

'Trade talks on in cordial atmosphere with US; farmer, MSME interest will be protected'

NEW DELHI, Oct 18 (PTI)

COMMERCE and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Saturday said talks between India and the US on a proposed bilateral trade agreement (BTA) are progressing in a cordial atmosphere and New Delhi will protect the interests of farmers, fishermen and MSME sectors.

"No agreement can be made until we take care of the interests of India's farmers, fishermen and MSME sector," he told reporters here. He was replying to a question about the progress of talks between the two countries on the proposed pact and by when it will be concluded.

"Talks are going on in a cordial atmosphere," he said. The remarks are important as the US is seeking concessions in India's agriculture sector. The Indian official team, headed by Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal, was in Washington this week to hold trade talks with their US counterparts.

The three-day talks ended on October 17. The team is on its way back from the US. An official said that the talks were positive during this visit between the two sides and a number of issues have

been resolved in earlier rounds of negotiations also.

In February this year, leaders of India and the US directed officials to negotiate a proposed Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA).

They have fixed a deadline to conclude the first tranche of the pact by the fall (October - November) of 2025. So far, five rounds of negotiations have been completed. Last month, Goyal led an official delegation to New York for trade talks. These deliberations are important as the rela-



tions between the two countries have been reeling under severe stress after the Trump administration imposed a steep 50 per cent tariff on Indian goods. It includes a 25 per cent additional import duty for buying Russian crude oil.

India has described these duties as "unfair, unjustified and unreasonable". However, the recent phone conversations between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump have raised hopes of a positive outcome from the ongoing negotiations for the trade deal. After a brief gap, Assistant US Trade Representative for South and Central Asia Brendan

Lynch held talks with Indian officials in New Delhi on September 16. In that meeting, both sides agreed to push for an early and mutually beneficial conclusion of the agreement. The proposed pact aims to more than double the bilateral trade to USD 500 billion by 2030 from the current USD 191 billion.

The US remained India's largest trading partner for the fourth consecutive year in 2024-25, with bilateral trade valued at USD 131.84 billion (USD 86.5 billion exports). It accounts for about 18 per cent of India's total goods exports, 6.22 per cent in imports, and 10.73 per cent in the country's total merchandise trade.

Venezuela: Defences against US deployment now ready

With US warships deployed off Venezuela's coast, President Nicolas Maduro said Saturday a plan to defend against what he called American threats is now complete. Washington accuses Maduro of heading a drug cartel and has deployed significant military assets — including stealth warplanes and several US Na-

Trump: US attacked 'drug-carrying sub'

President Trump on Friday confirmed a new strike by the US military against alleged drug traffickers in the Caribbean. "We attacked a submarine, and that was a drug-carrying submarine built specifically for the transportation of massive amounts of drugs" he said. AFP

vy ships — as part of what it says are counter-narcotics efforts in the Caribbean.

Maduro, an authoritarian socialist has responded to the big US military operation by ordering exercises around the country and positions soldiers at the borders. "Today we have completed all the country's integrated defence zones," Maduro said on Telegram.

US Embassy issues warning

The US Embassy in Trinidad and Tobago cautioned Americans Saturday to stay away from American govt facilities on the twin-island nation. It was an unusual warning that came as tensions grow between the US and Venezuela over deadly US strikes in Caribbean waters targeting suspected drug traffickers. AFP

Munir issues nuclear threat against India, Rajnath points BrahMos at him

Pak army chief: Will shatter 'misconceived' immunity Every inch of Pak territory within our range: Def min

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New Delhi: Pakistan's Field Marshal Asim Munir has yet again engaged in anti-India rhetoric, issuing veiled nuclear and economic threats while claiming that the "misconceived" immunity of India's geographic vastness will be shattered by the reach and lethality of their weapon systems.

Speaking at Pak Military Academy in Abbotabad (where Osama Bin Laden lived and was killed by the US) Saturday, the rabble-rouser army chief threatened that a response far beyond the expectations of the initiators (India/Afghanistan) can be expected, if a fresh wave of hostilities is triggered.

"With diminishing distinction between combat and communication zones, the reach and lethality of our weapon systems will shatter the misconceived immunity of India's geographic vastness," he added.

He cautioned and advised India's military leadership that there is no space for war in a nuclearised environment. "Core issues should be settled with Pakistan as per international norms, on the basis of equality and mutual respect. The deeply hurting retributive military and economic losses to be inflicted will be beyond the imagination and calculations of those responsible for chaos and instability," the jihadi army chief said.

Munir went on to claim that decisive responses will be made to even minor provocations, and that the onus of ensuing escalations, which may bear catastrophic consequences for the ent-



Munir said decisive responses will be made to even minor provocations, and the onus of ensuing escalations will lie with India

ire region, will lie with India," he said. Referring to India and Afghanistan, with whom it is currently engaged in hostility, Munir said that the use of Fitna al-Hind and Fitna al-Khawarij (a reference to rebel groups like the BLA and TTP) as hired guns exposes its 'hypocritical and heinous' face to the world. "Afghan Taliban regime should rein in the proxies who have sanctuaries in Afghanistan," Munir added.

Claiming the minerals and rare earth deposits in Balochistan would change Pakistan's future, he said, "The treasures hidden beneath our land for decades have started to surface as a silver lining for our bright future."

He praised US President Donald Trump for his "personal efforts and strategic leadership to bring peace to multiple conflict-prone areas of the world," while referring to Pakistan as a "regional stabiliser" with deepening ties with China, Saudi Arabia and US.

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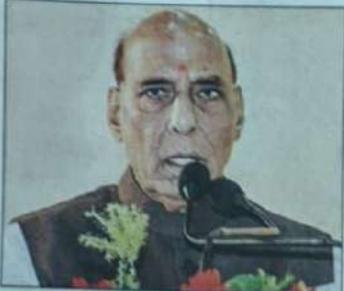
Lucknow: In a stern warning to Pakistan, Union defence minister Rajnath Singh said on Saturday that every inch of its territory lies within the range of BrahMos missiles, and that what happened during Operation Sindoor was just a trailer. The operation proved that victory has become a habit for India, he said.

Singh, along with CM Yogi Adityanath, flagged off the first batch of BrahMos missiles manufactured at the BrahMos Aerospace unit in Lucknow's Sarojini nagar. "BrahMos is not just a missile, it is proof of India's strategic confidence. From Army and Navy to Air Force, it has become a key pillar of our defence forces," he said.

Hailing Sindoor, Singh said it instilled a new confidence among Indians and proved BrahMos' effectiveness to the world. "The entire world now recognises India's capability. BrahMos has strengthened our belief that India can turn its dreams into reality," Rajnath, who is MP from Lucknow, said.

Adityanath hailed BrahMos as "the most capable weapon to protect not only India but also our friendly countries across the world". "Lucknow's land is now yielding gold — ensuring national security while driving prosperity," Yogi said, assuring additional land for DRDO if required.

On the manufacturing of BrahMos at the Lucknow unit, Singh said the project symbolises India's growing confidence and capability in defence manufacturing. "Lucknow is not just



Operation Sindoor, which has instilled confidence among Indians, is just a trailer, said Rajnath Singh in Lucknow Saturday

my parliamentary constituency, it resides in my soul. Today, it has become a city of technology and industry, apart from culture and tradition.

Assuring direct employment to hundreds of people, Singh said it is estimated around 100 missile systems will be provided annually to the armed forces from the Lucknow unit. In the next financial year, the turnover of this unit will reach Rs 3,000 crore, which will generate GST revenue of Rs 500 crore.

Rajnath said that today we are all celebrating the festival of Dhanteras and on this auspicious day, four BrahMos missiles are also being delivered.

He highlighted that the new unit, established in May 2025, is a powerful step towards national security. The global appeal of BrahMos was also highlighted, with Singh announcing export contracts worth Rs 4,000 crore with two countries following a landmark deal with the Philippines.

Trump calls on Ukraine, Russia to 'stop where they are', end war

WASHINGTON, Oct 18 (AP)

US President Donald Trump on Friday called on Kyiv and Moscow to "stop where they are" and end their brutal war, following a lengthy White House meeting with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

Trump's frustration with the conflict has surfaced repeatedly in the nine months since he returned to office, but with his latest comments, he edged back in the direction of pressing Ukraine to give up on retaking land it has lost to Russia.

"Enough blood has been shed, with property lines being defined by War and Guts," Trump said in a Truth Social post not long after hosting Zelenskyy and his team for more than two hours of talks. "They should stop where they are. Let both claim Victory, let History decide!" Later, soon after arriving in Florida, where he is spending the weekend, Trump urged both sides to "stop the war immediately" and implied that Moscow keep territory it has taken from Kyiv.



US President Donald Trump with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy at the White House, on Friday in Washington. (AP/PTI)

"You go by the battle line wherever it is-- otherwise it is too complicated," Trump told reporters. "You stop at the battle line and both sides should go home, go to their families, stop the killing, and that should be it."

The comments amounted to another shift in position on the

war by Trump. In recent weeks, he had shown growing impatience with Russian President Vladimir Putin and expressed greater openness to helping Ukraine win the war. After meeting with Zelenskyy in New York on the sidelines of the annual UN General Assembly last month,

Trump even said he believed the Ukrainians could win back all the territory they had lost to Russia since Putin launched the February 2022 invasion. That was a dramatic shift for Trump, who had previously insisted that Kyiv would have to concede land lost to Russia to end the war.

Afghan and Pakistani delegations head to Doha for crisis talks

ISLAMABAD, Oct 18 (AP)

AFGHAN and Pakistani delegations are heading to the Qatari capital Doha to defuse the deadliest crisis between them in several years, after more than a week of fighting killed dozens of people and injured hundreds on both sides.

The Taliban government said Saturday that the Afghan delegation included the defence minister and the head of the national intelligence agency. A Pakistani delegation was due to depart Saturday, the national broadcaster PTV had said a day earlier. It did not give further details.

Each country says it is responding to aggression from the other. Pakistan accuses Afghanistan of harbouring militants who carry out attacks in border areas, a charge rejected by the Taliban.

A 48-hour ceasefire intended to pause hostilities expired Friday evening. Hours later, Pakistan struck across the border.

Pakistani security officials confirmed to The Associated Press that there were strikes on districts in Afghanistan's eastern Paktika

Pakistan allegedly breached the 48-hour ceasefire deal with Afghanistan, with the Taliban claiming Pakistani forces carried out airstrikes on Afghan territory killing at least 10 people.

province — Urgun and Barmal.

The targets were hideouts of the militant Hafiz Gul Bahadur group, according to the officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorised to talk to the media. Pakistani Air Force raids killed dozens of armed fighters and there were no civilian deaths, they added.

One said the operation was a direct response to the suicide bombing of a security forces compound in Mir Ali, in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province a day earlier.

Newly-developed light tank fires Nag missile

NEW DELHI, Oct 18 (PTI)

INDIA'S newly-developed light tank achieved a major milestone as it fired anti-tank guided missile Nag Mk II.

The tank has been designed and developed by the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and manufactured by Larsen and Toubro Ltd.

The project is mainly being overseen by DRDO's Combat Vehicles Research and Development Establishment (CVRDE), officials said.

In a major boost to Atmanirbharta in critical defence technology, CVRDE DRDO achieved a major milestone in the development of Light Tank by demonstrating the anti tank guided missile (Nag Mk II) firing capability, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's office said on X.

"All performance objectives, including the range, maneuverability for top attack mode, and accuracy, were achieved," it said. Singh congratulated DRDO over the successful firing of the missile by the tank.



The Anti-Tank Guided Missile (ATGM) Nag Mk II is being successfully test-fired from a light tank developed by the Combat Vehicles Research and Development Establishment (CVRDE) laboratory of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). (PTI)