

Modi lands in Paris ahead of AI summit

Will Open India's First Consulate In Marseille, Head To US Tomorrow

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: PM Narendra Modi landed in France late on Monday for a two-day visit during which he will co-chair an action summit on AI with French President Emmanuel Macron and hold a bilateral meeting with him to deepen strategic partnership between the two countries.

Shortly after his arrival, Modi attended Macron's welcome dinner for leaders participating in the summit, including German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, Canadian PM Justin Trudeau, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and US Vice President JD Vance. From France, Modi will travel to Washington on Wednesday for a two-day visit to the US.

Ahead of his departure,

Modi said the summit in France will explore a collaborative approach to AI for innovation and larger public good in an inclusive, secure and trustworthy manner.

On his bilateral meeting with President Donald Trump, Modi said he will look to deepen ties between the two countries in technology, trade, defence, energy, and supply chain resilience. He said both will work for "mutual benefit of people of our two countries and shape a better future for the world".

"I look forward to meeting my friend, President Trump. This will be our first meeting following his historic electoral victory and inauguration in Jan. I have a warm recollection of working together in his first term in building a Comprehensive Global Stra-



PM Modi being welcomed on his arrival in Paris on Monday

tegic Partnership between India and the US," said Modi.

"This visit will be an opportunity to build upon the successes of our collaboration in his first term and develop an agenda to further elevate and deepen our partnership," he added.

On his engagement with Macron, Modi said it will provide an opportunity to review the progress on 2047 Horizon Roadmap for India-France strategic partnership along with Macron.

"We will also travel to the historic French city of Marseille to inaugurate the first Indian Consulate in France and also visit International Thermonuclear Experimental Reactor project, in which India is a member of the consortium of partner countries including France, to harness energy for the global good," said Modi, adding he will also pay tribute to Indian soldiers who laid down their lives during World Wars I and II at Mazargues War Cemetery.

Amid Trump's threats, India backs Chabahar port in Iran

New Delhi: As the Trump administration threatens to roll back the sanction waiver that allowed India to develop the strategic Chabahar port in Iran, New Delhi Monday strongly backed the port saying it has provided a much-needed alternative route to Afghanistan for its reconstruction and economic development, while boosting trade linkages with Central Asia, reports **Sachin Parashar**.

The remarks by a senior official in ministry of external affairs (MEA) follow the US restoration last week of its "maximum pressure" campaign on Iran to deny it all paths to a nuclear weapon and

Palestinians won't have right to return under Trump's Gaza plan

Enclave A 'Big Real Estate Site', US 'Committed To Owning It': Prez

President Donald Trump said Palestinians in Gaza would not have a right to return under his plan for US "ownership" of the war-torn territory, contradicting other officials in his administration who have sought to argue Trump was only calling for the temporary relocation of its population.

Less than a week after he floated his plan for the US to take control of Gaza and turn it in "the Riviera of the Middle East", Trump, in an interview with Fox News' Bret Baier that was set to air on Monday, said "No, they wouldn't" when asked if Palestinians in Gaza would be have a right to return to the territory. It comes as he has ramped up pressure on Arab states, especially US allies Jordan and Egypt, to take in Palestinians from Gaza, who claim the territory as part of a future homeland. "We'll build safe communities, a little bit away from where they are, where all of this danger is," Trump said. "In the meantime, I would own this. Think of it as a real estate development for the future. It



TRUMP COMPARES ISRAELI HOSTAGES TO 'HOLOCAUST SURVIVORS'
Trump said he was losing patience with the ceasefire deal after seeing footage of Hamas releasing hostages, whose appearance he compared to Holocaust survivors. 'They look like they haven't had a meal in a month'

would be a beautiful piece of land. No big money spent."

On Sunday too, Trump reiterated his proposal for the US to take over Gaza, telling reporters on Air Force One that the strip of land was "a big real estate site" that the US was "going to own". Trump said the US is committed "to owning it, taking it and making sure that Hamas doesn't move back", adding that "we may give it to other states in the Middle East to build sections of it."

Trump's comments added even more confusion around the proposal, which he first announced last week at a news conference at the White House alongside PM Netanyahu of Is-

rael. The idea has drawn widespread international condemnation, with some critics likening it to ethnic cleansing.

Trump also said that he was disturbed by the emaciated condition of Israeli hostages released this weekend and suggested he was losing patience with the ceasefire deal between Israel and Hamas. Trump said the hostages "look like they haven't had a meal in a month. No reason for that, and I don't know how much longer we can take it." He compared their condition to that of "Holocaust survivors." Trump didn't detail any steps he might take, though he said he was committed to ridding Gaza of Hamas. AGENCIES

Hamas says Israel violated truce deal, to delay next hostage release

Jerusalem: A Hamas spokesman on Monday accused Israel of violating the ceasefire agreement with the group, including targeting Palestinians in Gaza with air strikes, and said that next Saturday's hostage release would be delayed.

Israel and Hamas are in the midst of a six-week ceasefire during which Hamas is releasing dozens of the hostages captured in its Oct. 7, 2023, attack in exchange for nearly 2,000 Palestinian prisoners. The sides have carried out five swaps since the ceasefire went into effect last month, freeing 21 hostages and over 730 prisoners.

Abu Obeida, the spokesperson for Hamas' military wing, the Al-Qassam Brigades, accused Israel on Monday of systematically violating the ceasefire agreement over the past three weeks. "This includes delays in allowing displaced Palestinians to return to northern Gaza, targeting them with airstrikes and gunfire across various areas of the Strip, and failing to facilitate the entry of humanitarian aid as agreed." AP

3rd judge blocks Trump's EO

Amid Trump's threats, India backs Chabahar port in Iran

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The remarks by a senior official in ministry of external affairs (MEA) follow the US restoration last week of its "maximum pressure" campaign on Iran to deny it all paths to a nuclear weapon and counter its "malign influence" abroad. It saw US President Donald Trump signing a memorandum that calls upon Secretary of State to modify or rescind sanction waivers, particularly those that provide Iran "any degree of economic or financial relief, including those related to Iran's Chabahar port project".

The remarks, at an event to mark the 46th anniversary of Islamic Revolution of Iran, came days before PM Modi's bilateral meeting with Trump in Washington Thursday.

"Regional connectivity has been an important pillar of India, Iran ties. Development of Chabahar port in southeastern Iran reflects our joint vision for connectivity for mutual benefits," said MEA secretary (east) Jaideep Mazumdar, while describing signing of the long-term contract for development of Chabahar port in May last year as a "significant milestone in India-Iran ties". "The port has emerged as the connecting point for the region in delivering humanitarian assistance, especially during Covid," added the official.

Bangladesh Election Commissioner vows to remain neutral in elections

DHAKA, Feb 10 (IANS)

CHIEF Election Commissioner (CEC) of Bangladesh, AMM Nasir Uddin, has said the Commission does not intend to support or oppose any political party and vowed to remain neutral, local media reported.

"We, in the Commission, do not want to engage in politics. We do not want to stand for or against any political party," he said, adding, "We want to remain neutral." He made these remarks while addressing the annual general meeting and prize distribution ceremony of the Reporters Forum for Election and Democracy (RFED) at Nirbachan Bhaban in the capital



on Sunday, reports the country's leading newspaper, 'The Daily Star.'

Nasir Uddin also stated that political control over the Election Commission was the main reason behind criticism of its role.

"This is the biggest reason why the Election Commission has been subjected to political control. There may be hundreds of reasons, but I believe political control over the EC is the most significant factor," he said.

The CEC reaffirmed the commission's commitment to conduct elections in a free, fair and credible manner.

The statement gives a glimmer of hope for the restoration of democracy in a conflict-ridden Bangladesh. The unceremonious exit of Sheikh Hasina by a major political coup was a setback to democracy.

The mass violence in Bangladesh had not only dealt a blow to its fragile democracy but also undermined the potential of being a secular state. Bangladesh is set for elections in late 2025 or early 2026, which is being seen as the only viable solution to the existing crisis in the country.

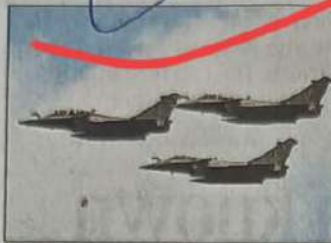
India-France strategic ties to get major boost with Rafale & Scorpene deals

Rajat.Pandit@timesofindia.com

New Delhi: India's expansive strategic partnership with France is set to get a further boost with two mega deals being virtually finalised for direct acquisition of 26 Rafale-Marine fighters, as well as the construction of three additional Scorpene submarines, which will collectively be worth almost Rs 1 lakh crore (Euro 10.6 billion).

As PM Narendra Modi left for Paris on Monday, govt sources told TOI that the Rs 63,000 crore deal for 22 single-seat Rafale-M jets and four twin-seat trainers for Navy is now with the cabinet committee for security (CCS), awaiting the final nod.

The Rs 33,500 crore deal for 3 additional diesel-electric Scorpene submarines, to be constructed by Mazagon Docks



SOARING HIGHER

(MDL) in collaboration with French Naval Group, in turn, will soon head for CCS after inter-ministerial consultations. "CCS will take up the Rafale-M deal after the PM returns from France-US trip. The cost negotiations for Scorpenes took a little longer because MDL had originally quoted a high price. The aim is to ink both deals before this fiscal ends on March 31," a source said.

The two countries are also discussing a possible collaboration between French major

Safran, which already makes helicopter engines in India, and DRDO to co-develop the 110 kilonewton jet engine for the Indian fifth-generation stealth fighter project, AMCA (advanced medium combat aircraft). But that is in the future. The impending govt-to-govt Rafale-M deal includes weapons, simulators, crew training and five-year performance-based logistics support as well as spares for the 36 Rafales already inducted by IAF under the Rs 59,000 crore contract in Sept 2016.

The 26 Rafale-M jets manufactured by Dassault Aviation, with "specific enhancements" to operate from the deck of indigenous aircraft carrier INS Vikrant, will be delivered in 37 to 65 months after inking of the contract. "The new inter-governmental agreement mirrors the

one inked in the IAF deal. All jets are to be delivered by 2030-31," a source said.

The first of the three additional Scorpenes, in turn, will roll out of MDL in six years, followed by the other two at intervals of a year each, after the contract is inked. The deal's cost does not yet include the price of fitting them with the fuel cell-based air-independent propulsion (AIP) developed by DRDO for greater underwater endurance.

The three new Scorpenes will have "some design modifications and improvements" over the first six such Kalvari-class vessels constructed at MDL for over Rs 23,000 crore. The plan is to fit them with the indigenous AIP, while the first six operational Scorpenes will progressively get it when they come for their scheduled refits.

IAF's Tejas & Su-30, American F-35, Russian Su-57 dominate 1st flying display at Aero India



World's most advanced 5th-generation stealth fighter planes, Russia's Su-57 and America's F-35, parked at the same bay at Aero India show in Bengaluru on Monday

Chethan.Kumar@timesofindia.com

Bengaluru: The first flying display at this edition of Aero India was dominated by fighter jets — IAF's Tejas and Su-30, the American F-35, and the Russian Su-57. With IAF's Sarang not performing, Surya Kiran Aerobatic Team (Skat) garnered the most applause as the lone aerobatic team here.

While Tejas, Su-30, Jaguar, IJT, and Rafale participated in the official flypast along with helicopters (Mi-17 and LUH) and Skat, the inaugural flying display only saw Tejas and Su-30 among the fighters.

The flypast began with paragliders from IAF's Akash Ganga team jumping off an AN-32, followed by the "Dhwaj" formation with three Mi 17 helicopters carrying the tricolour, the IAF flag, and the Aero India flag. This was followed by three LCA-Mk1A Tejas aircraft and three LUH in "Bhim" formation, and three Coast Guard Dornier aircraft in "Rakshak" formation.

Two more Dorniers accompa-

nied an AN-32 transport aircraft, which were followed by LCA-Mk1A in "Yodha" formation, two Hawks and MiG-29s along with a P81 aircraft in "Varuna" formation, and the big C-130 accompanied by two C-295 aircraft in "Saathi" formation.

The flypast ended with five Jaguar aircraft in "Arjun" formation, an Airborne Early Warning and Control System Embraer aircraft flanked by two Su-30 fighters, a Rafale with Su-30 and, finally, three Su-30 fighters in "Trishul" formation.

Skat, Su-57, and F-35 rule the skies

The flying display was kicked off by HAL's HTT-40 and IJT before Tejas-Mk1A soared, performing multiple stunts. Su-30 was the show-stopper with its moves. The morning flying display ended with a fine spectacle by Skat, making up for the absence of its partner Sarang (which was reported in these columns last Friday).

The afternoon display belonged to the two fifth-generation fighters from Russia and the US — Su-57 and F-35.

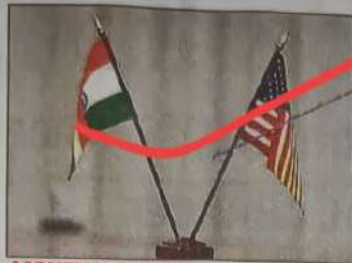
25% steel tariff won't hit India's shipments to US

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Officials are also laying store by US' strategic requirement to have good strategic ties with India, that Trump may not breach New Delhi's pain barrier on threshold.

Though Modi and Trump have enjoyed a good rapport since the latter's first term, the govt recognises that nothing can be taken for granted while dealing with a US president who sees himself as a transactionalist with an unrivalled capability to get the best deals for the US.

While the proposed 25% tariff on steel and aluminium has rocked the world, it is unlikely to have a significant impact on India's shipments to the US. During the last fiscal year, India's export of iron and steel was estimated at \$475 million, with iron and steel products adding up to another \$2.8 billion. Export of aluminium



MONEY MATTERS

and articles made of this metal were estimated at just under \$950 million in 2023-24. The largest sources of US steel imports are Brazil, Canada and Mexico, followed by South Korea and Vietnam, according to govt and American Iron and Steel Institute data.

In 2018, the previous Trump administration had imposed 25% tariff on steel and 10% on aluminium, citing national security concerns. These tariffs covered most primary steel products, except stainless steel, and included steel pipes and

tubes. The tariffs applied to most countries, triggering a wave of retaliatory measures and escalating tensions in global trade. This had also prompted American auto companies to slash production.

Trump had clubbed India, along with China, Brazil and Mexico, as a high-tariff country and threatened action. So far, however, India has not faced any specific action and both sides have spoken about strengthening trade and economic relations. Modi's meeting with the US president is expected to only smoothen the process, given the close bond that the two leaders share.

Trump's announcement pushed up gold prices, seen as a safe haven during turbulent times, while the dollar inched higher. While the sensx closed 550 points lower on Monday, global stocks seem to have shrugged off the threat. Global markets have been on the edge, wary of a possi-

ble trade war. The prospect of higher tariffs on Chinese steel and aluminium in particular is, however, not good news for India as the domestic industry is already complaining of cheap imports flooding the markets. This could get worse if Trump goes ahead with his plan, likely Monday, as China would look at the vast Indian market to cover some of the probable losses in the US.

The domestic steel industry has petitioned govt to impose 20-25% safeguard duty on steel to shield domestic players from predatory imports. Small businesses and exporters are, however, wary of these levies and have sought a "balanced response" so that Indian consumers do not end up paying more. An analysis by GTRI showed that India's iron and steel imports have grown from \$10.4 billion in FY2018, when the US-China trade war began, to \$18.6 billion in FY2024.