

INDIA-US PROPOSED TRADE PACT

Indian team to visit Washington next week

NEW DELHI, Apr 19 (PTI)

THE terms of references (ToRs) finalised by India and the US for the proposed bilateral trade agreement include around 19 chapters covering issues such as tariffs, goods, non-tariff barriers, and customs facilitation, official sources said.

To give further impetus to the talks in the 90-day tariff pause window, an Indian official team will be visiting Washington next week to iron out differences on certain issues before formally launching negotiations for the proposed India-US bilateral trade agreement (BTA).

India's chief negotiator, Additional Secretary in the Department of Commerce Rajesh Agrawal, will lead the team for the first in-person talks between the two countries. Agrawal was appointed as the next commerce secretary on April 18. He will assume

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office from October 1.

The three-day Indian official team's talks with the US counterparts in Washington will start from Wednesday (April 23).

"Both sides will discuss the level of ambition. The ToRs will be further developed and discussed. What will be the pathway for talks? The ToRs will include issues like tariffs, non-tariff barriers, rules of origin, and regulatory matters," the official said, adding general contours of the pact will be discussed, besides scheduling, so that things can be finalised in 90 days.

The three-day deliberations assume significance, as a senior Government official had earlier said that an interim trade agreement between India and the US could be finalised in the 90-day tariff pause announced by the Trump administration if it is a "win-win" for both sides.

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India's first prototype fast-breeder reactor to be commissioned by 2026

NEW DELHI, Apr 19 (PTI)

INDIA'S first prototype fast-breeder reactor in Tamil Nadu's Kalpakkam is expected to be commissioned next year, nearly two years after it got the go-ahead from the nuclear regulator, officials have said.

The commissioning of the Prototype Fast Breeder Reactor (PFBR) will mark the second stage of India's three-stage nuclear programme that aims to recycle spent fuel to reduce the inventory of radioactive waste.

The PFBR being developed in Kalpakkam is the first-of-its-kind nuclear reactor to use plutonium-based mixed oxide as fuel and liquid sodium as coolant. It will also utilise the spent fuel of Pressurised Heavy Water Reactors, which form the mainstay of nuclear power in India at present.

While the State-run Nuclear Power Corporation of India Limited (NPCIL) operates nuclear power plants in the country, the PFBR in Kalpakkam is being developed by the Bharatiya Nabhikiya Vidyut Nigam (BHAVINI).

"BHAVINI's 500 MW PFBR is in the advanced stage of integrated commissioning, with expected first criticality by 2025-26," Department of Atomic Energy officials recently told the parliamentary standing committee on science and technology. They had told the committee that the first criticality of the PFBR was expected to be



achieved in March and the plant would be completed by September 2026.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi witnessed the commencement of core loading in the nuclear reactor in March last year.

Last July, the Atomic Energy Regulatory Board (AERB) granted permission for loading of fuel, first approach to criticality and

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President Putin announces Easter ceasefire in Ukraine

MOSCOW, Apr 19 (AP)

RUSSIAN President Vladimir Putin announced a temporary Easter ceasefire in Ukraine, citing humanitarian reasons, the Kremlin said Saturday.

The announcement came on the same day as Russia's Defence Ministry said its forces pushed Ukrainian troops from one of their last remaining footholds in Russia's Kursk region where the Ukrainians staged a surprise incursion last year.

According to the Kremlin, the ceasefire will last from 6 pm Moscow time (1500 GMT) on Saturday to midnight (2100 GMT) following Easter Sunday.

"We assume that the Ukrainian side will follow our example. At the same time, our troops must

be ready to repel possible violations of the truce and provocations from the enemy, any of his aggressive actions," Putin said at a meeting with Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov, in a video broadcast by the Kremlin's Press Service.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy called the ceasefire "another attempt by Putin to play with human lives". He wrote on X that "air raid alerts are spreading across Ukraine," and "Shahed drones in our skies reveal Putin's true attitude toward Easter and toward human life."

Putin's announcement came after US President Donald Trump on Friday said negotiations between Ukraine and Russia are "coming to a head" and insisted that neither side is "playing" him

in his push to end the grinding three-year war.

RUSSIA, UKRAINE SWAP HUNDREDS OF PRISONERS IN WAR'S LARGEST EXCHANGE: RUSSIA and Ukraine said they each swapped hundreds of prisoners in the largest exchange since the Russian full-scale invasion started over three years ago.

Russia's Ministry of Defence said 246 Russian service members were returned from territory controlled by Kyiv, and that "as a gesture of goodwill" 31 wounded Ukrainian prisoners of war were transferred in exchange for 15 wounded Russian soldiers in need of urgent medical care. Ukrainian President Volodymyr said that 277 Ukrainian "warriors have returned home from Russian camps."

US to give nod for Russian control of Crimea in peace talks with Ukraine

WASHINGTON, Apr 19 (IANS)

THE US is reportedly prepared to recognise Russian control of the Ukrainian region of Crimea as part of a broader peace agreement between Moscow and Kyiv. The potential concession is the latest signal that President Donald Trump is eager to cement a ceasefire deal, and comes as he and Secretary of State Marco Rubio suggested on Friday that the administration is prepared to move on from its peace-brokering efforts unless progress is made quickly.

Crimea was taken by the Kremlin in 2014 following an invasion and subsequent referendum held under occupation, and the international community has resisted recognising the peninsula as Russian to avoid legitimising the illegal annexation. Doing so risks undermining international laws and treaties prohibiting the taking of land through use of force. But the move would be a boon for Russian President Vladimir Putin, who has long sought international recognition of Russian sovereignty in Crimea.

Iran, US conclude 2nd round of negotiations over Tehran's nuclear programme in Rome

ROME, Apr 19 (AP)

A SECOND round of negotiations between Iran and the United States here over Tehran's rapidly advancing nuclear programme ended on Saturday after several hours of talks, Iranian and American officials said.

There was no immediate readout on how the talks went at the Omani Embassy in Rome's Camilluccia neighbourhood.

A convoy carrying US envoy Steve Witkoff left as Iranian state television announced the talks' conclusion, with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi leaving a few minutes later.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei told Iranian state TV immediately after the negotiations that Iran

"will continue the path of the talks with seriousness" to see crippling economic sanctions on his country lifted. "Iran will continue as far as talks go on in a constructive and purposeful way," he added.

AUS official also confirmed the talks ended, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the closed-door talks.

Iranian officials described the talks as indirect, like those last weekend in Muscat, Oman, with Omani Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi shuttling between them in different rooms.

That talks are even happening represents a historic moment, given the decades of enmity between the two countries since the 1979 Islamic Revolution and the US Embassy hostage crisis.

President Donald Trump, in his first term, unilaterally withdrew from Iran's nuclear deal with world powers in 2018, setting off years of attacks and negotiations that failed to restore the accord that drastically limited Tehran's enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions. Talks come as tensions rise in the Mideast: At risk is a possible American or Israeli military strike on Iran's nuclear sites, or the Iranians following through on their threats to pursue an atomic weapon.

Meanwhile, tensions in the Middle East have spiked over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip and after US airstrikes targeting Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthi rebels killed more than 70 people and wounded dozens

more. "I'm for stopping Iran, very simply, from having a nuclear weapon," Trump said Friday. "I want Iran to be great and prosperous and terrific."

Araghchi met Saturday morning with Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani ahead of the talks with Witkoff. Rafael Mariano Grossi, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, the United Nations' nuclear watchdog, also met Tajani on Saturday.

Grossi's agency would likely be key in verifying compliance by Iran should a deal be reached, as it did with the 2015 accord Iran reached with world powers.

Tajani said Italy was ready "to facilitate the continuation of the talks even for sessions at the technical level."

PM Modi to visit Saudi Arabia from April 22-23

NEW DELHI, Apr 19 (ANI)

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi will embark on a visit to Saudi Arabia next week at the invitation of Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. According to the Ministry of External Affairs, the upcoming April 22-23 visit will be the first visit of the Prime Minister to the country in his third term.

Previously, he has travelled to the Saudi kingdom twice in 2016 and in 2019.

The visit follows the State Visit of Mohammed bin Salman to New Delhi in September 2023 to attend the G20 Summit and co-chair the first meeting of the India-Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership Council.

India and Saudi Arabia share close and friendly ties with a long history of socio-cultural and trade contacts. As strategic partners, the two countries share

India calls out Pak's shenanigans in OIC, calls it 'habit of longstanding'

NEW DELHI, Apr 19 (IANS)

INDIA on Saturday yet again slammed Pakistan's repeated attempts to highlight matters concerning India's internal affairs at the meetings of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

At a media briefing organised ahead of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-day visit to Saudi Arabia next week, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri debunked Pakistan's false claims and attempts to misuse

the forum.

"It is a habit of longstanding, one that we have regularly spoken out against and also raised with our friends and partners in the OIC. There is a certain view about these shenanigans that Pakistan practices in the OIC on the part of our colleagues and friends amongst the other members of the OIC but we will continue to share our views and bring to their attention what exactly we think of these attempts that Pakistan habitually makes," Misri said.

strong bilateral relations across various areas, including political, defence, security, trade, investment, energy, technology, health, education, culture and

people-to-people ties.

The visit of PM Modi reflects the importance India attaches to its bilateral relationship with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.