

PM Modi, Amir of Qatar ~~DECIDE TO ELEVATE~~ India-Qatar ties to 'strategic partnership'

NEW DELHI, Feb 18 (PTI)

INDIA and Qatar on Tuesday agreed to double bilateral trade to USD 26 billion over the next five years and announced elevation of their relationship to the level of strategic partnership as Prime Minister Narendra Modi held talks with Amir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al-Thani.

The two sides also signed two agreements - one on establishing strategic partnership and another on Revised Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement and signed five memoranda of understanding to strengthen economic partnership, step up ties in areas such as

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad Al Thani shake hands before a meeting at Hyderabad House, in New Delhi, on Tuesday. (PMO/PTI)

Gyanesh Kumar to take over as 26th CEC today

NEW DELHI, Feb 18 (PTI)

GYANESH Kumar, who as a senior Union Home Ministry official played a key role in the Government's move to abrogate provisions of Article 370 in Jammu and Kashmir and setting up the Ram temple trust, will assume the office of the Chief Election Commissioner on Wednesday.

Kumar retired as Secretary in the Cooperation Ministry in January 2024 and was appointed as an Election Commissioner in March 2024.

He will become the 26th CEC, a day after incumbent Rajiv Kumar demits office on Tuesday evening. He along with fellow Election Commissioner Sukhbir Singh Sandhu was appointed on the same day and was part of the Commission when the 2024 Lok Sabha polls were held. Kumar is the first CEC to be appointed under a new law on the appointment of the members of the EC. His term will run till January 26, 2029, days before the EC is expected to announce the schedule of the next Lok Sabha election.

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Kumar played key role in J&K reorganisation

STATUS QUOISM

With narrow focus opposing UNSC expansion, says India

■ By Yoshita Singh

UNITED NATIONS, Feb 19 (PTI)

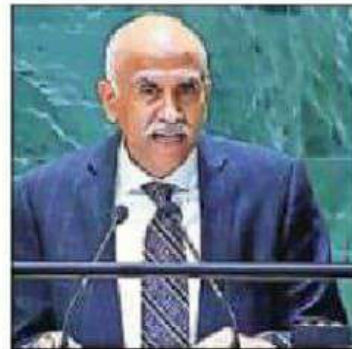
INDIA told a Security Council meeting chaired by China that countries opposing expansion in the UN body's permanent membership are status quoists with a narrow focus and "non-progressive" approach, asserting that this "can no longer be accepted."

"The Global South cannot continue to be short-changed. India and major players in other parts of the world deserve their due representation in the structures of the United Nations. As regards Security Council, this translates to permanent category member-

ship," India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish said.

Addressing the open debate in the Security Council on 'Practicing Multilateralism, Reforming and Improving Global Governance' held under China's Presidency of the 15-nation UN body, Harish further said that three fundamental principles are essential to the success of UNSC reforms.

These he described to be increase in membership of both permanent and non-permanent categories; commencement of text based negotiations; and linking ambitious timelines with concrete out-



Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish, India's Permanent Representative to UN

comes.

"Those opposed to expansion of permanent category are status quoists with a narrow focus. Clearly, their approach

is non-progressive in nature. This can no longer be accepted," Harish said.

The Indian envoy referred to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's remarks at the Summit for the Future in September last year when he has said that "reforms is the key to relevance".

"India has been consistent, categorical and a major voice with regard to underscoring the need for reforms," Harish said adding that original structures and frameworks of the UN represent a different period in history. "Our world has transformed and the UN needs to change with the times. It has

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Rekha Gupta is Delhi's new CM

- Rekha Gupta is fourth woman Chief Minister of Delhi
- Oath ceremony today at iconic Ramlila Maidan
- Over 50,000 people including Prime Minister Modi, Home Minister Amit Shah, and Chief Ministers of various BJP-ruled States to attend the programme.

NEW DELHI, Feb 19 (Agencies)

THE long suspense over 'who will be the next Delhi Chief Minister' ended on Wednesday evening with first-time MP Rekha Gupta being chosen as the leader of the BJP legislature party, paving the way for her to take over the post.

Gupta, the MLA from Shalimar Bagh, was chosen at a meeting of the BJP legislature party at the state party office at Pant Marg this evening, under the supervision of two Central Observers - former Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad and BJP National Secretary Om Prakash Dhankhar.

As the meeting began to elect the BJP legislature party leader, there was intense speculation about a woman legislator taking



over the mantle. Gupta will be the fourth woman Chief Minister of Delhi after Sushma Swaraj (BJP), Sheila Dikshit (Congress), and Atishi (AAP).

Even before the announcement of her name, celebrations had broken out at the house of Gupta, a former Delhi University Students Union President and Municipal Councillor.

The new Chief Minister will take oath at a grand swearing-in ceremony at the city's iconic Ramlila Maidan at noon on Thursday. The new CM will be administered the oath of office and secrecy by Lt Governor Saxena, amidst the presence of top BJP brass and leaders of allied parties on the dais.

The oath-taking ceremony will
(Contd on page 5)



LG Saxena invites Rekha Gupta to form Govt in Delhi

NEW DELHI, Feb 19 (PTI)

DELHI Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena has invited the BJP's CM-designate Rekha Gupta to form a new Government after she staked claim for it.

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Concerned over ISI team's visit to B'desh: Army chief

'Armed Forces Shouldn't Be Dragged Into Political Controversies'

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: India since 2014 has been "assertive" in its communication to Pakistan and "they have understood that we mean business", Army chief General Upendra Dwivedi said Wednesday, while also expressing "concern" over reports that a Pak Army-ISI delegation recently visited areas in Bangladesh close to 'Chicken's Neck' or the Siliguri Corridor in Bengal.

Gen Dwivedi also said India and China are now looking at how they both can reduce the massive number of troops deployed along the Line of Actual Control after the disengagement at Depsang and Demchok in eastern Ladakh last Oct, while reiterating all corps commanders have been "empowered" to resolve minor issues related to patrolling and grazing so that they do not "escalate into violence".

In the backdrop of defence minister Rajnath Singh earli-



er this month refuting Congress MP Rahul Gandhi's claim that the Army chief had stated Chinese troops were present inside Indian territory, Gen Dwivedi, during a podcast with ANI, said the armed forces should not be dragged into political controversies.

Singh had accused Gandhi of misquoting the Army chief and indulging in "irresponsible politics" on matters of national security. Gen Dwivedi, on his part, said, "I think

General Upendra Dwivedi said India and China are looking at how they both can reduce massive troops deployed along LAC after disengagement in eastern Ladakh last Oct. He said that all corps commanders have been 'empowered' to resolve minor issues related to patrolling and grazing

the political answer has been given by the Raksha Mantri (Singh). But the thing which I learnt is that it's important that I must make an endeavour that the Army should not be involved in politics."

On the Pakistan front, the Army chief said the neighbour has been very clearly told that the entire J&K is "an integral part of India", with the reading down of Article 370 in Aug 2019. "There is no compromise with this," he

said, noting the number of "local people" being recruited as terrorists in J&K has significantly gone down, people no longer have "confusion" over their identity and the theme of ensuring the move from "terrorism to tourism" was working well on the ground.

"India has said very clearly that we will be assertive in our communication (to Pakistan). And if required, we can be aggressive also. So, if you force us, then we will be aggressive enough to communicate our intent," he said.

Asked about last month's visit of Pak Army-ISI delegation to Rangpur in Bangladesh, Gen Dwivedi said, "I had used the word epicentre of terrorism for a particular country (Pakistan). Now those countrymen, if they go to any other place and they happen to be our neighbour, as far as I am concerned, I should be concerned about it. That they should not be able to use that soil to send terrorists to India."

Unfair to US if Musk sets up factory in India, says Trump

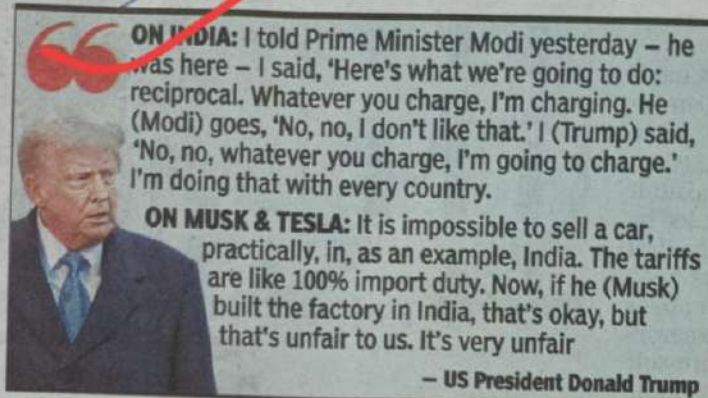
'Why Give India \$21m To Raise Voter Turnout?'

Chidanand Rajghatta | TNN

Washington: US President Donald Trump has added a \$21-million question to his relentless smackdown on tariffs by India despite talking up ties with Delhi and friendship with PM Modi during the latter's recent visit to Washington DC. "Why are we giving

► **EDIT PAGE: Elon Riders/Don't Be F-35ed, P 20**

\$21 million to India? They have a lot more money," Trump said on Tuesday, referring to a US Agency for International Development programme that details the amount (0.04%



ON INDIA: I told Prime Minister Modi yesterday – he was here – I said, 'Here's what we're going to do: reciprocal. Whatever you charge, I'm charging. He (Modi) goes, 'No, no, I don't like that.' I (Trump) said, 'No, no, whatever you charge, I'm going to charge.' I'm doing that with every country.

ON MUSK & TESLA: It is impossible to sell a car, practically, in, as an example, India. The tariffs are like 100% import duty. Now, if he (Musk) built the factory in India, that's okay, but that's unfair to us. It's very unfair

– US President Donald Trump

► **MAHA, GUJ, TN MAY VIE FOR TESLA FACTORY, P 19**

of USAID's \$44-billion budget), ostensibly to increase voter turnout in India.

He then segued into his customary rant about New Delhi's trade barriers and tariffs, picking up the theme in a joint interview on Fox News with Elon Musk, complaining that "every country in the world takes advantage of

us, and they do it with tariffs".

"It is impossible to sell a car, practically, in, as an example, India. The tariffs are like 100% import duty," Trump said, adding, "Now, if he (Musk) built the factory in India, that's okay, but that's unfair to us. It's very unfair."

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Prez: Zelensky a dictator, started war with Russia

President Trump on Wednesday called Volodymyr Zelensky a "dictator without elections", lashing out after the Ukrainian president said Trump was living in a Russian "disinformation space" as he moves to end the Kremlin's war against Ukraine on terms that Kyiv says are too favourable to Moscow. Senior US and Russian officials met in Riyadh Tuesday and agreed to negotiate a settlement to end the war. Trump accused Zelensky of misusing American aid to Ukraine for the war effort, and insinuated Ukraine was to blame for the ongoing conflict. **P 18**

India, US committed to boost trade to USD 500 billion through strong agreement in next 6-8 months: Goyal

NEW DELHI, Feb 18 (PTI)

INDIA and the US are committed to increasing bilateral trade to USD 500 billion and negotiating a "strong" trade agreement within the next 6-8 months, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Tuesday.

During the recent visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Washington, India and the US announced to more than double the two-way commerce to USD 500 billion by 2030 and negotiate the first tranche of a mutually beneficial, multi-sector bilateral trade agreement (BTA) by fall of 2025.

Goyal said once his US counterpart takes charge, both countries will discuss the contours of the pact. "In the next 6-8 months, by establishing a strong trade agreement, we are committed to increasing trade to USD 500 billion," Goyal told



reporters here on the sidelines of CII's India-Qatar Business Forum meet.

He added businesses of both the countries are excited about the agreement. When asked if the pact would have chapters related to goods, services

and investments, he said, "My counterpart has not yet confirmed in the US. After the (confirmation), we will do talks and then only we can decide the way forward".

Normally in a free trade agreement, two trading partners either eliminate or significantly reduce customs duties on the maximum number of goods traded between them. Besides, they ease norms to promote trade in services and boost investments. During the first term of US President Donald Trump, the two countries had discussed a mini-trade deal, but it was shelved by the Joe Biden administration as they were not in favour of such pacts. In 2023, the US and India bilateral trade in goods and services stood at USD 190.08 billion (USD 123.89 billion in goods and USD 66.19 billion in services trade). In that year, India's merchandise exports to the US stood at USD 83.77 bil-

lion, while imports were USD 40.12 billion, leaving a trade gap of USD 43.65 billion in favour of India. The country's services export to America was USD 36.33 billion in 2023, while imports were aggregated at USD 29.86 billion. The trade gap (difference between imports and exports) was USD 6.47 billion in favour of New Delhi.

During 2021-24, America was the largest trading partner of India. The US is one of the few countries with which India has a trade surplus. In 2023-24, the US was the largest trading partner of India with USD 119.71 billion bilateral trade in goods (USD 77.51 billion worth of exports, USD 42.19 billion of imports and USD 35.31 billion trade surplus). India received USD 67.8 billion in foreign direct investments from America during April 2000 and September 2024.

India, Malaysia to boost ties in defence production, AI

New Delhi: India and Malaysia on Wednesday decided to enhance cooperation in maritime security, defence production and multilateral engagements as well as in emerging areas like cybersecurity and Artificial Intelligence (AI).

The 13th meeting of the Malaysia-India defence cooperation committee at Kuala Lumpur, co-chaired by defence secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh and his counterpart Lokman Hakim Bin Ali, held wide-ranging discussions on "effective and practical initiatives" to further expand bilateral defence engagements as well as on regional and global issues.

The two sides also exchanged the finalised 'terms of reference (ToR)' on the establishment of a forum on the Russian-origin Sukhoi-30 fighters that both countries operate. As part of its policy to steadily enhance military ties with Asean countries, India had earlier trained Malaysian pilots to fly the Sukhoi-30 jets.

"The Sukhoi-30 forum will enable closer cooperation between the two air forces in exchanging expertise and best practices in the maintenance of the," an official said.

"The two sides identified ways to deepen existing defence collaboration, particularly in the industry, maritime security and multilateral engagements. They agreed to form a joint focus group to address non-traditional maritime security threats," the official said. TNN

EAM to attend G20 meet in SA, may hold talks with China's Wang

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: External affairs minister S Jaishankar will participate in the G20 meeting of foreign ministers in Johannesburg on Feb 20-21, said govt on Wednesday. Jaishankar's US counterpart Marco Rubio will skip the event, but China's Wang Yi and Russia's Sergey Lavrov will attend the meeting.

While Jaishankar is likely to informally meet Wang and Lavrov, a formal bilateral meeting is also not ruled out, according to govt sources, and will depend on the schedule of the leaders.

Jaishankar had last met Wang at the G20 Rio summit in Nov during which they discussed ways to take the relationship forward, following the border disengagement agreement, including through talks between the 'special representatives' and between the foreign secretary and vice minister. Both the engagements have taken place since then.



Jaishankar had last met Wang at the G20 Rio summit in Nov, during which they discussed ways to take the relationship forward, following the border disengagement agreement

"EAM's participation in the G20 FMM will strengthen India's engagement with G20 countries and bolster the voice of the Global South in this important forum," said the govt, adding that the minister will also have a few bilateral meetings on the margins of the event. South Africa holds the G20 presidency this year and will host the summit in Nov. Its presidency though has run into a

controversy, with the US secretary of state Marco Rubio boycotting the foreign ministers' meeting because South Africa is seeking to promote diversity, equality and inclusion. "In other words: DEI and climate change. My job is to advance America's national interests, not waste taxpayer money or coddle anti-Americanism," he had said earlier this month.

All other member-states, including India, China, Russia and EU, have backed South Africa's presidency. India has used the G20 platform to highlight the need for global governance reform and, in solidarity with the Global South, repeatedly called for collective efforts to address food, fuel, and fertiliser shortages. "Multilateralism is under threat right now. We also need to use this opportunity to develop the international system further to be more inclusive for all countries in the world," said EU foreign policy chief Kaja Kallas in South Africa.