

Efforts on to balance India-Japan trade by boosting exports: Goyal

NEW DELHI, Feb 21 (PTI)

COMMERCE and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Friday said efforts are underway to balance bilateral trade between India and Japan by increasing exports. India's exports to Japan during April-January this fiscal rose by 21.12 per cent to USD 5.1 billion, while imports grew by 9.1 per cent to USD 15.92 billion, leaving a trade deficit of USD 10.82 billion in favour of Japan.

In 2023-24, the country's export to Japan was USD 5.15 billion and imports were USD 17.7 billion. The trade gap was USD 12.55 billion. "Efforts are being made to balance trade between India and Japan, with a focus on increasing Indian exports to ensure reciprocal benefits," the Commerce Ministry said in a statement quoting the Minister.

This was stated by Goyal in his



keynote address at the India-Japan Economy and Investment Forum. He also invited Japanese firms to increase collaboration in areas such as green energy, renewable energy, high-tech manufacturing of semiconductors, electronic goods, and artificial intelligence.

The two countries signed a comprehensive free trade pact, officially dubbed as Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in 2011. Over 1,400 Japanese companies are operating in India and

11 industrial townships across eight states hosting Japanese enterprises. Goyal pointed out that major infrastructure projects such as the Mumbai-Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail and metro systems in Delhi, Ahmedabad, Bengaluru, and Chennai reflect Japan's active participation in India's development.

He expressed optimism about the commencement of the Shinkansen bullet train service between Mumbai and Ahmedabad in the near future.

India has received over USD 43 billion foreign direct investment (FDI) from Japan between 2000 and 2024, making it India's fifth-largest source of foreign investment. The Minister said two countries are collaborating to build globally competitive brands, citing the example of Maruti exporting vehicles to various countries, including Japan.

G20 calls for UN reforms, overhaul of UNSC

■ By Fakir Hassen
JOHANNESBURG, Feb 21 (PTI)

THE G20 representatives, attending the first Foreign Ministers' meeting under by South Africa's presidency, on Friday reaffirmed the urgent need to reform the UN, including changes to the Security Council. Among key attendees were External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov, and Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi.

"(The G20) support the need to reform the UN to make it fit for purpose and relevant to the current international reality. These include the UN Security Council," South African Minister of International Relations and Cooperation Ronald Lamola said at the conclusion of the two-day meet here.

He had earlier said that South Africa holds the view that the UN remains the appropriate forum for maintaining peace and security, supported by other institutions of global governance.

Ramola also highlighted the broader need for reform across global governance systems.

"(We) support the need to reform international systems of global governance, inclusive of the international financial architecture; the multilateral trading system and the multilateral development banks," he said.

In his opening remarks at the gathering, Ramola urged the G20 representatives to support South Africa's proposed approach to address geo-political issues. He emphasised that such issues should be discussed at the level of Sherpas, Foreign Ministers,

and Leaders, to develop consensus-based strategies to build peace and human development.

"As such, geo-political issues will not be discussed in the Working Groups, thus allowing these meetings to focus solely on technical discussions. We also like to caution against focusing exclusively on one conflict situation, to the exclusion of others, especially on the African continent, as has been the practice in the recent past," Lamola said.

The G20 endorsed South Africa's proposal for managing geo-political discussions during its Presidency. The slow progress in achieving the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) also came under the spotlight at the meeting.

"(The G20 countries) noted with concern the slow progress

being made in the achievement of SDG goals of the UN Agenda 2030. To this end, the meeting stressed on the need for urgent action to accelerate efforts and reaffirm the G20 strong commitment to the SDG in line with the theme (of this meeting) – Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability," Lamola said.

The ongoing global conflicts were another focal point of the discussions.

"These conflicts are detrimental to the economic development and attainment of the SDGs. The impact of wars on education, health was highlighted as a major concern by some participants. Sustainable investment in conflict prevention and peace-building was underscored (as a priority)," Lamola said. The G20 ministers reiterated

that all States must adhere to the principles of the UN Charter, he said.

"All parties in conflicts must comply with the provisions under international law, including international humanitarian law and international human rights law. Guided by these principles, there was agreement to support all the efforts towards justice in the Ukraine, Palestine, Sudan the Democratic Republic of Congo and other major conflicts around the globe," Lamola said.

The meeting also recognised the wider geo-political divisions which have contributed to fostering a climate of distrust, threatening to unravel progress with needs to address present global challenges such as poverty, climate change, pandemics, and nuclear proliferation.

India, B'desh agree to launch new 'hotline' between border forces

NEW DELHI, Feb 21 (PTI)

INDIA and Bangladesh have decided to establish a new communication link between the Deputy Commanders of their respective border-guarding forces and identified about 99 fresh patches for erecting a fence along their shared border.

The decisions were finalised during the biannual Director General-level talks between the Border Security Force (BSF) and the Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) that concluded here on Thursday, sources in the security establishment told PTI.

This was the first time that a high-level meeting between the two forces took place after the fall of the Sheikh Hasina Government in Bangladesh on August 5 last year.

The three-day talks, held from February 18 to February 20, went off in a "cordial manner", with the Indian side able to "convince" its neighbour about the importance of fencing on the remaining areas of the 4,096-km-long frontier that spans across five Indian states on the eastern flank, the sources said.

A total of 864.48 km of the front remains unfenced, including 174.51 km of "non-feasible" gap, according to official data.

The two sides have decided to open a new "hotline" for effective communication after the latest round of DG-level talks. This link will be between the additional Director General (ADG) of the BSF eastern command based in Kolkata and his BGB counterpart posted at the force's headquarters in Dhaka, the sources

said.

It was felt "necessary and important" to enhance the engagement between the two sides and hence, this new platform for commanders' interaction has been agreed upon and included in the official records for the first time, they added.

Currently, "hotlines" or links of communication exist between the two Force Chiefs and officers in the ranks of Inspector General (Regional Commander for the BGB), Deputy Inspector General (Sector Commander for the BGB) and other field-level officers.

These communication lines are used to convey real-time information and intelligence so that issues related to the front and instances of cross-border crimes can be checked promptly. The BSF delegation, headed

by its Director General Daljit Singh Chawdhary, also asked the BGB to take "stringent and effective" steps to ensure that Bangladeshi miscreants and criminals are not able to "breach" their security layer and cross the border to attack BSF personnel and Indian civilians.

Apart from "attacks and assaults" on BSF troops and the Indian population, it was categorically mentioned in the official records that instances of "abuse" against the personnel will be dealt with strongly by the force, the sources said.

The BGB delegation, led by its DG, Major General Mohammad Ashrafuzzaman Siddiqui, has promised to further strengthen the joint patrolling of the border protocol and enhance vigil during the night hours.

US refuses to call Russia 'aggressor' in G7 document

Also Wants Text Cut That Describes Invasion As A Breach Of Sovereignty

Berlin: The United States is opposing calling Russia the aggressor in the war with Ukraine in a G7 statement being drafted to mark the third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion, four senior officials from countries involved said Thursday. The American objections to the statement come after President Donald Trump earlier this week blamed Ukraine for starting the war, which in fact began with Russia's attack on Ukraine.

One official from a G7 country said that current chair Canada had circulated the first draft of the statement to the other six member countries. That version, the official said, used language that retained the pro-Ukraine tone the group of allies adopted after the full-scale invasion of the country in Feb 2022. The US side went through that first draft this week and removed all refer-

ences that could be interpreted as being pro-Ukraine, the official said. The result, the official added, was a neutral draft statement that made no references to Russia as the aggressor in the conflict, nor to Ukraine as the victim of the invasion.

Diplomats are continuing to work on the language in the draft, which currently describes "a devastating war that began with Russia's invasion of Ukraine" but does not use the words "Russian aggression" or "aggressors", which have been in G7 statements since 2022, senior German and European officials said. Another senior official from a G7 nation added that the drafting and negotiating over the text could continue until Monday, when the text is set to be published.

Similarly, it is not yet settled whether the G7 leaders who will meet virtually Monday will invite President Volodymyr Zelensky of Ukraine to participate, as he did last year, the official said.



The G7 is drafting a statement to mark the third anniversary of Russia's full-scale invasion on Feb 24. The American objection comes after President Trump earlier this week blamed Ukraine for starting the war.

Can't be weak in face of Putin: Macron to Trump

French President Emmanuel Macron said that he intends to tell US counterpart Donald Trump that it's in the joint interest of Americans and Europeans not to "be weak" in the face of Russian leader Vladimir Putin amid US-led negotiations to end the nearly three-year war in Ukraine. Macron will travel to Washington to meet with Trump on Monday, the White House said. In a one-hour question and answer session on social media Thursday, Macron said that he'll tell Trump: "You can't be weak in the face of President Putin. It's not you, it's not your trademark, it's not in your interest. How can you then be credible in the face of China if you're weak in the face of Putin?" Macron said that he would seek to persuade Trump that US interests and Europeans' interests are the same, telling him: "If you let Russia take over Ukraine, it would be unstoppable." AFP

dymyr Zelensky of Ukraine to participate, as he did last year, the official said.

The American objections follow a bitter exchange of insults between Zelensky and Trump. The US president has vowed to try to end the war rapidly and has authorized envoys to hold talks with Russia without the involvement of Ukraine or European nations.

The Americans also wanted to cut passages that described the invasion as a breach of sovereignty, one official said. For now, the current draft includes a statement that says strong security guarantees and Ukraine's integration into the EU "will be critical to secure a lasting peace that prevents future aggression." Negotiations are continuing, so the final language is still to be determined. The last time Canada was the G7 chair, during Trump's first term in 2018, the president walked out of a summit meeting in Quebec and withdrew his support for the final joint communique, angry about its language on trade. NYT

Trump: Zelensky's inclusion in talks 'not very important'

Washington: Donald Trump on Friday said he doesn't consider it essential for Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky to be present at negotiations aimed at ending Russia's war in Ukraine. "I don't think he's very important to be in meetings," Trump said in an interview with Fox News. "He's been there for three years. He makes it very hard to make deals."

Russian and top diplomats met in Saudi Arabia earlier this week to talk about a ceasefire and Kyiv was not invited. Tensions with Kyiv soared further when the Republican president branded Zelensky a "dictator" and falsely claimed Ukraine had "started" the war. "He complains that he's not in a meeting that we're having with Saudi Arabia trying to inter-mediate peace," Trump said. "He's been in a meeting for 3 years and nothing got done." NYT

Musk's DOGE to get New FBI boss Kash Patel

EAM meets Wang, says India & China strove hard to protect G20

Holds Talks On Border Peace, Kailash Yatra

Sachin.Parashar
@timesofindia.com

New Delhi: The recent thaw in ties was on display again as external affairs minister S Jaishankar met his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi and talked up cooperation between the two countries on regional and multilateral forums like G20, SCO and Brics, while stressing the importance of restoring mutual trust in bilateral ties and jointly maintaining border peace.

Jaishankar spoke about "notable developments" since their last meeting in Rio in Nov, but China went a step further in its readout and said exchanges at all levels had been restored. Jaishankar and Wang met on the sidelines of a G20 meeting in Johannesburg. Jaishankar told Wang in a polarised global situation, India and China have worked hard to preserve and protect the G20 as an institution. "This in itself testifies to the importance of international cooperation," the EAM said, adding platforms like G20 provided an opportunity



Jaishankar and China foreign minister Wang in Johannesburg Friday

Don't normalise terror, India told B'desh as it sought resumption of Saarc meet

External affairs minister S Jaishankar asked his Bangladesh counterpart Touhid Hossain to not normalise terrorism as the latter sought resumption of SAARC in a meeting in Oman earlier this week. While Jaishankar had discussed cooperation under BIMSTEC with Hossain, a Bangladesh readout of the meeting later said the foreign advisor requested Jaishankar for a meeting of the SAARC Standing Committee that hasn't met since 2016, or since India blocked the summit process because of Pakistan's support to cross-border terrorism. Bangladesh's call for a SAARC meeting comes in the middle of its efforts to revive ties with Pakistan after the exit of former PM Sheikh Hasina. India, however, has been focused on ramping up cooperation under BIMSTEC that includes Thailand and doesn't count Pakistan as a member. TNN

for talks even when ties were going through a difficult phase. Besides, issues like resumption of Kailash Mansarovar yatra, direct air services, trans-border river cooperation and travel facilitation were discussed. This was the

latest in a series of high-level engagements between India and China, including visits to Beijing by NSA Ajit Doval and foreign secretary Vikram Misri, since the Oct 21 agreement last year to complete the military disengagement proc-

On Gaza, India backs two-state solution, says Jaishankar

As US President Donald Trump looks to relocate Palestinians in Gaza to Jordan and Egypt and take over the Strip, EAM S Jaishankar backed the 'two-state solution' to resolve the conflict at the meeting of G20 foreign ministers in Johannesburg. This was the first time an Indian minister reiterated India's support for the same since Trump announced his plan, sending the Arab world in a tizzy. On US efforts to end the Ukraine war engaging only Russia and not Ukraine, Jaishankar underlined India's position backing direct engagement between the two parties to end the conflict. "On the Middle East, we welcome the Gaza ceasefire and hostage release, support humanitarian assistance, condemn terrorism, and advocate a two-state solution," he said. TNN

ess in eastern Ladakh and the meeting between PM Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping two days later in Kazan. Jaishankar is likely to visit China later this year, followed by the summit that Beijing expects Modi to attend.