

Indian official team to visit US next week for trade talks

NEW DELHI, Apr 15 (PTI)

AN OFFICIAL delegation will visit Washington next week to hold trade talks with US authorities, an official source said on Wednesday. The bilateral meeting between the trade officials of the two countries holds immense importance as India and the US have finalised the framework for an interim trade agreement. The team will visit the US next week, source said.

The pact was initially slated for signing in March, but changes in the tariff landscape following a US Supreme Court ruling have altered the situation. Official sources have earlier stated that the agreement will be signed once the new global tariff architecture of America is in place.

India and the US, in February, announced finalisation of a framework for the first phase of the bilateral trade agreement. According to that framework, the US had agreed to reduce tariffs on India to 18 per cent.

However, the tariff architecture in the US has changed following its Supreme Court ruling against President Donald

Trump's sweeping reciprocal tariffs. After that, the US President imposed 10 per cent tariffs on all countries for 150 days from February 24.

In light of these changes, the meeting between the chief negotiators of India and the US was postponed last month. The two sides were scheduled to meet in February to finalise the legal text of the agreement.

When India finalised the deal, it was at a comparative advantage compared to its competitor countries. Now all the US trading partners are facing the same 10 per cent tariffs.

Next week's meeting is also important as the USA is undertaking two

investigations under Section 301.

On March 12, the United States Trade Representative (USTR) launched a Section 301 probe, covering 60 economies, including India and China. The investigations will determine whether acts, policies, and practices of each of these economies related to the failure to impose and effectively enforce a ban on the importation of goods produced with forced labour are unreasonable or discriminatory, and burden or restrict US commerce.



UN nuclear chief urges strict Iran checks in deal to end war

SEOUL, Apr 15 (AP)

THE head of the UN's nuclear watchdog said Wednesday that "very detailed" measures to verify Iran's nuclear activities must be included in a potential US-Iran agreement to end their war in the Middle East.

International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director General Rafael Grossi stressed the need for the thorough verification regime for Iran's nuclear programme, as US President Donald Trump said Tuesday that a second round of talks with Iran could happen over the next two days.

The Trump administration has said that preventing Iran from gaining a nuclear weapon is a key war aim. Iran has previously said it isn't developing such weapons but rejected limits on its nuclear programme.

Last weekend in Pakistan, an initial round of talks between the two countries failed to produce an agreement. The White House said Iran's nuclear ambitions were a central sticking point. But an Iranian diplomatic official,

speaking on the condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the closed-door talks, denied that negotiations had failed over Iran's nuclear ambitions.

"Iran has a very ambitious, wide nuclear programme so all of that will require the presence of IAEA inspectors," Grossi told reporters in Seoul. "Otherwise, you will not have an agreement. You will have an illusion of an agreement."

He said that any agreement on nuclear technology "requires very detailed verification mechanisms."

Iran has not allowed the IAEA access to its nuclear facilities bombed by Israel and the United States during a 12-day war in June, according to a confidential IAEA report circulated to member states and seen by 'The Associated Press' in February.

The report stressed that it "cannot verify whether Iran has suspended all enrichment-related activities," or the "size of Iran's uranium stockpile at the affected nuclear facilities."

Trump claims China has agreed not to provide Iran weapons

CAIRO, Apr 15 (AP)

PRESIDENT Donald Trump on Wednesday claimed that China has agreed not to provide weapons to Iran as reports circulate that Beijing has considered transferring arms.

Trump wrote in a social media post that China is "very happy that I am permanently opening the Strait of Hormuz." He added: "They have agreed not to send weapons to Iran." He seemed to suggest the two are linked.

The President had told an interviewer on Tuesday that Chinese President Xi Jinping had denied sending weapons to Iran.

China's Foreign Ministry has repeatedly denied in recent days that the country is providing any form of military support to Iran.

Iran has long insisted its programme is peaceful, but the IAEA and Western nations say Tehran had an organised nuclear weapons programme up until 2003.

The IAEA has maintained Iran has a stockpile of 440.9 kilograms of uranium enriched up to 60 per cent purity, a short, technical step away from weapons-grade levels of 90 per cent.

That stockpile could allow Iran

to build as many as 10 nuclear bombs, should it decide to weaponise its programme, Grossi said earlier.

Such highly enriched nuclear material should normally be verified every month, according to the IAEA's guidelines.

During Wednesday's press conference, Grossi also said his agency has confirmed "a rapid increase" in activities at nuclear facilities in North Korea.

UK PM hits back after Trump's trade deal threat over Iran conflict

LONDON, Apr 15 (PTI)

PRIME Minister Keir Starmer hit back after US President Donald Trump's latest attack over the UK's decision not to join the US strikes on Iran, this time threatening to review a trade deal agreed last year.

In a phone call with *Sky News* on Tuesday, the US President said it was "sad" that the so-called special relationship with Britain has been strained despite him agreeing to a "good" trade deal "which can always be changed".

"My position on the Iran war has been clear from the start. We're not going to get dragged into this war. It is not our war," Starmer told Parliament.

Expanding permanent category with veto imp to real reform of UNSC: India

■ **By Yoshita Singh**

UNITED NATIONS, Apr 15 (PTI)

INDIA has asserted that any reform of the United Nations Security Council not accompanied by expansion in the permanent category with veto would perpetuate existing imbalance and inequities in the UN organ.

Addressing the Inter-Governmental Negotiations (IGN) meeting on Security Council reforms on Tuesday, India's Permanent Representative to the UN Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish also noted that consideration of a new category, with or without veto, would "complicate" an already existing discussion that involves wide-ranging views.

"There are two fundamental aspects that result in an imbalanced structure and lack of legit-



imacy and non-representativeness of the UN Security Council - these are the membership; and veto. "There is broad agreement on the dire need to reform the UN Security Council. It is evident that a structure designed more than 80 years ago does not meet the requirements of the current geopolitical realities," Harish said. The Indian envoy recalled that the sole reform of the Council in the 1960s, which expanded only the non-permanent category, led

to an increase in the relative power of veto-wielders.

While the original ratio of permanent members, with veto, to non-permanent members was 5:6, it was amended to 5:10 thereafter to the relative advantage of veto-wielders. "Any reform that is not accompanied by an expansion in the permanent category with veto would deteriorate this ratio further and thereby, perpetuate the existing imbalance and inequities. Therefore, expanding the permanent category with veto is critical to real reform of the Security Council," he said.

Harish also noted that consideration of a new category under the framework of UNSC reform, with or without veto, would "complicate" an already existing discussion that involves wide-ranging views.

Putin likely to take part in Brics summit in India

Modi May Visit Moscow For 2026 Annual Summit

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Russian President Vladimir Putin is likely to participate in the Brics summit being held in India in Sept, reported Russia's TASS news agency on Wednesday. The report quoted a Kremlin spokesperson as saying that while the dates for the summit have not been announced yet, the president would definitely attend the event.

If it happens, it would be Putin's second visit to India in nine months. He had last visited India in Dec for the annual India-Russia summit. PM Narendra Modi is also likely to visit Moscow this year for the 2026 annual summit. Govt is also expecting participation by Chinese President Xi Jinping in the Brics summit.

India holds the presidency for Brics this year and will host the grouping's foreign ministers' meeting on May 14-15. India has been working to forge a consensus among the



Vladimir Putin had last visited India in Dec last year for the annual India-Russia summit

member-states for a joint statement on the war in the West Asia region.

Iranian leaders, including President Masoud Pezeshkian, have pressed India to get Brics to express solidarity with Tehran. However, the presence of both Iran and the UAE in the group has prevented Brics from speaking in one voice over the ongoing conflict.

Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov will participate in the meeting. Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi is also expected to visit India for the meeting. As the relationship with China continues to improve steadily, Beijing has pledged support for India's Brics presidency. President Xi Jinping is also expected to visit India for the Brics summit.

Both exports, imports to West Asia fall over 50%

New Delhi: India's exports and imports with the West Asia region plunged by over 50% in March due to disruptions triggered by the war, said commerce secretary Rajesh Agrawal on Wednesday. While exports dipped by 57.9% last month, imports declined 51.6% due to the conflict, he said.

Agrawal said logistical challenges would pose difficulties for Indian exporters but "our export industry is going to adapt and we are also going to look at new markets".

India exports goods worth about \$6 billion every month to the region, but in March it was only about \$2.5 billion. Exports fell by around \$3.5 billion. Gems and jewellery, engineering goods, electronic items, petroleum products and rice are the main five sectors that have recorded dip in shipments. "These are the five areas where we have seen a reduction," Agrawal told reporters. AGENCIES

Will unblock Hormuz blockade... for China and the world: Trump

US Prez Also Says Xi Told Him Beijing Is Not Sending Weapons To Tehran

Chidanand Rajghatta | TNN

Washington: In a conflict already defined by unpredictable volatility, US President Donald Trump has declared that he is "permanently opening the Strait of Hormuz... for China and the World" days after imposing a naval blockade to punish Iran and throwing the world economy into a tizzy.

Trump's announcement came in one of his customary rambling social media posts in which he claimed China had assured him it would not send arms to Tehran, with which Beijing has close ties, taking in 90% of Iran's oil exports.

"China is very happy that I am permanently opening the Strait of Hormuz. I am doing it for them, also — And the World. This situation will never happen again. They have agreed not to send weapons to Iran. President Xi will give me a big, fat, hug when I get there in a few weeks," Trump wrote, referring to his upcoming visit to Beijing in May preceded by a letter he has reportedly written to China President Xi Jinping.

China has not confirmed any such assurance and is in fact unhappy about Trump's blockage that threatens its oil import from Iran.

The lack of acknowledgment from Beijing has deepened scepticism in diplomatic circles, particularly given the broader context: Trump is simultaneously engaged in an aggressive trade confrontation with China. The US president is known to frequently use social media posts and public statements to shape negotiating dynamics, even if the underlying deals are still fluid — or nonexistent.

The MAGA supremo's juxtaposition — military coercion



Trump is planning a May 14-15 visit to Beijing for a summit with Xi

Iran used Beijing's spy sat to hit US bases: Report; China denies

Iran secretly acquired a Chinese spy satellite in late 2024 that has allowed it to target US military bases across West Asia during the current war, the Financial Times reported on Wednesday, an account Beijing dismissed as untrue.

The TEE-01B satellite, built and launched by Chinese company Earth Eye Co, was acquired by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Aerospace Force after it was launched into space from China, the report said, citing leaked Iranian military documents. Iranian military commanders directed the satellite to monitor major US military sites, the newspaper said, citing time-stamped coordinate lists, satellite imagery and orbital analysis. The images were taken in March before and after drone and missile strikes on those locations, the Financial Times said.

As part of the deal, the IRGC received access to commercial ground stations operated by Emosat, a Beijing-based provider of satellite control and data services with a network extending across Asia, Latin Ameri-

ca and other regions, according to the report.

The Chinese foreign ministry on Wednesday denied the report, calling it untrue. "Recently, some forces have been keen on fabricating rumours and maliciously associating them to China," the ministry said in a statement. "China firmly opposes this kind of practice driven by ulterior motives," read the statement. Reuters could not verify the report. The White House, CIA and the Pentagon did not immediately respond to Reuters' requests for comment. Earth Eye Co and Emosat also did not immediately respond to Reuters queries.

The satellite captured images of Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia on March 13, 14 and 15, the report said. On March 14, Trump confirmed US planes at the base had been hit. According to the report, the satellite also monitored the Muwaffaq Salti Air Base in Jordan and locations close to the US Fifth Fleet naval base in Bahrain, and Erbil airport, Iraq, around the time of IRGC-claimed attacks on facilities in those areas. REUTERS

tion paired with personal diplomacy invoking friendship, love, hugs, etc. — has also become a hallmark of his geopolitical style, fuelling confusion about whether Washington is escalating towards a wider war or edging toward a negotiated de-escalation. Such chaos is reflected in a popular online meme that reads: "Only Trump could think of a blockade to block the blockade that's blocking the Strait that wasn't blocked before being blocked due to a war of his choosing."

Soon after Trump's announcement of a Hormuz blockade, the Pentagon said it has "completely halted" maritime trade in and out of Iran. The move involved more than 10,000 troops, alongside warships and aircraft enforcing restrictions in one of the world's most critical energy chokepoints. Iran has responded with threats of escalation. Yet while the military buildup intensifies, Trump struck an incongruously optimistic tone. In interviews to US media outlets, he declared the conflict "close to over", even as officials signalled preparations for further strikes or ground operations if a fragile ceasefire collapses.

To critics, the oscillation between threats and overtures is emblematic of a presidency that thrives on unpredictability. To supporters, it is a deliberate strategy designed to keep adversaries off balance while preserving room for negotiation. Trump himself appears to embrace both interpretations. His social media post encapsulated the duality: celebrating cooperation with China while reminding the world that the US is "very good at fighting... far better than anyone else."

... will block on its no

US says sanctions relief on Russian oil won't be extended

The Trump administration is unlikely to issue a new waiver allowing countries to buy sanctioned Russian oil as part of any efforts to tame high fuel prices, energy secretary Chris Wright said. "That was a broad-based reprieve," Wright said Wednesday at an event held by Wall Street Journal. "I don't think you will see that extended."

The US treasury had issued the waiver in March allowing for the sale of Russian crude stranded aboard tankers at sea as the war in Iran cut off supply from the Persian Gulf and sent prices surging. It expired April 11. Oil prices are up more than 30% since the war began, driving up prices of gasoline, diesel, jet fuel, fertiliser and other products. Those increases are putting immense pressure on President Trump to keep a lid on consumer prices. BLOOMBERG

Pak secures \$3bn in Saudi support to repay UAE loan

Pakistan said it secured \$3 billion in financial support from Saudi Arabia, providing a key lifeline to shore up its foreign exchange reserves and offset a loan repayment to the UAE. Saudi Arabia has committed additional funds with "disbursement expected in the coming week," Pakistan's finance ministry said in a statement Wednesday, citing its minister **Muhammad Aurangzeb**.

It also extended an existing \$5 billion deposit, which will no longer be subject to the earlier annual rollover arrangement.

The financial lifeline provides a much-needed boost to Pakistan's coffers following a surprise demand earlier this month from the UAE that Islamabad repay a \$3 billion loan. The demand came after Islamabad failed to strike an agree-

ment with the Gulf country to roll over the debt for the first time in seven years. Pakistan will pay the amount by the end of this month.

The repayment demand threatened to further strain Pakistan's economy at a time when it is already being hit by the fallout from the war in West Asia. It also put pressure on Pakistan's already-thin foreign-exchange reserves, which stood at \$16.4 billion as of March 27.

The aid from Saudi Arabia further cements ties between the two nations after they signed a defence pact pledging that "any aggression against either country shall be considered an aggression against both." The two countries have had many meetings about the pact since Iran began retaliatory attacks against its neighbours. BLOOMBERG

