kbd (thousand barrels per day) since May, nearly twice as much the levels from early 2025. Indian refiners could realistically increase their intake of US crude by another 100 kbd to previous highs of ~300 kbd in 2021," Falakshahi said.

However, he added he was sceptical that India will be able to completely stop the import of Russian oil.

India, Russia discuss rare earths among other areas of industrial cooperation

RAVI DUTTA MISHRA
NEW DELHI, AUGUST 7

INDIA AND Russia on Wednesday discussed industrial cooperation across a range of areas, including rare earth and critical mineral extraction, as India faces increasing pressure over its purchase of Russian oil, with the US announcing an additional 25 per cent tariff on Indian goods.

The discussions on rare earth minerals come amid China's restrictions on the export of seven rare earths, which has impacted automobile production in India. China dominates the global rare earths market, supplying 85 to 95 per cent of the world's demand.

"Both sides explored opportunities in rare earth and critical mineral extraction, underground coal gasification, and the creation of modern industrial infrastructure," the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said.

The Ministry added that key focus areas included cooperation in aerospace science and technology — such as the establishment of a modernised wind tunnel facility, production of small aircraft piston engines, and joint development in carbon fibre technology, additive manufacturing, and 3D printing.

DPIIT Secretary Amardeep Singh Bhatia and Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade of the Russian Federation, Alexey Join FREE Telegram Channel <https://t.me/+jUYKq0AFHBAwMGQ1>

DPIIT Secretary Amardeep Singh Bhatia and Deputy Minister of Industry and Trade of the Russian Federation, Alexey Gruzdev, also discussed key areas such as aluminium, fertilisers, and railway transport

Gruzdev, also discussed key areas such as aluminium, fertilisers, and railway transport, alongside capacity building and technology transfer in mining equipment, exploration, and industrial and domestic waste management.

"The meeting concluded with the signing of the Protocol of the 11th Session by both co-chairs, reaffirming the strategic India-Russia partnership and shared commitment to deepen industrial and economic cooperation. The session saw participation from around 80 delegates representing both sides, including senior government officials, domain experts, and industry representatives," the Ministry said.

On Wednesday, the US said it would impose an "additional 25 per cent ad valorem duty" on Indian goods, over and above the 25 per cent reciprocal tariffs an-

nounced on August 1, to "deal with the national emergency stemming from Russia's actions in Ukraine," according to a White House statement.

The additional tariffs significantly raise pressure on India, as most of its competitors — such as Vietnam, Bangladesh, and China — face lower US tariffs in the range of 19 to 30 per cent. However, India's exports in exempted categories, such as pharmaceuticals and electronics, account for nearly half of its total annual goods exports, which stand at \$80 billion.

New Delhi-based think tank Global Trade Research Initiative (GTRI) noted that in 2024 alone China purchased \$62.6 billion worth of Russian oil — more than India's \$52.7 billion. Washington has avoided targeting Beijing, GTRI said, because of China's leverage over critical materials such as gallium, germanium, rare earths, and graphite, which are vital for US defence and technology.

"The US has also overlooked its allies' trade with Russia: the EU imported \$39.1 billion worth of Russian goods last year, including \$25.2 billion in oil, while the US itself purchased \$3.3 billion in strategic materials from Russia. The tariffs are expected to make Indian goods significantly more expensive in the US, with the potential to cut US-bound exports by 40-50 per cent."

Goldman Sachs: India's growth could dip by 0.6 percentage point

GEORGE MATHEW
MUMBAI, AUGUST 7

US INVESTMENT group Goldman Sachs on Thursday said that the steep 50 per cent tariff on imports from India could reduce the country's real GDP growth by around 0.6 percentage point (pp).

"We had previously estimated a potential direct impact of around 0.3 percentage point (annualised) to India's real GDP growth, following President Trump's surprise announcement of a 25 per cent tariff on Indian imports," the US investment group said.

If the new additional duty (including exclusions) is enforced, then that would constitute a potential incremental drag of around another 0.3 percentage point (annualised), Goldman Sachs said. "This estimate is based on India's goods exports exposure of roughly 4 per cent of GDP to US final demand and a goods export demand elasticity of 0.5 as referenced in the IMF study. There are indirect impacts on real GDP growth through trade-related uncertainty as well, as we had written earlier," it said.

Amid the global uncertainty, the RBI on Wednesday retained

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“This estimate is based on India's goods exports exposure of roughly 4% of GDP to US final demand and a goods export demand elasticity of 0.5 as referenced in the IMF study. There are indirect impacts on real GDP growth through trade-related uncertainty as well ...”

— GOLDMAN SACHS

its annual and quarterly real GDP growth forecasts for 2025-26 at 6.5 per cent for April-June 2025, 6.7 per cent for July-September 2025, 6.6 per cent for October-December 2025, and 6.3 per cent for January-March 2026

Goldman Sachs has estimated the total effective US tariff on Indian imports would be around 32 per cent after all exemptions. However, the firm stated that it will wait for 20 days before deciding whether to revise its GDP forecast for India. "We see downside risks to our growth estimates for both CY25 and CY26, but are not making any changes to our growth forecasts

at the moment, given that there is a three-week window for negotiations until the new incremental tariffs come into effect," Goldman Sachs said.

US President Donald Trump through a White House executive order announced an additional 25 per cent "ad valorem" duty on Indian goods imports, effective August 27, which will take the total tariff levy on Indian imports to 50 per cent. The executive order said that this "ad valorem" duty is owing to India's continued energy purchases from Russia.

The additional "ad valorem" duty will not apply to commodities included in Sec. 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962.

In response, the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India in a statement reiterated that the government "will take all actions necessary to protect its national interests", it said.

The US accounted for around 4 per cent of India's crude oil imports (in volume terms) in FY25, increasing from around 3 per cent in FY24, while Russian imports constitute around a third of Indian oil imports.

In April and May 2025, the US accounted for 8 per cent (on average) of India's crude oil imports, the US firm said.

RUSSIAN LEADER SUGGESTS UAE AS SUITABLE VENUE FOR SUMMIT

Putin-Trump meet likely next week, White House presses for peace deal

REUTERS & AP
AUGUST 7

RUSSIAN PRESIDENT Vladimir Putin said Thursday he hopes to meet next week with U.S. President Donald Trump, possibly in the United Arab Emirates. The news came on the eve of a White House deadline for Moscow to show progress toward ending the 3-year-old war in Ukraine.

Putin's foreign affairs adviser Yuri Ushakov had said earlier a summit could possibly take place next week at a venue that has been decided "in principle."

Next week is the target date for a summit, Ushakov said.

Ushakov brushed aside the possibility of Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy joining the summit, something the White House had said Trump was ready to consider. Putin has spurned Zelenskyy's previous offers of a meeting to clinch a breakthrough.

"We propose, first of all, to focus on preparing a bilateral meeting with Trump, and we consider it most important that this meeting be successful and productive," Ushakov said, adding that US special envoy Steve Witkoff's suggestion of a meeting including Ukraine's leader "was not specifically discussed."



Russian President Vladimir Putin with UAE President Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan in Moscow on Thursday; and (right) US President Donald Trump with Apple CEO Tim Cook in the Oval Office on Wednesday. Reuters & AP



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Putin made the announcement in the Kremlin after his meeting with Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the president of the UAE.

He said UAE is one of the suitable places to hold a meeting with United States President Donald Trump. Putin said that he was not "on the whole" against meeting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, adding that "certain conditions should be created" for such a meeting. He stressed that the current situation was "far" from being ready for it.

The US was still expected to impose those sanctions Friday on Russia, according to a White House official who spoke on condition of anonymity. The same official said a US-Russian summit would not happen if Putin does not agree to meet with Zelenskyy. The official did not specify whether the condition was for Zelenskyy to be present at the possible US-Russia summit or at a subsequent meeting.

The meeting would be the first U.S.-Russia summit since 2021, when former President Joe Biden met Putin in Geneva.

EXPLAINED Resolving 'root causes of war' primary for Putin

THE FUTURE of Ukrainian territory annexed by Russia had always been a point of contention in peace talks. But people close to the Kremlin say that Putin's demands — to exclude Ukraine from NATO, limit its military capabilities and lay the groundwork for a more Russia-friendly government in Kyiv — are more crucial to him than the specifics of territory. Analysts say a decision by Putin to settle rather than try to conquer more of Ukraine should be seen as a concession in itself, in return for resolution of the "root causes" of the war.

US to shut down NASA missions to monitor plant health, emissions

Washington: The Trump administration is moving to shut down two NASA missions that monitor a potent greenhouse gas and plant health, potentially shutting off an important source of data for scientists and farmers.

President Donald Trump's budget request for fiscal year 2026 includes no money for the Orbiting Carbon Observatories, which can precisely show where carbon dioxide is being emitted and absorbed and how well crops are growing.

NASA said Wednesday that the missions were being terminated "to align with the President's agenda and budget priorities". But the missions are more sensitive and accurate than any other systems in the world and a "national asset" that should be saved, said David Crisp, a retired NASA scientist who led their development. **AP**

OVER 7,000 CASES HAVE BEEN REPORTED AS OF WEDNESDAY

Drones, fines and nets: How China is fighting mosquito-borne chikungunya virus

ASSOCIATED PRESS
TAIPEI, AUGUST 7

CHINESE AUTHORITIES are using nets, spraying insecticide and even deploying drones to fight the mosquito-borne chikungunya virus, which has infected thousands of people.

Authorities had reported more than 7,000 cases of the virus as of Wednesday, mostly in the southern Chinese manufacturing hub of Foshan, some 170 kilometers (105 miles) from Hong Kong.

The number of new cases appears to be dropping slowly,

according to authorities.

It appears to be the largest chikungunya outbreak ever documented in China, according to Cesar Lopez-Camacho of the University of Oxford.

The virus is transmitted by infected mosquitoes and can cause fever and joint pain. But in rare cases, it can cause debilitating joint pain that persists for months or even years. Patients who get severely ill often require hospitalization because of the risk of organ damage.

The World Health Organization says severe cases and deaths are rare and mostly occur in babies or elderly people

with underlying health conditions. There is no specific treatment for chikungunya, but health workers can treat the symptoms by giving medicines to lower fevers or ease muscle pain.

"What makes this event notable is that chikungunya has never been established in mainland China before," Lopez-Camacho said in a statement.

"This suggests that most of the population had no preexisting immunity, making it easier for the virus to spread quickly."

Chinese state television has shown workers spraying insecticide around city streets, residential areas, construction



A sanitation worker in Hong Kong on Thursday. AP

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ing that Americans take extra precautions when visiting China's Guangdong province, where Foshan is located, as well as Bolivia and some island nations in the Indian Ocean.

Since the 2003 SARS outbreak, China has used strict measures to fight the spread of viruses, including hard-line tactics during the COVID-19 pandemic. This time, patients are being forced to stay in hospital in Foshan for at least one week and authorities briefly enforced a two-week home quarantine, which was dropped because the disease cannot be transmitted between people.

Reports also have emerged

of attempts to stop the spread of chikungunya with fish that eat mosquito larvae and even larger mosquitoes to eat the insects carrying the virus.

Officials have held meetings and adopted protocols at the national level in a sign of China's determination to eliminate the outbreak and avoid public and international criticism.

Two vaccines have been approved in several regions, including Britain, Brazil, Canada and Europe.

Those are mostly targeted at travelers and are not widely available in the countries most affected by chikungunya.

What to expect from Trump-Putin meet

The two Presidents could meet as early as next week. ARJUN SENGUPTA spoke to one of India's foremost experts on Russia on the state of the war, what the Trump-Putin meeting could achieve, and what it could mean for Ukraine, Europe, and India

EXPLAINED INTERVIEW



NANDAN UNNIKRISHNAN

Where does the Russia-Ukraine war stand? Which side would be happier if the war ended today?

Currently, Russia is winning, and Ukraine will be unhappy under all circumstances. Although Russia is yet to fully capture the four oblasts (Luhansk, Donetsk, Zaporizhzhia, Kherson) that were constitutionally incorporated into Russia in 2022, most experts agree that if the current tempo of the war is sustained, they will get there by the end of the year.

After losing Crimea in 2014, Ukraine has lost another 20% of its territory, and may lose more land in the coming months. Ukraine has neither the economic power nor the human resources to turn the tide of the war.

Russia may be challenged if NATO enters the war but that could lead to a quick escalation to the nuclear level. This is why NATO, while supporting Ukraine's war efforts, has been very careful not to cross certain red lines. This is unlikely to change.

In this context, what does a meeting between President Donald Trump and President Vladimir Putin aim to achieve?

The two leaders will enter the meeting with very different expectations.

Trump will hope to extract some kind of a promise from Putin — at the very least of a ceasefire that will halt the fighting. Trump believes he has the personality and the leverage to get Putin to agree to whatever he wants.

But Russia's President is unlikely to agree to any deal unless he is given guarantees that Ukraine will never become a member of NATO and will not receive any security guarantees from the West. Moreover, Putin will insist that the territories his forces have captured, including Crimea, be recognised as Russian.

Is Putin likely to receive these guarantees?

During his presidential campaign and in the first months of his presidency, Trump indicated that he was willing to consider several of Russia's demands.

The US President does not see Ukraine as a part of NATO, a grouping that he personally doesn't appear to be too invested in. Trump and members of his administration had also indicated that they were not averse to Ukraine ceding territory to Russia to end



US President Donald Trump (left) meets Russia President Vladimir Putin at the G-20 summit in Hamburg, Germany on July 7, 2017. The upcoming meeting will be the first between the Presidents of the two countries since 2021. *The New York Times*

the war.

Trump does not consider the war in Ukraine to be a legacy that he has to continue. Given that Ukraine is not that strategically important to the US, Trump does not see the war as a path to achieving American dominance in world affairs. In fact, he was trying to push Ukraine into accepting these demands, as his public bust-up with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the White House made clear.

But with the so-called peace deal not coming together, Trump, who sees himself as a great peacemaker, is irritated. The pro-Ukrainian lobby in the US has had time to work on him, and the President seems to have had a change of heart since the end of May. The President also seems to have been cornered by his own rhetoric. Having signed agreements with Ukraine, talked about the country's sovereignty, and reopened arms supplies, he will find it difficult to walk back to his older position.

Nevertheless, the Russians have said that Trump's envoy Steve Witkoff had during his talks with Putin on August 6 presented an "acceptable" offer for peace. This is an indication that the US appears to be seriously con-

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sidering Russia's concerns about Europe's security architecture.

Can Trump's secondary sanctions compel Putin to agree to a deal?

Trump undoubtedly is using these secondary sanctions as leverage to get Russia to the negotiating table.

The problem for Russia is that these secondary sanctions affect other countries, such as China and India. Russia has survived a lot of sanctions and, in a sense, built a sanctions-proof economy. But Russia will suffer if — and this is still a big if — it is unable to sell its natural resources or trade with the world. A substantial part of its budget comprises taxes on exported natural resources including oil and gas.

At the same time, from a Russian perspective, they are fighting an existential threat. Ukraine becoming a part of NATO, meaning that Western countries could put their weapon systems and people on Ukrainian soil, is a red line for Russia. Given this aim, it is unlikely that Russia will compromise due to economic pressure.

Putin may indeed agree to a ceasefire, but he will only do so if it suits Russia's interests.

Given the stakes for him and the state of the war, he is very much in the driver's seat.

Where does this leave Ukraine?

Zelenskyy had hoped that by signing the critical minerals deal with the US, the Americans would be forced to enter the war to protect their own interests in the minerals covered under the deal. But Trump's likely meeting with Putin indicates that the deal alone is not enough for the US to commit to war.

The Ukrainian President has been calling up various European leaders and trying to get himself invited to the Trump-Putin meeting. He is worried that Putin may be able to persuade Trump to accept some of the positions that Russia has been voicing from the beginning of the war — which the American President himself does not appear to be fundamentally against.

What are the implications for Europe, whose leaders have framed the war as an existential threat to the continent?

There is not a shred of evidence that any European leader can provide about Russia's aggressive intentions towards even the Baltic

countries, let alone Western Europe. This is a scare that European elites created and ingrained in people's minds as a distraction from the situation on the continent.

Europe is facing a recession. The European Union, at least Germany, which has long been the locomotive of the EU's development, is facing deindustrialisation. There are fundamental issues with the economic model that the EU had going: they were buying cheap energy from Russia to make products to sell to the world, particularly China. Now, they are being squeezed at both ends. The war has stopped the flow of Russian gas to Europe, and the Americans are pressuring the EU to restrict its interactions with China.

As the European economies struggle, it is the European elites — and not Europe itself — who face an existential crisis. If they were to back out of supporting Ukraine now, they would definitely not survive in power, especially with far right parties already posing serious challenges to traditional political elites. Europe's elites are, in effect, stuck: they cannot help Ukraine win the war, but ending it by acquiescing to Russian demands will be an unacceptable defeat.

For India, what does a Trump-Putin meeting entail?

India is caught in Trump's attempt to exert leverage on Russia. His "extra" tariffs have put India in a difficult position. To use a phrase used by former National Security Adviser J N Dixit, India will need to do a "complicated Bharatnatyam dance" to extricate itself from this situation.

The US is our largest trading partner. It is also one of the few countries with which India has a trade surplus that offsets, at least partially, the deficit we have with China and Russia.

India is not a fully export-oriented economy, and the tariffs, as they are structured, provide India with some wiggle room. For example, petroleum products, pharmaceuticals and IT products are exempt from the tariffs imposed for import of Russian crude. India has to decide whether ceasing to buy cheap oil from Russia is worth the hit that American tariffs will entail.

This is also about the country's image. If India gives in to Trump's demands it is likely to be perceived as "weak" and its image as a global leader is likely to be hit. This also will have to be part of the calculations on how India should proceed.

In this difficult situation, the best would be if Trump and Putin were to agree on a roadmap to peace next week. Such an agreement would likely make the threat of additional tariffs irrelevant.

Nandan Unnikrishnan is Distinguished Fellow at the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi

TRUMP'S TARIFF & INDIA'S RED LINES

What Trump's 50% tariff means for India

UDIT MISRA

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 7

ON WEDNESDAY, United States President Donald Trump announced that imports from India would attract an additional 25% tariff as penalty for India buying Russian energy. Together with the 25% tariff that Trump had announced earlier, imports from India will now attract a total 50% tariff — making India (along with Brazil) the country facing the highest tariff wall in the US.

India has described these actions as "unfair, unjustified and unreasonable", and said it would take "all actions necessary" to "protect national interests". Experts suggest that the tariff can result in India's annual economic output (measured by gross domestic product or GDP) to fall by over half a percentage point.

What is Trump's grouse against India?

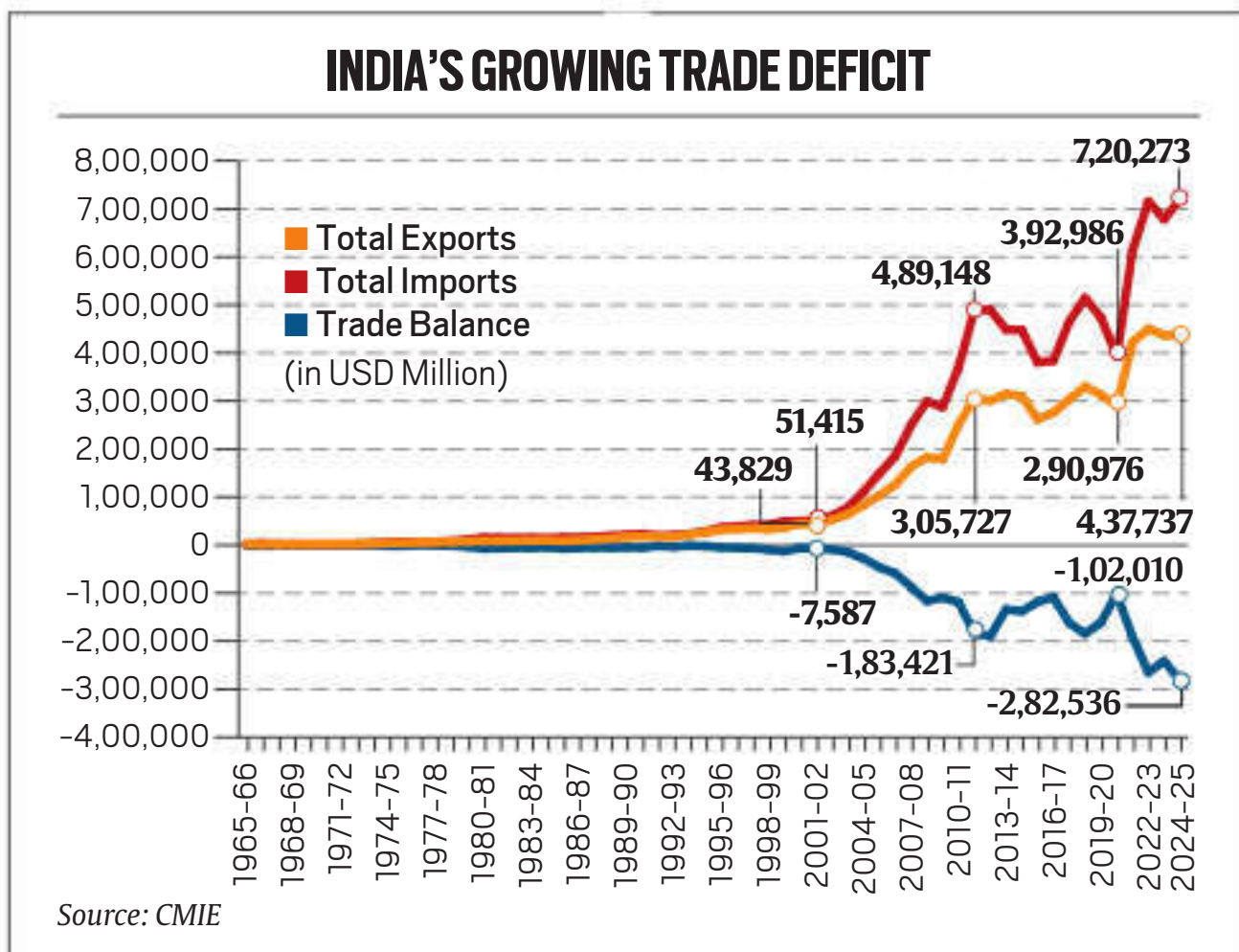
The additional 25% tariff appears to be driven not so much by a desire to punish India for importing energy from Russia — the stated reason — as to use it as a negotiating tool to force New Delhi to sign a trade deal that suits the US. Several countries such as China and those in the European Union, as well as the US, continue to import goods and energy from Russia.

More broadly, Trump has repeatedly described India as one of the world's most protectionist countries, with very high tariff and non-tariff barriers that make it difficult for producers in the US to sell their products in India. According to Trump, this is the reason why the US has a trade deficit with India. At the heart of his tariffs policy is a desire to eliminate the US trade deficit and have balanced trade relations.

How will tariffs reduce the trade deficit?

A tariff is essentially a tax on domestic consumers when they import goods from abroad. So when the US puts a tariff of 50% on imports from India, American buyers find Indian goods 50% costlier.

With the rise in prices, demand falls. High tariffs are thus meant to drive Americans to a cheaper alternative or stop them from buy-



Join FREE Whatsapp Channel <https://whatsapp.com/channel/0029Van2VRb6RGJOKH6oBd0F> ing the specific product at all. As imports from India fall, presuming exports to India do not change, the US' trade deficit will reduce and eventually close up.

Tariffs can also be used as a threat to force India to strike a trade deal that would open up two other ways to eliminate the trade deficit. One, by forcing India to open its markets to American goods — a rise in US exports to India will bridge the trade deficit. Two, by forcing the Indian government and its associated entities to buy more American goods — say defence equipment or crude oil — to reduce the trade deficit.

Does that mean Trump is a champion of free-trade?

Not really. Trump has imposed tariffs even on countries with which the US enjoyed trade surpluses such as the UK and Australia.

Trump believes that only balanced trade — that is, zero trade deficit — is fair trade. A trade deficit, in his worldview, implies that the other country (India, for instance) is cheating the US. As a result, even if there was complete free trade between the US

and the other countries, if the US suffers a trade deficit, Trump can still be expected to slap tariffs.

What makes this stance of Trump troublesome is that no two countries naturally achieve balanced trade. More often than not, a country has trade deficits with some countries and surpluses with others. What matters for any country is not to have an overall trade deficit which is unsustainable.

Is Trump singling out India?

No. Since taking over on January 20, Trump has gone after several of its closest trade and military allies — such as Canada, Mexico and the EU — slapping or threatening to slap punitive tariffs.

Many countries are still negotiating with the US, and it is possible that they may see even higher tariffs being slapped on them. It is equally possible that Trump may hike tariff rates against India if he believes that even after these tariffs the trade deficit will not go away.

Should India retaliate by putting tariffs

on imports from the US?

No, for two reasons. One, a tariff essentially penalises the domestic consumer. Putting a tariff will only make it more costly for an Indian consumer to import a good from the US.

Two, placing tariffs will result in reducing India's imports from the US, thus widening the trade deficit and triggering yet another cycle of tariffs because Trump is only looking at wiping out the trade deficit.

What will be the exact impact of these tariffs?

Tariffs disrupt long-established supply chains. A small scale firm or entrepreneur in Ludhiana who loses a contract for supplying T-shirts to a New York store as a result of these tariffs may not recover if that business order goes to a competitor in Bangladesh.

The exact impact will depend on how capable Indian firms are in taking a hit on their profits, for how long, and whether there are close competitors in other countries who are in a position to take advantage.

The real damage is not in terms of the loss of GDP but in terms of the loss of livelihoods and employment. Sectors such as textiles and carpets or food-related exports are heavily labour intensive, and the same half a percentage point fall in GDP in such sectors could create much deeper devastation of livelihoods.

What can India do?

In the immediate term, Indian negotiators have to limit the damage in terms of the trade deal that is being negotiated.

But in the medium to longer term, this is yet another clarion call for domestic reforms. Policymakers and citizens alike should question: Why is it that growth in Indian manufacturing lags even Indian agriculture? Why are Indian youth unskilled despite college degrees? What can be done to reduce logistical costs? How can we improve the ease of doing business?

Trump's reluctance to have a direct confrontation with China, which is the factory to the world, shows that when it comes to global trade, strength matters and weaknesses don't just get exploited but also punished.

Why PM spoke of farmers, livestock rearers & fisherfolk

HARISH DAMODARAN

NEW DELHI, AUGUST 7

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi said on Thursday that his government would never compromise the interests of India's *kisaan* (farmers), *pashupadalak* (livestock rearers) and *machhuare* (fisherfolk), even if it entailed his paying a very heavy personal price.

Both the occasion — an international conference to commemorate the birth centenary of the Father of India's Green Revolution M S Swaminathan — and the context — the stalled trade talks between India and the United States — suggested that the PM was responding to pressure from the Donald Trump administration to open up the country's market to American farm produce.

Modi did not refer to the deadlocked negotiations or Trump's unilateral action to impose a 50% tariff on Indian goods imported into the US. But the PM's clear identification of *kisaan*, *pashupadalak* and *machhuare*, and placing their interests as his government's "topmost priority" suggests that the signal was to the US that there are red lines as far as agriculture is concerned.

What are the concerns specific to the three primary agricultural producer-stakeholders that have hindered the finalisation of the India-US bilateral trade agreement?

Farmers

The main issue here is with the US' pressure on India to open up its domestic market to genetically modified (GM) soyabean and maize. Both crops are widely grown in India — on 13 million and 12 million hectares respectively. But average per-hectare corn yields in India, at around 3.5 tonnes, are a fraction of the 11 tonnes in the US. In soyabean, Indian average yields are just over 0.9 tonnes, as against the 3.5 tonnes in the US.

This difference is to a significant extent on account of American farmers cultivating GM varieties that can tolerate the application of herbicides such as glyphosate and glufosinate, or resist attacks by specific pests.

Indian farmer organisations fear that allowing imports of GM maize and soyabean from the US would lead to a crash in domestic prices. They consider such opening to be unfair, when the planting of GM crops (other than cotton) is not permitted in India.

The US also wants India to allow imports of ethanol for use as bio-fuel. Currently, only ethanol produced from domestically grown sugarcane, maize, and rice is used for blending up to 20% with petrol. Sugar mills have opposed any move to import maize for bio-fuel purposes. They say that this will ultimately hurt India's sugarcane farmers.

Livestock rearers

There is all-round opposition from the Indian dairy industry to the imports of milk powder, butter oil, and cheese under any free trade agreement, whether with the US, the European Union, New Zealand, or Australia. India levies 30% import duty on cheese, 40% on butter, and 60% on milk powder.

There is also the requirement — which the US claims is premised purely on religious and cultural grounds — that all imported dairy products should be derived from animals not fed on any formulation produced from the internal organs, bone meal or tissues of animals. Any reduction of import duties or the relaxation of these non-tariff barriers is unlikely in the present context.

Fisherfolk

Here, the threat has less to do more with exports. India's seafood exports to the US were valued at \$2.48 billion in 2024, and a 32.5% growth has been posted in the first six months of this calendar year.

Given that the US is a major market, particularly for frozen shrimp, the latest Trump tariff of 50% can hugely impact aqua farmers in states such as Andhra Pradesh, Gujarat, Odisha, and Tamil Nadu.

This is more so when lower tariffs of 10-20% have been put on competing countries like Chile, Ecuador, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

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