

Goyal meets US Comm Secretary Lutnick, discusses trade and economic partnership

NEW DELHI, Feb 26 (PTI)

COMMERCE and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal on Thursday said he has held a meeting with US Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick and US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor and discussed ways to expand trade relationship between the two countries.

"Hosted US Secretary of Commerce @HowardLutnick & @USAmbIndia Sergio Gor. Engaged in very fruitful discussions to expand our trade and economic partnership," Goyal said in a social media post.

The meeting holds immense importance as both countries are looking to finalise the legal text for the first phase of a bilateral trade agreement.

Chief negotiators of both sides were scheduled to meet this week in Washington to finalise the legal text for the pact but it was postponed following the US Supreme Court order striking down President Donald Trump's



Union Minister of Commerce and Industry Piyush Goyal (C), with US Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick (L), and US Ambassador to India Sergio Gor (R) during a meeting. (PTI)

sweeping tariffs.

After the court order, the US imposed 10 per cent tariffs on all the countries for 150 days with effect from February 24. Trump has announced to increase it to 15 per cent, but there is no official order on that yet.

Goyal on Tuesday had said "as soon as" there is more clarity on

the tariffs front in the US, India will resume trade talks with America.

In a major setback to Trump's pivotal economic agenda in his second term, the US Supreme Court ruled that the tariffs imposed by Trump on nations around the world were illegal and that the President had

exceeded his authority when he imposed the sweeping levies by using the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) of 1977.

The US had imposed a 25 per cent reciprocal tariff on India in August 2025. Later, an additional 25 per cent duty was imposed for buying Russian crude oil, taking the total tariffs on India to 50 per cent.

India and the US, earlier this month, agreed on a framework to finalise an interim trade deal, under which Washington will cut down the tariffs to 18 per cent. To sign and implement the first phase of the bilateral trade agreement, the framework has to be converted into a legal document.

During 2021-25, the US was India's largest trading partner in goods. The US accounts for about 18 per cent of India's total exports, 6.22 per cent of its imports, and 10.73 per cent of its bilateral trade. In 2024-25, bilateral trade were USD 86.5 billion in exports and USD 45.3 billion in imports.

Modi holds wide-ranging talks with Israeli President Herzog

■ By Harinder Mishra

JERUSALEM, Feb 26 (PTI)

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi and Israeli President Isaac Herzog on Thursday held “extremely fruitful” and wide-ranging talks during which they explored avenues to further enhance cooperation in education, start-ups, innovation, tech and connectivity.

Modi called on Herzog at his official residence, where the two leaders first planted an oak tree together in the garden “as a symbol of friendship, growth, and the building of a shared future between the two countries”, a press release from the Presidency said.

“Our talks were extremely fruitful and wide-ranging,” Modi said in a post on X.

“Both leaders explored avenues to further enhance cooperation in education, start-ups, innovation, tech and connectivity,” Ministry of External Affairs spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said in a post on X. During the meeting, Modi thanked Herzog for the “very warm and grand reception” since he landed in Israel. “This shows the love that the people of Israel have towards India and Indians,” he



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Israeli President Isaac Herzog during a bilateral meeting, in Israel. (narendramodi.in via PTI)

said.

“We have had very positive exchanges, especially in sectors such as water and agriculture. India is also implementing a lot of good Israeli solutions in our country, especially in the agricultural sector, and we have had great results because of that,” Modi said.

US, Iran hold another round of indirect talks

GENEVA, Feb 26 (AP)

IRAN and the United States were holding another round of indirect talks in Geneva on Thursday to try to reach a deal on Tehran's nuclear programme and potentially avert another war as the US gathers a massive fleet of aircraft and warships in the Middle-East.

US President Donald Trump wants a deal to constrain Iran's nuclear programme, and he sees an opportunity while the country is struggling at home with growing dissent following nationwide protests. Iran also hopes to avert war, but maintains it has the right to enrich uranium and does not want to discuss other issues, like its long-range missile programme or support for armed groups like Hamas and Hezbollah.

If America attacks, Iran has said US military bases in the region would be considered legitimate targets, putting at risk tens of thousands of American service members. Iran has also threatened to attack Israel, meaning a regional war again could erupt across the Middle-East.

"There would be no victory for anybody - it would be a devas-

tating war," Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told 'India Today' in an interview filmed on Wednesday just before he flew to Geneva.

"Since the Americans' bases are scattered through different places in the region, then unfortunately perhaps the whole region would be engaged and be involved, so it is a very terrible scenario."

Ali Vaez, an Iran expert with the International Crisis Group, said it was a good sign that the Americans did not walk away immediately when Iran presented its latest proposal on Thursday.

"There might still not be a breakthrough at the end of this day, but the very fact that the US team is returning shows that there is enough common ground between the two sides," he said.

The two sides held multiple rounds of talks last year that collapsed when Israel launched a 12-day war against Iran in June and the US carried out heavy strikes on its nuclear sites, leaving much of Iran's nuclear programme in ruins even as the full extent of the damage remains unclear.

Afghanistan attacks Pak in retaliation for Sunday strikes in border area

KABUL, Feb 26 (AP)

AFGHAN military authorities said on Thursday that they had begun carrying out strikes against Pakistan in retaliation for Pakistani airstrikes in Afghanistan's border area days ago.

A statement issued by the media office of Afghanistan's military corps in the east said "heavy clashes" had begun on Thursday night "in response to the recent airstrikes carried out by Pakistani forces" in eastern Afghanistan.

"In response to the repeated rebellions and insurrections of the Pakistani military, large-scale offensive operations were launched against Pakistani mil-

itary bases and military installations along the Durand Line," Afghan Government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in a post on X Thursday night.

The two countries' 2,611-kilometre long border is known as the Durand Line, which Afghanistan has not formally recognised.

There was no immediate information on casualties and no immediate response from Pakistan's military to the announcement.

However, Pakistani local authorities and two senior security officials said Pakistani forces deployed along the Afghan border in the north-western Khyber Pakhtunkhwa

"In response to the repeated rebellions and insurrections of the Pakistani military, large-scale offensive operations were launched against Pakistani military bases and military installations along the Durand Line," Afghan Government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said in a post on X Thursday night.

province were responding to "unprovoked fire" by targeting the Afghan positions from which the artillery fire origi-

nated.

According to Pakistani local administration officials, the exchange of fire began in the Khyber district along the border and later spread to at least four other districts.

Tension has been high between the two neighbours for months, with deadly border clashes in October killing dozens of soldiers, civilians and suspected militants. The violence followed explosions in Kabul that Afghan officials blamed on Pakistan. Islamabad, at the time, conducted strikes deep inside Afghanistan to target militant hideouts.

A Qatari-mediated ceasefire between the two countries has largely held, but the two sides

have still occasionally traded fire across the border. Several rounds of peace talks in November failed to produce a formal agreement.

On Sunday, Pakistan's military carried out strikes along the border with Afghanistan, saying it had killed at least 70 militants.

Afghanistan rejected the claim, saying dozens of civilians had been killed, including women and children. The Defence Ministry said "various civilian areas" in eastern Afghanistan had been hit, including a religious madarasa and several homes. The ministry said the strikes were a violation of Afghanistan's airspace and sovereignty.

India & Israel elevate ties to special strategic partnership

Agreement reached to use UPI in Israel



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with his Israeli counterpart Benjamin Netanyahu during their joint press meet, in Jerusalem. (@NarendraModi/YT via PTI Photo)

JERUSALEM, Feb 26 (PTI)

INDIA and Israel on Thursday elevated their “time-tested” relationship to a special strategic partnership and agreed to fast-track a long-awaited free trade deal even as Prime Minister Narendra Modi backed the Gaza peace initiative, asserting that humanity must never become a victim of conflict.

In his media statement after holding wide-ranging talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Modi said India’s security interests are directly

linked to peace and stability in the Middle East and that New Delhi has been pitching for a peaceful solution to the conflict in Gaza.

Following meeting between the two Prime Ministers, India and Israel inked a total of 17 agreements and documents that will provide for deeper cooperation in artificial intelligence, trade, investment, education, manufacturing, culture, maritime heritage, agriculture and a plethora of other areas.

The two sides also vowed to

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Modi visits Israeli tech innovation exhibition

JERUSALEM, Feb 26 (PTI)

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi has invited Israeli technology companies to invest in India and partner with Indian youth as he visited an exhibition here showcasing pioneering innovations in areas such as artificial intelligence, health-care, and agriculture. Modi was accompanied by Israeli Prime

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PM Modi with Israeli PM Netanyahu during a visit to a technology exhibition, in Jerusalem, Israel. (PMO via PTI)