

# India-EU trade pact: Goyal to visit Brussels on Jan 8-9

NEW DELHI, Dec 19 (PTI)

COMMERCE and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal will visit Brussels on January 8-9 next year for talks with his EU counterpart to give an impetus to a proposed trade pact, for which negotiations are in the last phase, an official said.

During the two-day visit, Goyal will meet the Executive Vice-President and European Commissioner for Trade of the European Union, Maros Sefcovic.

"On January 7, the Minister will visit Liechtenstein, and then on January 8-9, he will be in Brussels for trade talks," the official said. The visit comes at a crucial stage in the ongoing India-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations, as both sides intensify efforts to conclude a comprehensive, balanced, and mutu-

ally beneficial trade agreement at the earliest.

Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal, on December 15, said that the negotiations between India and the 27-nation bloc, the EU, have entered the "most difficult" stage, and both sides are engaged to bridge the differences and close the talks soon.

He said that the European Union's (EU) carbon border adjustment mechanism (CBAM) is on the discussion table.

The 16th round of negotiations between the two sides concluded earlier this month (3-9 December) here. Key chapters such as goods, services, investment, and technical barriers to trade were discussed. Under CBAM, Indian exports of steel, aluminium, and cement to the EU could face tariffs of 20-35 per cent from January next year.

# China to allow export of Rare Earth metals for civilian use

BEIJING, Dec 19 (PTI)

CHINA on Friday said it will approve export of its rare-earth metals for civilian use, amid India's persistent calls for Beijing to lift curbs and resume the export of precious metals needed to manufacture a host of modern products.

China's export control on Rare Earth related items in accordance with laws and regulations does not target any specific country, Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun told a media briefing while responding to a question on India's calls for resumption of Rare Earth over which Beijing holds a near monopoly.

"As long as the export is for civilian use and complies with regulations, the Chinese Government will approve the application in a timely manner," he said, highlighting China's stand not to export the metals to manufacture defence products. "China stands ready to step up dialogue and cooperation with relevant countries and regions to jointly keep the global industrial and supply chains stable," he said. However, he emphasised that the permits would be for civilian use, considering that they could also be used to manufacture defence equipment.

"We'd like to stress that given the dual-use nature of medium and heavy Rare Earth and related items, exercising export control on the items is in line with international practice and reflects China's consistent position of firmly upholding world peace and regional stability and actively participating in international non-proliferation effort," Guo said.

# Nirmala likely to present Budget on Sunday in Feb

NEW DELHI, Dec 19 (PTI)

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IF PARLIAMENTARY convention is followed, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman will present the General Budget for 2026-27 on a Sunday, according to officials. The budget has been presented on the first day of February since 2017, and in 2026, it is a Sunday. However, Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju, when asked about it, said, "These decisions are taken by the Cabinet Committee on Parliamentary Affairs at an appropriate time." The February 1 date was selected to ensure implementation of the Budget at the start of the new financial year on April 1.

# 41 Maoists surrender in T'gana

HYDERABAD, Dec 19 (PTI)

IN A major setback to the banned CPI (Maoist) organisation, 41 underground cadres, including six senior functionaries at the Company Platoon Committee and Divisional Committee levels, surrendered to Telangana police, officials said.

The cadres formally renounced violence and joined the mainstream of society, Telangana Director General of Police B Shivadhar Reddy said in a press release on Friday.

The surrendered ultras handed over 24 firearms, including one INSAS LMG, three AK-47 rifles, and five SLR rifles, along with 733 live rounds of ammunition of various calibres, to the police. "The surrender represents a significant erosion of organisational strength, morale, and leadership credibility of the CPI (Maoist)," the release said.

Police said the cadres decided to surrender as the CPI

(Maoist) leadership had been arbitrarily deploying members to unfamiliar and distant areas without their consent, often to regions where they lacked basic geographical knowledge and

local support.

The total eligible reward of Rs 1.46 crore will be disbursed to the surrendered cadres under the State and Central relief and rehabilitation policy.



Telangana Director General of Police B Shivadhar Reddy, right, inspects seized weapons after 41 underground cadres of the banned CPI (Maoist) organisation, including six senior functionaries at the Company Platoon Committee and Divisional Committee levels, surrendered to the State police, in Hyderabad on Friday. (PTI)

# Trump signs into law defence policy bill to boost engagement with India

■ **By Yoshita Singh**

NEW YORK/WASHINGTON, Dec 19  
(PTI)

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump has signed into law an annual defence policy bill that highlights broadening America's engagement with India, including through the QUAD to advance the shared objective of a free and open Indo-Pacific region and address the challenge posed by China. The National Defence Authorisation Act for Fiscal Year 2026, signed into law Thursday, also states that the Secretary of State shall establish and maintain within the US-India Strategic Security Dialogue a joint consultative mechanism with the Indian Government in connection with the Nuclear Liability Rules. It authorises fiscal year appropriations for the Department of War (DoW), the Department of Energy national security programmes, the



Department of State, the Department of Homeland Security, the Intelligence Community, and other executive departments and agencies.

"The Act will enable the DoW to carry out my Peace Through Strength agenda, protect the homeland from domestic and foreign threats, and strengthen the defence industrial base, while eliminating funding for wasteful and radical programmes that undermine the warfighting ethos of our Nation's men and women in uniform," Trump said in a statement.

# 'India wants to work with Netherlands more closely'

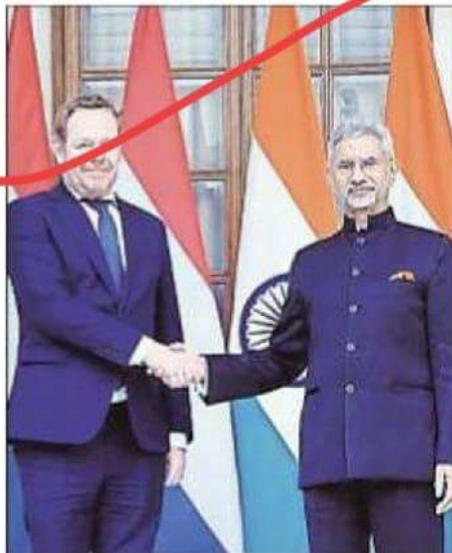
NEW DELHI, Dec 19 (PTI)

WITH new, important areas of bilateral cooperation coming up, there is scope for raising the ambition of India-Netherlands relationship, and whether it is semiconductors, digital, cyberspace or life sciences, "we would like to work more closely with you", External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Friday.

In his opening remarks before holding talks with his Dutch counterpart David van Weel here, the EAM also said, "We also count on your support as we are moving to what I hope is a decisive phase in our negotiations with the European Union on the Free Trade Agreement."

The Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands is visiting India from December 17-19, the Ministry of External Affairs said. "We, of course, value our relations with Netherlands enormously -- bilaterally as well as a key player in the European Union. Today as we meet, we will recognise that a number of important agreements have been reached in the last few months, which have added more dimensions to our cooperation," Jaishankar said.

India and the Netherlands have a "strate-



External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar meets Netherlands' Foreign Minister David van Weel, in New Delhi on Friday. (ANI)

gic partnership" in water, a very strong cooperation in agriculture, health, science and technology and shipping, he said.

"But with the new areas of cooperation, important areas of cooperation like semiconductors now coming up, I think there is scope for raising the ambition of our relationship. So whether it is semiconductors, digital, cyberspace or life sciences, we would like to work more closely with you," the EAM said.

Jaishankar also said he would like to get his Dutch counterpart's perspectives on global and regional issues. "So I look forward to your discussions."

The EAM later also posted few photos of their meeting held at the Hyderabad House.

"Pleased to meet FM @davidvanweel of the Netherlands today in New Delhi. Held productive discussions on our bilateral cooperation including in trade, defence, shipping, water, agriculture, health and culture. And new opportunities in semiconductors, talent mobility and renewables. Also exchanged views on our multilateral cooperation and global issues. Value Netherlands support for closer India-EU ties and conclusion of FTA. @ministerBZ," he posted.

Earlier in his remarks made just before the bilateral talks, Jaishankar welcomed van Weel to Delhi.