

# After Taliban min's visit, Kabul embassy restored

## Af Rejects Pakistan's Claims That India Was Behind Recent Clashes Between Two Countries

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**New Delhi:** India Tuesday restored its embassy in Kabul, upgrading its technical mission to the level of an embassy, following the announcement made during Taliban foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi's recent visit to India. As per understanding between the two sides, India will designate the head of the mission in Kabul as chargé d'affaires before eventually appointing an ambassador, while the Taliban are expected to send two diplomats to New Delhi by Nov.

The diplomats will operate from Afghan embassy here, even though India has not formally recognised the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, the name used by Taliban for their regime. The move marks a significant step towards expansion of economic cooperation, enabling India to play a greater role in Afghanistan's development while maintaining its position of aligning with the global community on recognition.

Muttaqi's unprecedented visit and the decision to elevate ties came amid mounting



Centre took the big step after Taliban foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi's recent visit to India

tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan, which saw border clashes even as the Afghan minister was in India.

"In keeping with decision announced during the visit of Afghan foreign minister to India, govt is restoring the status of the Technical Mission of India in Kabul to that of Embassy of India in Afghanistan with immediate effect," India said in a statement. It added that the move underscored India's resolve to deepen bilateral engagement in all spheres of mutual interest.

India had shut its embassy in Aug 2021 after the Taliban takeover but reopened a technical mission in June 2022, following security assurances from Kabul, to oversee distribution of humanitarian aid.

Taliban view Muttaqi's visit as heralding a new phase in bilateral ties. Both sides reaffirmed their commitment to respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, while condemning terrorism emanating from "regional countries" — a veiled reference to Pakistan. Taliban's expression of support for India's sovereignty over J&K angered Islamabad, which lodged a formal protest with Kabul.

This week, Taliban defence minister Mawlawi Mohammad Yaqoob rejected Pakistani claims that India was behind recent tensions between the two neighbours. "These accusations are baseless & illogical. We will strengthen ties with India within the framework of our national interests," he said, adding that Kabul seeks peaceful relations with Pakistan as well.

India, while refraining from recognising Taliban govt, continues to press for an inclusive regime and protection of women's & children's rights. So far, Russia is the only country to have formally recognised the Taliban govt, while China and Pakistan have accepted its diplomats.

# Pune co to produce DRDO's ordnance disposal robot

**New Delhi:** Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) has finalised a technology transfer agreement with a Pune-based defence company for the production of the unexploded ordnance handling robot (UXOR), which is designed to neutralise ordnance weighing up to 1,000 kg, reports **Surendra Singh**.

The pact will position Sagar Defence Engineering as one of the primary industry partners, alongside Bharat Electronics Ltd, for scaling up production of UXOR units, which are set to be deployed by IAF to enhance operational safety during unexploded ordnance handling missions across sensitive zones, including forward airbases and strategic installations, a company source told **TOI**.

Indigenously by DRDO, UXOR's key features include high-powered water jet cutting technology, and performing remote operation from a distance of up to 2 km.

# EU Council okays new agenda to deepen def, tech ties with India

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** The EU Council has approved the 27-nation bloc's new strategic agenda with India, paving the way for its adoption after discussions with India at the next EU-India summit early next year. The fresh agenda looks to promote deepening of EU-India ties in sustainability, technology, innovation, security and defence, and connectivity, apart from global issues.

Seeking enhanced market access, removal of trade barriers, and provisions on sustainable development, the council welcomed efforts to conclude a "balanced, ambitious, mutually beneficial and economically meaningful" free trade agreement. Both sides are looking to finalise the agreement by the end of this year.

The council also took note of the intention to pursue work towards the establishment of a Security and



## STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Defence Partnership, which could also facilitate defence industrial cooperation when appropriate.

It said it will continue to engage with India on all aspects of Russia's war of aggression against the Ukraine. "The council emphasises the joint capacity & responsibility of the EU and India to safeguard multilateralism and the rules-based international order with the UN Charter at its core, as well as the multilateral trading system, in particular the WTO," it said in a statement.

# Trump and Putin's Hungary summit on hold: US official

## No Decision Yet On Tomahawks Made Russia Less Keen On Diplomacy: Zelensky

Washington: Plans are on hold for President Donald Trump to sit down with Russian President Vladimir Putin to talk about resolving the war in Ukraine, a US official said on Tuesday. The meeting had been announced last week.

It was supposed to take place in Budapest, although a date had not been set. The decision was made following a call between US secretary of state Marco Rubio and Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov. The official wasn't authorised to speak publicly and spoke on condition of anonymity. Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov indicated Tuesday there was no sense of urgency for Trump and Putin to meet, saying that "preparation is needed, serious preparation."

The back-and-forth over Trump's plans is the latest bout of whiplash caused by his stutter-step efforts to resolve a conflict that has persisted for nearly four years.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and European leaders accused Putin of stalling for time to continue his invasion as diplomatic efforts took place. They also said they opposed any push to ma-



AFP/File

Trump and Putin last met in Anchorage, Alaska, in August

## Russia reiterated previous Ukraine peace terms to US in private communique: Report

Russia reiterated its previous terms for reaching a peace deal with Ukraine in a private communique sent to the US over the weekend known as a "non paper," according to two US officials and a person familiar with the situation. The communique reiterated Russia's demand that it take control of all of Ukraine's Donbas region, one of the US officials said, a stance that effectively rejects Trump's view that the frontlines should be frozen at their prevailing locations. The White House and the Russian embassy in Washington did not immediately respond to a request for comment. REUTERS

ke Kyiv surrender land captured by Russian forces in return for peace, as Trump has on occasion suggested.

Eight European leaders as well as senior European Union officials said in a joint statement they intend to go ahead with plans to use Moscow's billions of dollars (euros) of frozen assets abroad to help Kyiv win the war, despite some misgivings about the legality and consequences of such a step.

Zelensky noted that Putin

returned to diplomacy and called Trump last week when facing the possibility that the US would supply Ukraine with long-range Tomahawk missiles. But "as soon as the pressure eased a little due to the postponement of a decision by the US on Tomahawk missiles, the Russians began to try to drop diplomacy, postpone the dialogue," Zelensky said Tuesday in a Telegram post. "We need to end this war, and only pressure will lead to peace," he said. AP

# India plans to buy S-400 missiles, build 4 amphibious warships

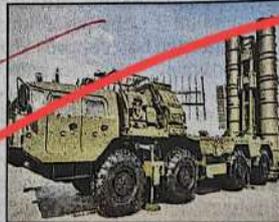
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**New Delhi:** India is getting set to give the initial nod for the indigenous construction of four large amphibious warfare ships for Rs 33,000 crore as well as procurement of a large number of additional missiles for Russian-origin S-400 air defence systems, which shot down a special mission aircraft and at least five Pakistani fighters during Op Sindoor, for around Rs 10,000 crore.

Rajnath Singh-led Defence Acquisitions Council (DAC) will also take up the grant of "acceptance of necessity (AoN)", which is the first step in the long-winded procurement process, to several other military modernisation pro-

jects on either Thursday or Friday, sources told TOI. Sources said the proposals include procurement of over 600 additional missiles for Barak-8 medium range surface-to-air missile (MR-SAM) systems, jointly developed with Israel to have an interception range of 70km, which also played a major role in thwarting multiple waves of Turkish drones and Chinese missiles launched by Pakistan during the May 7-10 cross-border hostilities.

Another proposal is for additional ammunition for desi Pinaka multi-launch artillery systems, which include 45km extended range and 75km guided extended range rockets, the source said. The four amphibious warfare ships, or "landing platform docks", will be built at



India is also finalising plans to buy at least 3 more S-400 squadrons

an Indian shipyard, with possibly British-origin electric propulsion systems.

The long-range detection and destruction of hostile aircraft, fighters, missiles and drones by S-400 "Triumph" surface-to-air missile systems came to fore during Op Sindoor, with IAF chief Air Chief Marshal AP Singh describing

it as a "game-changing" capability. The S-400 shot down either an ELINT (electronic intelligence) or an AEW&C (airborne early warning and control) aircraft of Pakistan at a distance of 314 km in the "longest such kill ever achieved" as well as "at least five high-tech Pakistani fighters in the F-16 and JF-17-class" in the air, as per the IAF chief.

"S-400 missiles used during Operation Sindoor have to be replenished. They have ranges of 120, 200, 250 and 380 km," a source said. Under the \$5.43 billion (Rs 40,000 crore) contract inked with Russia in 2018, IAF has deployed first three S-400 squadrons in north-west and east India to cater to threats from both China and Pakistan. Delivery

of the remaining two S-400 squadrons, however, has been hugely delayed due to the Russia-Ukraine war. "Russia has now promised to deliver fourth and fifth S-400 squadrons in Feb and Sept next year," the source said.

Ahead of Russian President Vladimir Putin's visit to India for the summit in early-Dec, India is also finalising plans to procure at least three more S-400 squadrons but the proposal is still in the initial stages. Both S-400s and MR-SAMs are plugged into IAF's integrated air command and control system (IACCS), which also helped in intercepting large UAVs, cruise missiles and long-range stand-off weapons like H2 and H4 precision-guided glide bombs during Sindoor.

# Big relief on H-1B fee norms for Indians looking for US jobs

Lubna Kably | TNN

In a major relief for foreign students and American employers, the US Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) has clarified that the \$100,000 'entry' fee announced by President Donald Trump, that came into effect from Sept 21, will not apply to individuals already in the United States who are seeking a change of status to an H-1B, extension of stay, or amendment (such as a change in the employer).

The clarification will benefit thousands of international students on F-1 visas who transit to H-1B status through the annual lottery selection process. While the fee has to be paid by the sponsoring employer and not the be-

## USCIS: FEE NOT FOR STATUS CHANGE

- **US employers** eligible to hire under cap-exempt H-1B route **won't have to pay the fee**, where the international student is transiting from F-1 visa to work visa
- Those **already in US with approved H-1B applications** also don't need to pay if they travel abroad

neficiary (individual who is sponsored), it was feared that employers wouldn't wish to cough up this significant sum for recent graduates (entry-level hires). International students who face the added pressure of heavy student loans can now breathe easy.

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