

Ready to conclude FTA that worked for both sides, Starmer tells Modi

By Aditi Khanna
LONDON, July 6 (PTI)

BRITAIN'S newly-elected Prime Minister Keir Starmer spoke to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday morning and said he stood ready to conclude a Free Trade Agreement that worked for both sides, Downing Street said.

India and the UK have been negotiating a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) for over two years with a Conservative Party-led government but the talks were stalled in the 14th round amidst the general election cycles in both countries.

It is now expected to be picked up by the new Starmer-led Labour government, which was voted in with a landslide this week.

"The Prime Minister [Starmer] said he looked forward to further deepening the strong and respectful relationship between both countries, and welcomed Prime Minister Modi's leadership on key global challenges, such as climate

New UK PM creates 'Mission Delivery Boards' for new Cabinet

LONDON, July 6 (PTI)

BRITISH Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Saturday presided over his first Cabinet meeting and created "Mission Delivery Boards" for his ministers, including British Indian Culture Secretary Lisa Nandy, to drive through the "change" he said the public had voted for in the general election.

The newly-elected leader addressed his first televised press conference as Prime Minister at 10 Downing Street right after the meeting to update the country on how he intends to meet the tar-

gets he has set for the new Labour Party Government, including fixing a "broken" National Health Service (NHS).

"The entire Cabinet that we will be judged on actions not on words," said Starmer.

"At the Cabinet meeting, I also discussed delivery, how we would put into action the plan that we have set out in our manifesto. We will have Mission Delivery Boards to drive through the change that we need, and I will be chairing those boards to make sure that it's clear to everyone that they are my priorities in Government," he said.

change and economic growth," the spokesperson noted.

The leaders are then said to have discussed the importance of the "living bridge" between both countries, and the 2030 Roadmap and are said to have agreed that there was a wide

range of areas across defence and security, critical and emerging technology, and climate change, for the two countries to deepen cooperation on.

"Discussing the Free Trade Agreement, the Prime Minister said he stood ready to conclude



Britain's Prime Minister Keir Starmer, center, with Deputy Prime Minister Angela Rayner, center right, hosts his first Cabinet meeting at 10 Downing Street, London, on Saturday. (AP/PTI)

a deal that worked for both sides. The leaders hoped to meet at the earliest opportunity," the spokesperson added.

Both sides have been working towards clinching an pact to enhance the GBP 38.1 billion bilateral trading partnership since January 2022, when Boris Johnson was the British Prime Minister.

The talks have since had to contend with political turmoil in the UK that first led to a

short-lived Liz Truss premiership followed by Rishi Sunak as Britain's first Prime Minister of Indian heritage.

The Labour Party's election manifesto for Thursday's polls committed to clinching the deal, stating: "We will seek a new strategic partnership with India, including an FTA, as well as deepening cooperation in areas like security, education, technology and climate change."

Starmer says, controversial Rwanda deportation plan is 'dead and buried'

LONDON, July 6 (AP)

BRITISH Prime Minister Keir Starmer said Saturday that he is scrapping a controversial Conservative policy to deport asylum-seekers to Rwanda.

"The Rwanda scheme was dead and buried before it started," Starmer said in his first news conference. "It's never acted as a deterrent. Almost the opposite."

The move was one of Starmer's first acts in office, though it was widely expected. He had said during his campaign that he would ditch the plan that has cost hundreds of millions of

dollars, but never taken flight. The Rwanda plan was one of the showcase policies of former Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to try to curb migrants from making dangerous English Channel crossings.

Starmer made the announcement after holding his first Cabinet meeting, the day after his Labour Party's landslide victory overturned 14 years of Conservative rule. But it was beset with challenges over human rights issues and never managed to deport a single person despite spending hundreds of millions of dollars in a pact with the east African nation.

The new Starmer-led Government's new Foreign Secretary, David Lammy, is also on the record saying that he wants to "finish the job" on the FTA and said he plans to visit India within the first month of being elected.

"My message to [Finance] Minister Sitharaman and [Trade] Minister Goyal is that Labour is ready to go. Let's finally get our free trade deal done and move on," he said at the India Global Forum in London last week.

Assam floods

situation still critical, toll 52

Bihar rivers close to danger mark after torrential rain

NEW DELHI, July 6 (PTI)

WATER level in different rivers in Bihar started rising at many places and the flood situation in Assam remained critical with 24.5 lakh people in 30 districts affected as torrential rain battered eastern parts India.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah spoke to Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma to take stock of the flood situation and said the National Disaster Response Force and the State Disaster Response Force were working on a war footing to rescue and provide relief to the affected people.

Thirteen people were killed in rain-related incidents across Uttar Pradesh in the last 24 hours, State's relief department officials said.

Assam has been reeling from floods, with more than 24.5 lakh people affected in 30 districts and major rivers flowing above the danger level at several places. Cachar, Kamrup, Dhubri, Nagaon, Goalpara, Barpeta, Dibrugarh,



Locals cross a flooded area on a boat in Balimuk village of Morigaon district on Saturday.

(PTI)

Bongaigaon, Lakhimpur, Jorhat, Kokrajhar, Karimganj, and Tinsukia are among the districts affected.

Flood in urban areas of three districts of Kamrup (Metropolitan), Kamrup and Dibrugarh was also reported.

So far, 52 people have been killed in this year's flood while 12 others were killed in land-

slides and storms.

The Brahmaputra river is flowing above the danger mark in Nimatighat, Guwahati, Goalpara and Dhubri.

The Barak river is flowing above the danger mark in AP Ghat, BP Ghat, Chota Bakra and Fuletral, and its tributaries Dhaleswari in Gharmura, Katakhal in Matizuri and

Kushiyara in Karimganj town.

The devastating flood in the Kaziranga National Park has claimed 114 wild animals while 95 were rescued till Saturday.

In Bihar, light to moderate rain was recorded in many districts since July 4, according to the latest rainfall bulletin issued by the water resources department.

India donates digital equipment worth Rs 300 mn to 200 schools in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO, July 6 (PTI)

DESCRIBING it as “a project for posterity,” India on Saturday donated digital equipment, including 2,000 Tabs, worth Rs 300 million for use by 200 schools in the southern province of Sri Lanka.

A ceremony in the southern district of Galle, attended by President Ranil Wickremesinghe and Indian High Commissioner Santosh Jha, marked a significant step towards educational modernisation, with the provision of 200 Smart Classrooms and 2,000 Tabs to 200 schools in the

Southern Province.

“Following a request by the Minister of Health and Industry, Dr Ramesh Pathirana, the Government of India allocated Rs 300 million to the Southern Provincial Council for this project. Of the 200 selected schools, 150 are in the Galle district, while the remaining 50 are in the Hambantota and Matara districts,” a statement from the President’s Media Division (PMD) said.

Additionally, 2,000 Tabs were distributed, with each of the 200 classrooms receiving 10 Tabs, the statement said.

“We deeply appreciate the

support extended by neighbouring India in advancing modern technology. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has expressed interest in establishing an Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) campus in Sri Lanka, which is highly appreciated,” Wickremesinghe said. “Additionally, negotiations to enhance cooperation in the energy sector with India are progressing successfully,” he said.

Pathirana and Minister of Education Dr Susil Premajayantha, both appreciated India’s assistance in their respective speeches.

Masoud Pezeshkian elected Iran President

- Pezeshkian gets 16.3 million votes against his rival Saeed Jalili's 13.5 million votes

DUBAI, July 6 (AP)

REFORMIST candidate Masoud Pezeshkian won Iran's runoff presidential election on Saturday, besting hard-liner Saeed Jalili by promising to reach out to the West and ease enforcement on the country's mandatory headscarf law after years of sanctions and protests squeezing the Islamic Republic.

Pezeshkian promised no radical changes to Iran's Shiite theocracy in his campaign and long has held Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei as the final arbiter of all matters of state in the country. But even Pezeshkian's modest aims will



Reformist candidate for the Iran's presidential election Masoud Pezeshkian leaves a polling station after casting his vote in Shahre-e-Qods near Tehran, Iran on Friday. (AP/PTI)

be challenged by an Iranian Government still largely held by hard-liners, the ongoing Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip, and Western fears over Tehran enriching uranium to

near-weapons-grade levels.

A vote count offered by authorities put Pezeshkian as the winner with 16.3 million votes to Jalili's 13.5 million in Friday's election. Overall, Iran's

Interior Ministry said 30 million people voted in an election held without internationally recognised monitors.

Supporters of Pezeshkian, a heart surgeon and long-time lawmaker, entered the streets of Tehran and other cities before dawn to celebrate as his lead grew over Jalili, a hard-line former nuclear negotiator.

"Dear people of Iran, the elections are over and this is just the beginning of our cooperation," Pezeshkian wrote on the social platform X, still banned in Iran.

"The difficult path ahead will not be smooth except with your companionship, empathy and trust. I extend my hand to you and I swear on my honour that I will not leave you alone on this path. Do not leave me alone."

Pezeshkian's win still sees Iran at a delicate moment, with

tensions high in the Mideast over the Israel-Hamas war, Iran's advancing nuclear programme, and a looming election in the United States that could put any chance of a detente between Tehran and Washington at risk. Pezeshkian's victory also wasn't a rout of Jalili, meaning he'll have to carefully navigate Iran's internal politics as the doctor has never held a sensitive, high-level security post.

The first round of voting on June 28 saw the lowest turnout in the history of the Islamic Republic since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Iranian officials have long pointed to turnout as a sign of support for the country's Shiite theocracy, which has been under strain after years of sanctions crushing Iran's economy, mass demonstrations and intense crackdowns on all dissent.



Session from ~~July 22~~

FM Sitharaman to present Union Budget on July 23

ommendation of Government of India, has approved the proposal for summoning of both the Houses of Parliament for the Budget Session, 2024 from 22nd July, 2024 to 12 August, 2024 (Subject to exigencies of Parliamentary Business)."

This will be the first Budget presented by the Government led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in its third term amid high anticipation following President Droupadi Murmu's assertion that it will be marked by many historic steps.

In her address to a joint sitting of Parliament, she had said major social and economic decisions will be a highlight of the budget.

After having presented an interim budget ahead of the Lok Sabha polls, the Finance Minister will now present the full Budget for 2024-25 that ensures the economy continues on the high growth trajectory and creates more jobs during the Modi 3.0 Government.

NEW DELHI, July 6 (PTI)

PARLIAMENT'S Budget Session will be held between July 22 and August 12, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju said on Saturday.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present the Budget on July 23.

Rijju said, "Hon'ble President of India, on the rec-

India unveils light tank 'Zorawar'

DRDO chief reviews advanced trials

HAJIRA, July 6 (ANI)

IN A major boost to Indian forces deployed opposite China in Ladakh, premier defence research agency Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and private sector firm Larsen and Toubro (L&T) are at advanced stage of trials of the indigenous Light Tank 'Zorawar'.

DRDO chief Dr Samir V Kamat today reviewed the progress made in the project at the Larsen and Toubro plant at Hajira in Gujarat.

Developed in a record time of two years for high altitude areas of Ladakh, the tank is testimony to Indian progress in indigenous manufacturing.

The DRDO and L&T have integrated USVs in loitering munitions in the tank learning lessons from the Russia and Ukraine conflict.

The light tank 'Zorawar' with 25 tonnes in weight and it is the first time, a fresh tank has been designed and made ready for trials in such a short time. 59 of these tanks will be provided to the Army initially and it will be a front runner for the major programme of 295 more of these

armoured vehicles.

The Indian Air Force can supply two tanks at a time in the C-17 class transport aircraft as the tank is light and can be run at high speeds in mountain valleys.

The trials are expected to be completed in the next 12-18 months and be ready for induction. Even though the first ammunition is coming from Belgium, the DRDO is ready to develop the ammunition indigenously.

'ZORAWAR' EXPECTED TO BE INDUCTED INTO INDIAN ARMY BY 2027, SAYS KAMAT: DRDO chief Samir V Kamath said on Saturday that 'Zorawar' is expected to be inducted into the Indian Army by the year 2027 after all trials. The DRDO chief told ANI, "It's indeed a momentous day for all of us to see the light tank in action. It makes me happy and proud. It's indeed an example.

In a short period of two years to two and a half years, we have not only designed this tank but made a first prototype and now the first prototype will undergo development trials over the next six months, and then we will be ready to offer it to our users for user trials.