

EAM meets Sweden, Ireland counterparts

NEW DELHI, Mar 17 (PTI)

EXTERNAL Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Monday met here his counterparts from various countries including Sweden, Ireland and Ghana and discussed ways to strengthen ties.

The interactions took place on a day when the three-day Raisina Dialogue -- India's premier conference on geopolitics and geoeconomics -- began in the national capital. Jaishankar shared the updates on his meetings in a series of posts on X.

"Started the #Raisina2025 engagements, meeting DPM & FM @tfajon of Slovenia. Appreciated her assessment, as a current UN Security Council member, of global challenges," the EAM said after meeting Slovenian foreign minister Tanja Fajon earlier in the day.

He also met several other leaders during the course of the day, including his Swedish counterpart Maria M Stenergard and Simon Harris, Tánaiste (Deputy Prime Minister of Ireland), Minister for Foreign Affairs, Trade and Defence.

"Pleased to meet FM @MariaStenergard of Sweden this morning. Discussed deepening our engagement with the EU," the external affairs minister posted on X.

"Warm greetings to Tánaiste & FM @SimonHarrisTD, the Government and People of Ireland on their National Day. My recent visit provided an opportunity to renew our bonds and strengthen our ties," he wrote in another post and also shared



Union External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar during a meeting with the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Sweden Maria M Stenergard, in New Delhi. (PTI)

a photograph.

Jaishankar also had a meeting with the foreign minister of Ghana. "A good meeting with FM @S_OkudzetoAblak on sidelines of #Raisina2025. Explored opportunities to further our development partnership and South-South cooperation," he wrote on X and also shared a photo of their meeting. Jaishankar also mentioned in a separate post that he met with New Zealand batsman Ross Taylor. "A Raisina bonus! Pleasure to meet the great New Zealand batsman @RossLTaylor," he said and also shared a photo with him.

Slovenia bats for UNSC reforms, permanent seat for India

NEW DELHI, Mar 17 (PTI)

SLOVENIA Deputy Prime Minister Tanja Fajon on Monday here expressed strong support for reforms in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and India's candidacy for a permanent seat.

Following her meeting with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, Fajon, who is also the country's foreign minister, underscored the need for a Security Council that reflects the current geopolitical realities.

"We definitely support (a UNSC reform)," Fajon told PTI Videos. "We need to have a better reflection of the current

geopolitical stand, be it in the Security Council among non-permanent members, but also in the permanent members."

"If there will be a direction to increase the number of members, I don't see the reason why India wouldn't be at the table," she added.

The UNSC has five permanent members -- US, China, Russia, UK, and France. India has been a Council's non-permanent member several times in the past.

Fajon's visit to India comes as Slovenia prepares to assume a non-permanent seat in the UNSC.

During her discussions with

Jaishankar, the two leaders spoke about the Russia-Ukraine war and instability in the Middle East. "We need strong allies to protect peace and stability around the world," Fajon said.

"We will hold political consultations in May in Delhi to see whether we can explore further what the options are," she added, hinting at the defence production in Slovenia by Indian firms.

Fajon's visit also comes amid much fretting over US President Donald Trump's tariff policies, which she warned could destabilise the world economy. "Trade wars are not beneficial to any society."

India, Philippines should accelerate negotiations for trade deal: Top Filipino diplomat Manalo

NEW DELHI, Mar 17 (PTI)

INDIA and the Philippines should accelerate negotiations for a preferential trade agreement, Filipino Secretary for Foreign Affairs Enrique Manalo said on Monday.

In an address to Indian busi-

ness leaders at the FICCI, Manalo also emphasised the "strategic importance" of developing the Philippines' nickel sector with Indian participation.

"The Philippines is the world's largest exporter of nickel ore with exports valued at approximately USD 1.95 billion, chiefly used

in lithium-ion battery production," Manalo said.

Currently, nearly 98 per cent of the Philippines' exports go to China, with Japan importing the remaining 2 per cent, he said.

"We are quite interested to see India become a player in our nickel sector, not just for export

diversification but crucially for the processing and development of a value chain," he said.

"India imports about USD 707 million worth of raw nickel from Russia, Norway, and Japan," Manalo noted, suggesting an opportunity for supply chain realignment.

Russia **rejects** possible deployment of NATO peacekeepers in Ukraine

MOSCOW, Mar 17 (IANS)

RUSSIA has rejected the possible deployment of NATO peacekeepers in Ukraine, suggesting unarmed observers or a civilian monitoring group sent there to oversee a potential peace deal.

Discussions on peacekeeping efforts in Ukraine remain premature and should only take place after a formal peace agreement has been reached, said Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Alexander Grushko in an interview with Russian daily Izvestia on Sunday.

Grushko emphasised that NATO's involvement in peacekeeping operations is fundamentally contradictory, Xinhua news agency reported.

"NATO and peacekeeping are entirely incompatible. The real history of the alliance consists of military operations and unprovoked aggression to assert its global and regional dominance," he said.

He reaffirmed Russia's stance that the deployment of NATO forces in Ukraine -- whether under the banner of the EU, NATO, or individual national forces -- would effectively place them in the conflict zone, making them direct participants with all the consequences that entail.

As a possible alternative, he said that an unarmed observer mission or a civilian monitoring group could be considered to oversee certain aspects of a potential peace deal.

Putin, Trump talks on Ukraine today

WASHINGTON, Mar 17 (AP)

PRESIDENT Donald Trump said he would speak to Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday as he pushes to end the war in Ukraine.

The US leader disclosed the upcoming conversation to reporters while flying from Florida to Washington on Air Force One on Sunday evening.

"We will see if we have something to announce maybe by Tuesday. I will be speaking to President Putin on Tuesday," Trump said.

US, Houthis vow escalation

CAIRO, Mar 17 (AP)

THE United States and Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen are both vowing escalation after the US launched airstrikes to deter the rebels from attacking military and commercial vessels on one of the world's busiest shipping corridors.

The Houthi-run Health Ministry said the US strikes killed at least 53 people, including five women and two children, and wounded almost 100 in the capital of Sanaa and other provinces, including Saada, the rebels' stronghold on the border with Saudi Arabia.

"We're not going to have these people controlling which ships can go through and which ones

cannot. And so your question is, how long will this go on? It will go on until they no longer have the capability to do that," US Secretary of State Marco Rubio told CBS on Sunday.

President Donald Trump on Saturday vowed to use "overwhelming lethal force" until the Houthis cease their attacks, and warned that Tehran would be held "fully accountable" for their actions.

The Houthis have repeatedly targeted shipping in the Red Sea, sinking two vessels, in what they call acts of solidarity with the Palestinians in Gaza, where Israel has been at war with Hamas, another Iranian ally. The attacks stopped when a Israel-Hamas ceasefire took hold in January -

a day before Trump took office - but last week, the Houthis said they would renew attacks against Israeli vessels after Israel cut off the flow of humanitarian aid to Gaza this month.

There have been no Houthi attacks reported since then.

The US airstrikes were one of the most extensive attacks against the Houthis since the war in Gaza began in October 2023.

Trump's national security adviser, Mike Waltz, on Sunday told ABC that the strikes "actually targeted multiple Houthi leaders and took them out." He didn't identify them or give evidence. Rubio said some Houthi facilities had been destroyed. "We will confront escalation with escalation."

PM Christopher Luxon highlights NZ-India ties at Raisina Dialogue



(Left) Prime Minister Narendra Modi with New Zealand PM Christopher Luxon attends the inauguration of the Raisina Dialogue 2025 in New Delhi on Monday. (Right) President Droupadi Murmu with New Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon during a meeting, in New Delhi. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, Mar 17 (ANI)

NEW Zealand Prime Minister Christopher Luxon on Monday highlighted the long-standing relationship between Indians

and New Zealanders, emphasising over two centuries of shared history at the Raisina Dialogue 2025 in New Delhi.

He stated, "It is more than 200 years since Indians and New

Zealanders began living side by side... Just as they were 200 years ago, 'Kiwi-Indians' today are fully integrated into our multicultural society."

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Enhance educational cooperation between India, New Zealand: President Murmu

NEW DELHI, Mar 17 (PTI)

CITING close and friendly relations between India and New Zealand, President Droupadi Murmu on Monday said there is immense potential for enhancing educational cooperation between the two countries.

Welcoming New Zealand PM Christopher Luxon, she expressed satisfaction about the growth of bilateral trade and economic relations between the two nations, including in the areas of customs,

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Tough negotiations result in big savings from Scorpene submarine deal

NEW DELHI, Mar 17 (IANS)

THE initial price offered by France and Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL) for the three additional Scorpene class submarines was Rs 75,000 crore but the Indian Ministry of Defence negotiated very strongly to get a discount of nearly Rs 40,000 crore from them.

The price of the submarines is now coming to be around Rs 36,000 crore and the discount will result in mega savings for projects of the Indian Navy and other two defence services.

The price was jointly offered by the MDL, Bharat Electronics Limited and the French side.

The MoD acquisition wing has been indulging in tough negoti-

ations with vendors and has been able to save crores of tax payers' money.

The tough negotiation drive was started during the tenure of former Defence Secretary Ajay Kumar's time where the working mantra was that every penny saved in making more money available for other modernisation projects for the armed forces.

India and France share robust defence industrial partnership. Last month, during their meeting, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron stressed on the early launch of an R&D framework through a Technical Arrangement for cooperation in defence technologies between DGA and DRDO, thus further

deepening the Research and Development partnerships.

In addition, both leaders at the Summit also welcomed the ongoing discussions between L'Office National d'Etudes et de Recherches Aérospatiales (ONERA) and Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) to identify technologies for R&D partnerships.

Recalling the deep and long-standing defence cooperation between France and India as part of the Strategic Partnership, President Macron and Prime Minister Modi at the last Summit also welcomed the continuation of the cooperation of air and maritime assets in line with the ambitious Defence Industrial Roadmap agreed in 2024.

Both leaders commended progress in collaboration in construction of Scorpene submarines in India, including indigenisation, and in particular the work carried out with a view to the integration of DRDO developed Air Independent Propulsion (AIP) into P75-Scorpene submarines and the analyses conducted regarding the possible integration of the Integrated Combat System (ICS) into the future P75-AS submarines.

Both leaders welcomed the commissioning of the sixth and final submarine of the P75 Scorpene-class project, INS Vaghsheer, on January 15, 2025. Both sides welcomed the ongoing discussions in missiles, hel-

icopter engines and jet engines. They also welcomed the excellent cooperation between the relevant entities in the Safran group and their Indian counterparts. Prime Minister Modi also invited the French Army to take a closer look at the Pinaka MBRL, emphasising that an acquisition of this system by France would be another milestone in Indo-French defence ties.

In addition, President Macron welcomed the decision to include India as an observer to the Eurodrone MALE programme managed by OCCAR, which is another step forward in the growing strength of our partnership in defence equipment programmes.

Brand SFJ a terrorist outfit, Rajnath tells US intel chief

Trump Admin Committed To Defeating 'Islamist Terrorism': Gabbard

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Defence minister Rajnath Singh on Monday asked the Trump administration to take strong action against Sikhs For Justice (SFJ), which is banned in India for promoting secessionist and pro-Khalistani activities, during his meeting with visiting US director of national intelligence Tulsi Gabbard.

Singh told Gabbard that the US should designate SFJ, which was "linked" to Pakistan and other terrorist/secessionist outfits and undertakes anti-India activities on American soil, a foreign terrorist organisation under its own domestic laws, sources said.

"SFJ, run in the US by Gurbaj Singh Pannun who himself is a designated terrorist here, regularly threatens Indian political leaders and diplomats, advocates secessionism and violence for the creation of Khalistan, and even tries to incite Sikhs in the Indian Army and police forces to mutiny," a source said.

Banned for the first time in India in 2019, SFJ was again declared an "unlawful association" in July under the UAPA by the home minis-



try for another five years. Indian diplomacy seems to be finding new channels. On a day when PM Modi joined US President Trump's social media platform, he also gifted Tulsi Gabbard, US director of national intelligence, Gangajal collected from Sangam during the just-concluded Maha Kumbh. Gabbard, who follows Hinduism, presented Modi with a rosary made of sacred basil

try for another five years.

In media interviews later, Gabbard said the US was deeply concerned about the persecution of minorities in Bangladesh and the Trump administration was committed to defeat "Islamist terrorism" globally. She noted that PM Modi also took this threat seriously and added that the two leaders would work together to identify and defeat the threat.

"The long-time unfortunate persecution, killing and abuse of religious minorities like Hindus, Buddhists, Chris-

tians and others has been a major area of concern for the US govt and President Trump and his administration," Gabbard told NDTV World.

She spoke about the ideology of an "Islamic Caliphate" and how extremist elements and terror groups globally aimed for such an outcome. "The threat of Islamist terrorists and the global effort of different terror groups are routed in the same ideology and objective — which is to rule or govern with an Islamist Caliphate," she said, adding, "This

obviously affects people of any other religion, other than the one that they find acceptable, and they choose to carry this out with terror and very violent ways and means."

Her remarks mark a strong indictment of Mohammad Yunus-led interim dispensation in Dhaka which had enjoyed support from the Biden administration. In her meeting with Singh, Gabbard reaffirmed the growing strength of the India-US bilateral defence partnership, drawing from the joint statement issued after the recent Modi-Trump meet-

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ing in DC, while laying emphasis on intelligence-sharing.

The two stressed that strategic security remained a vital pillar of the comprehensive global strategic cooperation between India and the US. "They reviewed significant strides made in areas of military exercises, strategic cooperation, integration of defence industrial supply chains and information-sharing cooperation, especially in the maritime domain, between the two countries," an MoD official added.

China welcomes Modi's positive remarks on ties

'Tango Between Dragon & Jumbo Only Right Choice'

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New Delhi: India and China should be partners contributing to each other's success and a cooperative "pas de deux" between the dragon and the elephant is the only right choice for the two countries, Beijing said while welcoming PM Modi's "positive" remarks in a podcast in which he had

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endorsed signs of a rapprochement in ties since Oct last year.

In the interaction with Lex Fridman, Modi had also strongly backed Donald Trump's policies and the US president even shared the podcast on his social media



As US President Donald Trump shared PM Modi's podcast with Lex Fridman on Truth Social, the PM debuted on the social media platform, posting a photo with Trump from the 'Howdy Modi' event in Houston in 2019. 'Delighted to be on Truth Social! Looking forward to interacting with all the passionate voices here and engaging in meaningful conversations in the times to come,' the PM wrote in his first post | **P 20**

platform, Truth Social.

Modi had said on Sunday that the border situation with China was normalising since his meeting with President Xi Jinping in Kazan in Oct and trust would return in the relationship "slowly but surely".

Seeking a cooperative relationship, he also said it was natural for India and China to have differences, and the focus should be on ensuring that these don't turn into disputes.

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