

India, Ethiopia natural partners: PM in address to Ethiopian Parlt

This was 18th Parliament in the world that PM Modi has addressed

Drawing parallels with 'Vande Mataram' and Ethiopia's national anthem, Modi says, both refer to our land as mother

ADDIS ABABA, Dec 17 (PTI)

INDIA and Ethiopia are "natural partners" in regional peace, security and connectivity, Prime Minister Narendra Modi told the Ethiopian Parliament on



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being greeted by an Ethiopian leader during the Joint Session of the Parliament in Addis Ababa on Wednesday. (PTI)

of Africa. India stands at the heart of the Indian Ocean. We are natural partners in regional peace, security, and connectivity," Modi told the lawmakers, who clapped more than 50 times during the Prime Minister's speech.

"Our commitment to mutual security became stronger with the signing of the Defence Cooperation Agreement earlier this year. This agreement focuses on closer military cooperation. It includes collaboration in cybersecurity, in defence industries, in joint research, and in capacity building," he said.

India and Ethiopia stand together as members of one family and work for a world that is "more just, more equal, and more peaceful," the Prime Minister said. He thanked Ethiopia for its solidarity after the Pahalgam terror attack and for affirming the commitment to zero tolerance towards terrorism.

Modi said, he was honoured to be in this temple of democracy, in the heart of a nation with

ancient wisdom and modern aspirations. "On behalf of the 1.4 billion people of India, I bring greetings of friendship, goodwill, and brotherhood," he said.

Speaking about the Global South, Modi said the region is writing its own destiny, and India and Ethiopia share a vision for it. "Our vision is of a world where the Global South rises not against anyone, but for everyone. A world where development is fair, where

(Contd on page 5)

PM Modi arrives in Oman on final leg of three-nation visit

MUSCAT, Dec 17 (PTI)



Prime Minister Narendra Modi being received by Oman's Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq Al Said upon his arrival, in Muscat on Wednesday. (ANI)

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday arrived in Oman on a two-day visit during which he will hold talks with the country's top leadership and is expected to sign an ambitious trade deal.

He was warmly welcomed by Oman's Deputy Prime Minister for Defence Affairs Sayyid Shihab bin Tariq Al Said at the airport, where a guard of honour was accorded to the Prime Minister.

Modi is visiting Oman at the invitation of Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

This is his second visit to the Gulf nation and marks 70 years of the

establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries. India has said that it is "very optimistic" about finalising an ambitious trade deal with Oman during the visit.

The free trade agreement between India and Oman was approved by the Union Cabinet last Friday.

Talks for the agreement, officially termed as CEPA (Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement), formally began in November 2023, and the negotiations concluded this year. "We are all very optimistic about it. The teams from both sides have been working very hard for its early finalisation," Arun Chatterjee, a secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), had said at a media briefing when asked whether the proposed India-Oman comprehensive economic partnership agreement will be inked during Modi's visit.

Wednesday, asserting that the two countries work for a world that is "more just, more equal, and more peaceful".

Modi, who arrived here on Tuesday on his maiden bilateral visit, said it

was wonderful to be in Ethiopia, the land of lions, as he greeted lawmakers in the local language, "Tena yistilign, Salaam".

"I feel very much at home because my homestate, Gujarat, is also home to Lions," Modi said in his address to the Joint session of Parliament of Ethiopia. It was the 18th Parliament in the world that PM Modi has addressed.

"Ethiopia sits at a crossroads

Read Editorial
CHANGING DIPLOMACY
on page 8

India, Oman to sign free trade agreement today

NEW DELHI, Dec 17 (PTI)

INDIA and Oman will sign a free trade agreement on Thursday in Muscat with an aim to boost economic ties between the two countries, an official said.

It will be signed in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who is on a four-day, three-nation visit.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal has reached Muscat for the FTA signing. Talks for the free trade agreement, officially termed as CEPA

(Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement), formally began in November 2023 and the negotiations concluded this year. In free trade agreements, the two trading partners either significantly reduce or eliminate customs duties on a maximum number of goods traded between them. They also ease norms to promote trade in services and attract investments.

Oman is the third-largest export destination for India among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.

US adds 20 more countries to travel ban and restrictions list

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, Dec 17
(PTI)

THE Trump administration has expanded its travel ban and restrictions to 20 additional nations as well as the Palestinian Authority as part of its efforts to “protect US national security and public safety interests”.

US President Donald Trump signed a proclamation on Tuesday expanding and strengthening entry restrictions on nationals from countries with “demonstrated, persistent, and severe deficiencies” in screening, vetting, and information-sharing to protect America from national security and public safety threats.

The proclamation said these measures are necessary to prevent the entry of foreign nationals about whom the US “lacks sufficient information to assess the risks they pose, garner cooperation from foreign governments,



enforce our immigration laws, and advance other important foreign policy, national security, and counterterrorism objectives.” It imposed partial restrictions and entry limitations on 15 additional countries - Angola, Antigua and Barbuda, Benin, Cote d’Ivoire, Dominica, Gabon, The Gambia, Malawi, Mauritania, Nigeria, Senegal, Tanzania, Tonga, Zambia, and Zimbabwe.

Full restrictions and entry limitations were also imposed for nationals of Burkina Faso, Mali, Niger, South Sudan, and Syria.

Full restrictions and entry lim-

itations have also been placed on individuals holding Palestinian Authority-issued travel documents, as several “US-designated terrorist groups operate actively in the West Bank or Gaza Strip and have murdered American citizens,” it said, adding that the recent war in these areas likely resulted in compromised vetting and screening abilities. “...Considering the weak or nonexistent control exercised over these areas by the PA (Palestinian Authority), individuals attempting to travel on PA-issued or endorsed travel documents cannot currently be properly vetted and approved for entry into the United States.”

The proclamation also imposed full restrictions and entry limitations on Laos and Sierra Leone that were previously subject to partial restrictions, and continued partial restrictions on nationals from Burundi, Cuba, Togo, and Venezuela.

Trump orders blockade of 'SANCTIONED OIL TANKERS' into Venezuela

WASHINGTON, Dec 17 (AP)

PRESIDENT Donald Trump said on Tuesday he is ordering a blockade of all "sanctioned oil tankers" into Venezuela, ramping up pressure on the country's authoritarian leader Nicolas Maduro in a move that seemed designed to put a tighter chokehold on the South American country's economy.

Trump's escalation comes after US forces last week seized an oil tanker off Venezuela's coast, an unusual move that followed a buildup of military forces in the region. In a post on social media Tuesday night announcing the blockade, Trump alleged Venezuela was using oil to fund drug trafficking and other crimes and vowed to continue the military buildup until the country gave the US oil, land and assets, though it was not clear why he

felt the US had a claim.

"Venezuela is completely surrounded by the largest Armada ever assembled in the History of South America," Trump said in a post

on his social media platform. "It will only get bigger, and the shock to them will be like nothing they have ever seen before — Until such time as they return to the United States of America all of the Oil, Land, and other Assets that they previously stole from us."

Pentagon officials referred all questions about the post to the White House.

Venezuela's government released a statement Tuesday accusing Trump of "violating international law, free trade, and the principle of free navigation" with "a reckless and grave threat" against the South American country.

Army gets 3 more AH-64E Apache helicopters



NEW DELHI, Dec 17 (IANS)

IN A major development that will further strengthen the Indian Army's warfare store, the US Embassy on Wednesday announced the delivery of the remaining three AH-64E Boeing Apache attack helicopters.

Taking it to X, the US Embassy wrote, "Delivering on the US President and Indian Prime Minister's joint statement, the arrival of the latest Boeing India AH-64E Apache helicopters for the Indian Army marks another step forward in the US-India Major Defence Partnership. This milestone reflects the reliable and growing US-India Defence partnership and fulfills commit-

ments made by the Secretary of War and the Defence Ministry of India."

"With its cutting-edge capabilities, the Apache strengthens our shared vision for regional security and deepens cooperation in co-production, training, and technology exchange," it said.

The delivery comes after repeated delays.

Notably, the Indian Army received the first slot of these three helicopters in July.

The Indian Army Aviation Corps had been waiting for the first slot of three Apache helicopters since 2024, as they were originally planned to be delivered in May 2024.

Gopinath: IMF may raise India's growth forecast closer to 7%

'Definitely Close To The Peak On Trump's Tariffs'

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is likely to raise India's GDP growth forecast for the current fiscal year closer to 7%, former IMF deputy managing director Gita Gopinath said on Wednesday.

"This Oct, IMF revised up India's growth for 2025 to 6.6%. But that came in before the second quarter growth numbers came out. I expect they will move up to 7% the next time they come up with their numbers. India is actually doing better than was predicted before the crisis," said Gopinath, now a professor of economics at Harvard University.

Several multilateral agencies, brokerages and economists have revised India's GDP growth projections for 2025-26 after the 8.2% growth in the July-Sept quarter. She said the world has shown a lot of resilience since the tariffs were announced.

"Different parts of the world for different reasons. I believe artificial intelligence has been a big offset for tariffs around the world. The spending on it has supported growth everywhere," she said. "I don't think the lesson to take away is that high levels of tariffs are not a problem for the world. They are conse-



Gopinath believes artificial intelligence has been a big offset for tariffs around the world

quential. And I would say that the next couple of years we will continue to see some of the drag from this geoeconomic environment that we're in," said Gopinath.

She said at least from the US perspective, "we are past peak tariffs" in the US for several reasons. "The important piece is that 2026 is a year of midterm elections in the US. I don't think there's anybody who wants to have a lot of uncertainty in the run up to the elections," said Gopinath.

She said tariffs have raised prices in the US & they've pushed up inflation by about 0.7 percentage points and the cost of living increase is a problem for affordability. "So that also dampens the incentive to raise tariffs further. There were important legal challenges to the tariffs in the US, which I think will also scale it down. So, from the US tariff perspective, I suspect we are, if not past the peak, but definitely close to the peak."

Trade 'getting weaponised' through tariffs: Sitharaman

'Bringing Down Debt-To-GDP Ratio Govt's Core Focus Next Year'

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Global trade is "getting weaponised" through tariffs and other measures and India will have to navigate its way carefully, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Wednesday, asserting that the country's robust growth is going to provide an advantage.

"Globally, it is now very clear, trade is not fair, it's not free," Sitharaman said in her inaugural address at the Times Network India Economic Conclave and detailed measures undertaken by govt to step up growth.

FM said India gets "lectured" for being "inward looking" and a "tariff king". "But tariff has been weaponised. India's intention was never to weaponise tariffs. We, of course, safeguarded our own industries against flooding which happens from a predator." She said now



“Globally, it is now very clear, trade is not fair, it's not free... That seems to be the new normal... India's intention was never to weaponise tariffs. We, of course, safeguarded our own industries against flooding which happens from a predator

“weaponisation” goes without criticism and suddenly newer people come up with tariff barriers. “There is no questioning. So that seems to be the new normal,” FM said.

Sitharaman said that India will have to negotiate this landscape carefully. “Beyond trade negotiations, it is the strength of our economy that will give us a decisive advantage.”

The minister said over the last 10 years, there has been robust growth while re-

forms have been undertaken and there has been strengthening across every sector-financial inclusion, greater participation of women in the workforce, improved nutrition and childcare and ensuring families have access to finance and banking.

“Navigating geoeconomics while remaining a bright spot of fast and steady growth and sustaining that level of growth year after year—it is something the people of India are achieving. Each one of us,

including political parties and critics, should recognise this,” said Sitharaman.

FM also said that bringing down the debt to GDP ratio will be govt's core focus in the next financial year and urged states to focus on lowering the debt to GDP ratio and ensure fiscal discipline.

She said PM Narendra Modi is known for his fiscal management and the Centre has set clear goals for transparency in budget making, ensuring that fiscal management is visible to all and meets the highest standards of accountability.

“As a result, we have been able to bring down the debt-to-GDP ratio since the post Covid period, when it crossed 60%. It is now on a declining path and from the next financial year, this will be a core focus area. The fiscal deficit will continue to remain an important marker & we will care for it,” said Sitharaman.

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