

INDIA, UK BOTH COMMITTED TO FTA: GOYAL

NEW DELHI, July 10 (PTI)

COMMERCE and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Wednesday said both India and the UK are committed to the proposed free trade agreement (FTA) between the two countries.



He said that the initial comments made by the new UK Government are "very" encouraging. "The Labour Party is deeply committed as is the Modi Government (for the FTA)," he told reporters here. Britain's newly-elected Prime Minister Keir Starmer spoke to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on

Saturday and said he stood ready to conclude an FTA that worked for both sides. The two leaders agreed to work towards the early conclusion of a mutually beneficial India-UK FTA. The India-UK talks for the proposed free trade agreement (FTA) began in January 2022. The 14th round of talks stalled as the two nations stepped into their general election cycles.

In an FTA, two or more trading partners either significantly reduce or eliminate customs duties on the maximum number of goods traded between them. Besides, they also ease norms to promote and facilitate trade in services and investments. There are pending issues in both the goods and services sectors. The Indian industry is demanding greater access for its skilled professionals from sectors like IT and

healthcare in the UK market, besides market access for several goods at nil customs duty.

On the other hand, the UK is seeking a significant cut in import duties on goods such as scotch whiskey, electric vehicles, lamb meat, chocolates and certain confectionary items. Britain is also looking for more opportunities for UK services in Indian markets in segments like telecommunications, legal and financial services (banking and insurance). Two countries are also negotiating a bilateral investment treaty. There are 26 chapters in agreement, which include goods, services, investments and intellectual property rights.

The bilateral trade between India and the UK increased to USD 21.34 billion in 2023-24 from 20.36 billion in 2022-23.

Assam flood situation improves marginally, 17 lakh hit



A woman walks through a flood-affected area in Nagaon district of Assam on Tuesday. (PTI)

GUWAHATI, Jul 10 (PTI)

THE flood situation in Assam improved marginally on Wednesday with water levels of major rivers showing a receding trend, reducing the affected population to 1.7 million across 26 districts, according to an official bulletin. Vast tracts

of land, however, remain inundated with sporadic rainfall reported from several districts.

Seven deaths were reported on Tuesday with two in Cachar and one each in Dhubri, Dhemaji, South Salmara, Nagaon and Sivasagar, according to the Assam State Disaster Management Authority

(ASDMA). The death toll in this year's floods, landslides and storms increased to 92 with 79 people losing their lives to the deluge alone. An area of 38,870.3 hectares of cropland was still inundated as against 49,014.06 hectares on Monday.

Among the worst-hit districts are Dhubri where 3,54,045 peo-

Waterlogging in Goa rly tunnel

PANAJI, July 10 (PTI)

TRAIN traffic on the Konkan Railway route was paralysed once again on Wednesday morning due to severe water-logging inside a tunnel at Pernem in Goa, leading to the cancellation and diversion of several trains and stranding passengers at various stations.

Goa has been receiving heavy rains for last three days. Although it witnessed moderate showers since Wednesday morning, Met Department issued a red alert predicting exceptionally heavy rainfall.

ple are affected, Cachar (1,81,545), Sivasagar (1,36,547), Barpeta (1,16,074) and

Light rain in Himachal, 28 roads shut

SHIMLA, July 10 (PTI)

LIGHT rain lashed parts of Himachal Pradesh, causing closure of 28 roads, officials said on Wednesday.

The State Emergency Operation Centre said that eight roads in Mandi, six in Shimla, five in Sirmour, four in Kangra, three in Kinnaur and two in Kullu districts were closed in the morning.

It added that 19 transformers and 16 water supply schemes were also disrupted. Baijnath received 32 mm rainfall in a 24-hour period, followed by Poanta sahib (18.4 mm), Dhaulakuan (17.5 mm), Palampur (8.3 mm) and Dalhousie (8 mm).



The Badrinath National highway blocked after a landslide in Chamoli on Wednesday. (PTI)

Golaghat (1,09,475). A total of 48,021 affected people have taken shelter in 507 relief camps

while relief materials have been distributed to 104,665 others outside these camps.

Indian Naval Ship Tabar arrives in Morocco

RABAT, July 10 (IANS)

INDIAN Navy's frontline frigate INS Tabar arrived at Casa Blanca in Morocco on Tuesday for a three-day visit.

"Morocco holds a unique geographical position sharing coastline with both the Mediterranean and Atlantic. The visit by INS Tabar will further strengthen our bonds and explore newer avenues for bolstering the relationship between the two navies. India and Morocco share warm bilateral relations that span diverse fields, including regular interactions between the two navies," a Navy official said.

He said that the ship is commanded by Captain MR Harish and has a complement of 280 personnel.

"The ship is part of the Indian Navy's Western Fleet which is based at Mumbai under the Western Naval Command. The ship is equipped with a versatile range of weapons and sensors and is among the earliest stealth frigates of the Indian Navy," he said.

INS Tabar is a stealth frigate built for the Indian Navy by the Russians.

The official said that during the three-day stay at Casablanca port, the ship's crew will undertake a number of professional interactions with the Royal Moroccan Navy.

He said that upon departure from Casablanca, the two navies would also undertake a PASSEX at sea.

"These engagements seek to enhance interoperability between the two navies. These interactions will also offer an opportunity for both the sides to observe and imbibe the 'Best Practices' from each other," the official said.

Make no mistake, Russia failing in this war: Biden

WASHINGTON, July 10 (PTI)

US PRESIDENT Joe Biden on Tuesday announced a historic donation of air-defence equipment for Ukraine and said Russia is failing in this war.

Welcoming leaders of NATO member countries for the historic summit on the occasion of its 75th anniversary, Biden said the United States, Germany, the Netherlands, Romania and Italy will provide Ukraine with the equipment for five additional strategic air-defence systems.

In the coming months, the US and its partners intend to provide Ukraine with dozens

of additional tactical air-defence systems, he said, adding that the US will make sure that when "we export tactical air-defence interceptors, Ukraine gets to the front of the line." "They will get this assistance before anyone else gets it. All told, Ukraine will receive hundreds of additional interceptors over the next year, helping protect Ukrainian cities against Russian missile and Ukrainian troops facing air attacks on their front lines," Biden said.

"Make no mistake, Russia is failing in this war. More than two years into (Russian President Vladimir) Putin's war

of choice, his losses are staggering. More than 350,000 Russian troops dead or wounded, nearly one million (10 lakh) Russians, many of them young people, have left Russia because they no longer see a future in Russia," he said.

"Kiev, remember fellas and ladies, was supposed to fall in five days? Remember? Well, it is still standing two and a half years later and will continue to stand. All of the allies knew that before this war, Putin thought NATO would break. Today, NATO is stronger than it has ever been in its history. When this senseless war began, Ukraine was a free country.

Today, it is still a free country," the US President said.

Reiterating that Putin's war of aggression against Ukraine continues, he said the Russian President wants nothing less than Ukraine's total subjugation to end that country's democracy, to destroy its culture and to wipe it off the map.

"We know Putin will not stop at Ukraine, but make no mistake, Ukraine can and will stop Putin," Biden said.

He said the war will end with Ukraine remaining a free and independent country. "Russia will not prevail. Ukraine will prevail. Ladies and gentlemen, this is a pivotal moment for

Europe, for the transatlantic community and I might add, for the world. Let us remember, the fact that NATO remains the bulwark of global security did not happen by accident," he said. "NATO is stronger, smarter and more energised than when you began. And a billion people across Europe or North America, indeed the whole world, will reap the rewards of your labour for years to come in the form of security, opportunity and greater freedom," the President said.

In his remarks, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said there are no cost-free options.

This is not time for war: India-Austria

Solutions to all global problems can't be found on battlefield, says PM Modi

VIENNA, July 10 (PTI)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday asserted that solutions to problems can't be found on the battlefield, and emphasised that dialogue and diplomacy is the only way to resolve global conflicts, particularly the ongoing war in Ukraine.

Modi said this during a joint press statement after holding "fruitful discussion" with Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer during which they discussed in detail the ongoing disputes in the world, including the Ukraine conflict and situation in West Asia, reaffirming that "this is not

the time for war".

Modi said both India and Austria strongly condemn terrorism and agree that it is not acceptable in any form. "This cannot be justified in anyway," he said.

Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer offered his country as a site for dialogue as a neutral country and said, India is an influential and credit-worthy country whose role is more than important when it comes to the Russia-Ukraine peace process.

Modi, who arrived here from Moscow after meeting Russian President Vladimir Putin on Tuesday night on a

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'Fruitful' bilateral talks

Modi, Nehammer discuss ways to tap full potential of bilateral ties

VIENNA, July 10 (PTI)

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday held 'fruitful' talks with Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer to discuss ways to tap the full potential of the bilateral partnership.

Modi received a ceremonial Guard of Honour ahead of talks at the Federal Chancellery here. He also signed the guest book.

"India-Austria scripting a new chapter in bilateral relations. PM @narendramodi warmly received by Austrian Chancellor @karlnehammer at the Federal Chancellery and accorded a ceremonial welcome." MEA Spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in a post on X, along with photographs of the welcome ceremony.

On Tuesday, Modi met Nehammer for a private engagement.

"An important milestone in India-Austria partnership! PM @narendramodi hosted by Austrian Chancellor @karlnehammer for a private engagement. This is the first meeting between the two leaders. Discussions on realising the full potential of bilateral partnership lie ahead." Jaiswal posted on X on Tuesday, along with photographs of the two leaders together in Vienna.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi being greeted by Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer upon the former's arrival in Vienna. (PTI)

Modi was seen hugging Nehammer in one of the photos, while in another, the Austrian Chancellor was seen clicking a selfie with the Prime Minister. Nehammer posted a photo of him and Modi on the microblogging platform and said: "Welcome to Vienna, PM @narendramodi! It is a pleasure and honour to

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Prime Minister Narendra Modi being greeted by Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer during the signing of guest book in Vienna, Austria on Wednesday. (PTI)



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being welcomed by the Indian diaspora upon his arrival in Vienna. (PTI)

India's role in peace process more than important: Austrian Chancellor

'Vande Mataram' in Vienna

NEW DELHI, July 10 (IANS)

A SPECIAL rendition of 'Vande Mataram' by Austrian artists greeted Prime Minister Narendra Modi at the hotel Ritz-Carlton in Vienna, where he arrived after a highly successful two-day visit to Russia.

Upon his arrival, PM Modi was welcomed by Austrian Chancellor Karl Nehammer at the airport. The two leaders then proceeded to the Ritz-Carlton hotel, where he was welcomed with the special performance of 'Vande Mataram'.

Austrian artists welcomed Modi with a rendition of Vande Mataram. The choir and orchestra were led by Vijay Upadhyaya.

Upadhyaya, 57, was born in Lucknow. In 1994 he became director of the Vienna University Philharmony. He is the Austrian representative on the jury of experts for the evaluation of European Union culture projects and is the founder and artistic director of the India National Youth Orchestra.

SC: Parl never sought to limit divorced Muslim woman's rights to 'iddat' period

'Such An Interpretation Would Be Regressive, Anti-Divorced Muslim Woman'

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We are inclined to conclude that equivalent rights of maintenance ascertained under both, the secular provision of Section 125 of CrPC 1973 and the personal law provision of Section 3 of the 1986 Act, parallelly exist in their distinct domains and jurisprudence, thereby, leading to their harmonious construction and continued existence of the right to seek maintenance for a divorced Muslim woman under the provisions of CrPC 1973 despite the enactment of the 1986 Act," Justice Masih said, adding that Parliament never sought to restrict the rights of a divorced Muslim woman to the 'iddat' period. 'Iddat' refers to the period of time for which a Muslim woman must wait before she can remarry, 3 months in case of a divorce.

The Muslim Women (Protection of Rights on Di-



This court will not countenance unjust or Faustian bargains being imposed on women, said Justice BR Nagarathna

vorced) Act was enacted by the Rajiv Gandhi govt in response to pressure from Muslim groups and politicians who were upset with the SC verdict in the Shah Bano case where the court had ordered that the old and indigent divorcee from Bhopal be given a monthly maintenance of Rs 125 per month.

Justice Nagarathna said Parliament's intent in enact-

ing the 1986 law was to enhance the rights of a divorced Muslim woman in addition to what she would have been entitled to under Section 125 of CrPC. She said if the intent was to curtail the rights of a divorced Muslim woman, then the clause of 'notwithstanding anything contained in any other law for the time being in force' would not have found a place in Section

3 and Parliament did not simultaneously or at any time thereafter create any bar for a divorced Muslim woman from claiming maintenance under Section 125.

"One cannot read Section 3 of the 1986 Act containing the non obstante clause so as to restrict or diminish the right to maintenance of a divorced Muslim woman under Section 125 of CrPC and neither is it a substitute for the latter. Such an interpretation would be regressive, anti-divorced Muslim woman and contrary to Articles 14, 15(1) and (3) as well as Article 39(e) of the Constitution," Justice Nagarathna said.

"Therefore, a technical or pedantic interpretation of the 1986 Act would stultify not merely gender justice but also the constitutional right of access to justice for aggrieved Muslim divorced women who are in dire need of maintenance. This court would not countenance unjust or Faus-

tian bargains being imposed on women. The emphasis is on sufficient maintenance, not minimal amount. After all, maintenance is a facet of gender parity and enabler of equality, not charity. It follows that a destitute Muslim woman has the right to seek maintenance under Section 125 of CrPC despite the enactment of the 1986 Act," she said.

The court noted that Section 125 of CrPC was more beneficial to women in comparison to Section 3 of the 1986 law as maintenance to a divorced Muslim woman is given within the 'iddat' period by her husband under the 1986 law but under the secular provision, any divorced wife is entitled to maintenance till she remarries. Under personal law, maintenance for children is given by her former husband only for a period of two years but under Section 125, maintenance is given until the children attain the age of majority.