

India, GCC ink terms of reference to formally launch FTA negotiations

NEW DELHI, Feb 5 (PTI)

INDIA and the six-nation bloc of Middle Eastern nations, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), inked terms of reference on Thursday for formally launching negotiations for a free trade agreement (FTA).

The terms of reference (ToR) outline the scope and modalities of a proposed trade pact. Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal presided over the signing ceremony of the ToRs with GCC. GCC is a union of six countries in the Gulf region Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman and Bahrain.

Goyal said that the agreement will help boost bilateral trade and investments between the two. "The two trading partners have been trading amongst each other for over 5,000 years," he told reporters. He added that about 10 million Indians are living and working in the GCC region.

"It is most appropriate that we now enter into a much stronger and robust trading arrangement which will enable a greater free flow of



Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal witnesses the signing of the Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), in New Delhi. (PTI)

goods, services, bring predictability and stability to policy, help encourage a greater degree of investments," Goyal said.

He said the agreement will also encourage the food and energy security of the GCC nations, as well as India. While India is a major food grain producer in the world, GCC nations are oil and gas exporters.

"We already have a very robust, nearly USD 179 billion bilateral trade. I believe a number of products and services required by the GCC countries can be provided by our young, very talented and skilled Indians, as the GCC countries can help us with further diversification and growth of our energy sources," he said.

About 10 million Indians at present are living and working in the GCC region, helping power the economies of the group.

Indian exports will get a boost from the proposed pact from the elimination of duties and non-tariff barriers.

"We will also get a foothold to grow Indian infrastructure and the infrastructure in the GCC, together with the high-quality companies that are working in the space of infrastructure. Our petrochemical industry will hugely benefit with this partnership," Goyal said.

Further, he added that India's information and communication technology firms will get opportunities in the ever-growing GCC market. India has already implemented a free trade pact with the UAE in May 2022. India and Oman also signed a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in Muscat on December 18, 2025.

Goyal said that the Government has finalised as many as nine trade pacts in the last few years, covering 38 developed nations.

Seychelles President arrives on his maiden visit to India

CHENNAI, Feb 5 (PTI)

SEYCHELLES President Patrick Herminie arrived here on Thursday on his maiden trip to India, coinciding with the celebration of half-a-century of strong diplomatic ties with the country. He was accorded a warm reception by State Adi Dravidar Welfare Minister M Mathivendhan, Chennai Mayor R Priya and senior officials upon his arrival at the airport. During his five-day trip, he would meet Governor R N Ravi, Maharashtra Governor Acharya Devvrat in Mumbai.

Five Tejas jets ready for delivery to IAF: HAL



NEW DELHI, Feb 5 (PTI)

STATE-run aerospace behemoth Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd (HAL) on Thursday said five Tejas light combat aircraft are fully ready for delivery to the Indian Air Force.

In February 2021, The Defence Ministry sealed a Rs 48,000 crore deal with HAL for the procurement of 83 Tejas Mk-1A jets for the IAF.

The delivery of the jets are facing delays primarily due to GE Aerospace missing several deadlines for supply of its aero engines to power the jets.

“The HAL confirms that five aircraft are fully ready for delivery, incorporating major contracted capabilities in accordance with the agreed specifications,” a spokesperson of the aerospace major said. “An additional nine aircraft have already been built and flown. Upon receipt of engines from GE, these aircraft will be made ready for delivery,” the official said, adding all design and development issues identified are being addressed in an “expedited manner”.

Tejas is a single-engine multi-role fighter aircraft capable of operating in high-threat air environments. It has been designed to undertake the air defence, maritime reconnaissance and strike roles.

Last US-Russia N-pact expires

MOSCOW, Feb 5 (AP)

THE last remaining nuclear arms pact between Russia and the United States expired Thursday, removing any caps on the two largest atomic arsenals for the first time in more than a half-century. The termination of the New START Treaty could set the stage for what many fear could be an unconstrained nuclear arms race. Russian President Vladimir Putin last year declared readiness to stick to the treaty's limits for another year if Washington follows suit, but US President Donald Trump has been non-committal about extending it.

Putin discussed the pact's expiration with Chinese leader Xi Jinping on Wednesday, Kremlin adviser Yuri Ushakov said, noting Washington hasn't responded to his proposed extension.



Prompts fears of new arms race

Russia "will act in a balanced and responsible manner based on thorough analysis of the security situation," Ushakov said.

Russia's Foreign Ministry on Wednesday night said in a statement that "under the current circumstances, we assume that the parties to the New START Treaty are no longer bound by any obligations or symmetrical declarations within the context of the Treaty, including its core provisions, and are fundamentally free

to choose their next steps."

New START, signed in 2010 by then President Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart, Dmitry Medvedev, restricted each side to no more than 1,550 nuclear warheads on no more than 700 missiles and bombers - deployed and ready for use. It was originally supposed to expire in 2021 but was extended for five more years. The pact envisioned sweeping on-site inspections to verify compliance, although they stopped in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic and never resumed. New START followed a long succession of US-Russian nuclear arms reduction pacts. The Kremlin said Thursday it regretted the expiration of the last remaining nuclear arms pact between Russia and the US that left no caps on the two largest atomic arsenals for the first time.

US, Russia agree to reestablish military dialogue after Ukraine talks

KYIV, Feb 5 (AP)

THE US and Russia have agreed to reestablish high level military-to-military dialogue following a meeting between senior Russian and American military officials in Abu Dhabi, the United States European Command said in a statement.

The agreement was reached following meetings in Abu Dhabi between General Alexis Grynkewich, Commander of US European Command -- also NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe -- and senior Russian and Ukrainian military officials, the statement said.

Grynkewich was in the capital of the UAE for talks between American, Russian and Ukrainian officials on ending the war in Ukraine. The channel "will provide a consistent military contact as the parties continue to work towards a lasting peace," the statement said. High level military communication was suspended in 2021, just before Russia's full scale invasion of Ukraine.