

2nd GE engine arrives, 12 LCA Tejas set to roll out by year-end

AMRITA NAYAK DUTTA

NEW DELHI, JULY 15

TWELVE TEJAS Mk 1A light combat aircraft, powered by the GE F404 engine from US defence major GE Aerospace, will be ready for rollout by December this year, and six of these aircraft have already been lined up, officials privy to the latest developments have told *The Indian Express*.

The second GE F404 engine, officials said, landed in India Monday and will be taken to the Bengaluru facility of HAL where it will be integrated with the indigenous Tejas Mk 1A.

In August 2021, HAL placed an order worth ₹5,375 crore for 99 F404 engines with GE Aerospace to power the Tejas Mk-1A. The first engine was delivered to HAL in April this year after considerable delay — the scheduled delivery date was in 2023.

The IAF has placed an order to procure 83 Tejas Mk 1A LCA. The Ministry of Defence is also in the process of procuring another 97 Mk 1A LCAs at an estimated cost of ₹67,000 crore.

Officials said that GE Aerospace has said it will deliver 10 engines by the end of this year.

"It takes about a month to integrate the engines and do the tests. The process first involves building the fuselage, then getting the lobing and piping done, followed by combining the landing gear," an official said.

"After integrating the engines, the ground runs, including high-speed runs, are carried out for all thorough checks," the official said.

The deliveries of the LCA Tejas Mk 1A were scheduled to begin in March 2024, but have been delayed by over a year.

Last month, HAL Chairperson and MD D K Sunil attributed the delay to GE Aerospace missing the deadline to supply the aircraft engines to HAL for the Tejas Mk 1A.

The development came

EXPLAINED

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The IAF's urgency

OPERATING WAY below its authorised strength of 42 fighter squadrons, the IAF is seeking timely delivery of the indigenous Tejas Mk 1A. It has already phased out most of its MiG-21 squadrons and in the coming years, it will begin phasing out other ageing fighter squadrons.

weeks after IAF chief Air Chief Marshal A P Singh expressed concern over the delay in delivery of the fighter aircraft.

The timely induction of the indigenous fighter jets, including Tejas Mk 1A, is crucial to hold the IAF's dwindling squadron strength. The IAF has phased out most of its MiG-21 squadrons, and early next decade, it is likely to begin phasing out other ageing fighter squadrons.

According to officials, HAL plans to produce 16 fighter aircraft next year if engine deliveries from the US are on schedule. The original plan was to produce 16 aircraft every year and complete deliveries of all aircraft by 2030.

The Tejas Mk 1 A LCAs have multiple upgrades over the Mk 1 version, including integration of the AESA radar, Advanced Electronic Warfare Suite with jammer, and Beyond Visual Range (BVR) capabilities with integration of the Derby and the indigenous ASTRA air-to-air missiles.

Officials said testing of the ASTRA missile firing from the aircraft is currently underway.

Earlier this month, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh asked US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth to expedite the deliveries of GE F404 engines for the Tejas Mk 1A.

Govt. data show fall in women at work in rural, urban areas

Govt. says this could be due to seasonal agricultural patterns and intense summer heat limiting outdoor work; unemployment rate stagnant at 5.6%

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The unemployment rate among people aged 15 and above has remained the same at 5.6% in June and May, according to the Periodic Labour Force Survey released by the Statistics and Programme Implementation Ministry here on Tuesday.

Women's participation in labour force, both in urban and rural areas, decreased by one percentage point in June compared with May. The government said there is a "marginal decline" in the labour force participation rate (LFPR) among men too.

✓ The Centre said the marginal decline in LFPR and worker population ratio (WPR) in June was largely influenced by seasonal agricultural patterns, intense summer heat limiting outdoor physical work, and a shift of some unpaid helpers, particularly from higher-income rural households, towards domestic chores. It said the share of rural women workers in agriculture dropped to



For females of all age groups in both rural and urban areas, the LFPR was 24.5% in June and it was 25.5% in May. AP

69.8% in June from 70.2% in May, indicating the reduced need for agricultural engagement among women, "perhaps due to a decline in rural inflation".

The Ministry said the LFPR in current weekly status among all persons aged 15 and above was 54.2% during June compared with 54.8% during May. "The LFPR in rural areas was 56.1% and LFPR in urban areas was 50.4% during June for persons of the same age group," the Ministry said.

The LFPR for males aged 15 and above in rural and urban areas were 78.1% and 75%, respectively in June, and it marked a marginal decline from the

corresponding LFPR estimates of 78.3% and 75.1% for rural and urban areas, respectively in May.

For females, the LFPR for those aged 15 and above in rural areas was 35.2% in June. This was 36.9% in May and 38.2% in April. In urban areas, the LFPR was 25% in June. It was 25.3% in May. For all age groups in both rural and urban areas, the LFPR was 24.5% in June compared with 25.5% in May.

The unemployment rate for female and male of all ages above 15 was 5.6%. While for males, the rate remained same as of May, for females there was a decrease by 0.1 percentage point.

DELEGATION MEETS ELECTION COMMISSIONERS

BJP ally TDP to EC: Define SIR scope, make clear there's no citizenship link

Party says any deletion from voter list must be preceded by a valid inquiry

PUSHKAR BANAKAR
NEW DELHI, JULY 15

AS QUESTIONS are raised over the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in poll-bound Bihar, the Telugu Desam Party (TDP), the ruling NDA's second-largest constituent, has sought clarity on "the scope of the exercise" and said it should be made clear that it is "not related to citizenship verification".



The TDP delegation at the EC office, Tuesday. X/@ECISVEEP

In a letter to Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar
CONTINUED ON PAGE 4



WHAT WILL
NOT
COUNT IN BIHAR

AN EXPRESS SERIES

PART II

10 days to go, Bihar CEO launches online form for residents outside state

SANTOSH SINGH
PATNA, JULY 15

WITH ONLY 10 days left for the submission and uploading of enumeration forms to be included as voters in the Election Commission's Special Intensive Revision (SIR) drive, Bihar Chief

Electoral Office (CEO) has launched "an easy, two-step" online form for the estimated one crore migrants living outside the state, amid concerns that they may be left out of the exercise.

Bihar CEO Vinod Singh Gunjyal told *The Indian Express* in an interview earlier that the Election
CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

BJP ally TDP to EC: Define SIR scope, make clear there is no citizenship link

on Tuesday, written by TDP parliamentary party leader Lavu Sri Krishna Devarayalu and signed by five other party leaders, the TDP said: "The scope of the SIR must be clearly defined and must be limited to electoral roll recorection and inclusion. It should be explicitly communicated that the exercise is not related to citizenship verification, and any field instructions must reflect this distinction."

The N Chandrababu Naidu-led party called for "the presumption of inclusion", and said voters enrolled after the previous revision must not be required to re-establish their eligibility "unless specific and verifiable reasons are recorded", and called for a third-party audit under the Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) to identify anomalies.

Citing a Supreme Court judgment, the TDP letter said the prior inclusion of a person in electoral rolls creates a presumption of validity and any deletion must be preceded by a valid inquiry. "The burden of proof lies with the ERO or objector, not the voter, especially when the name exists in the official roll," said the

letter, signed by TDP MPs Byreddy Shabari and D Prasada Rao, TDP Andhra president Palla Srinivasa Rao, and MLA Koonu Ravi Kumar.

The letter was submitted to the EC after TDP leaders met it as part of an ongoing exercise by the poll panel to take suggestions from political parties to strengthen electoral processes.

Asked about the letter, TDP national spokesperson and one of the signatories, Jyothsna Tirunagari, denied any link between the ongoing SIR in Bihar and the party's suggestions. "We just met the EC and, as we were asked for suggestions, made our stand clear on the electoral process. We are a democratic party and would want transparency in the electoral process," she told *The Indian Express*.

As reported by *The Indian Express*, the EC on July 5 wrote to Chief Electoral Officers (CEOs) of all states, directing them to begin preparations for a Bihar-like exercise with January 1, 2026, as the qualifying date.

The TDP letter said that any such electoral roll revision should "not ideally be held within six months of any major

election". "To ensure voter confidence and administrative preparedness, the SIR process should be conducted with a sufficient time lead," it said.

Pointing out that Assembly polls in Andhra — where the TDP is in power with allies BJP and Pawan Kalyan's JanaSena Party (JSP) — are not due till 2029, the letter said that the SIR provides "a valuable opportunity to ensure electoral rolls are updated in a fair, inclusive and transparent manner".

Specifically pointing to seasonal migration in coastal areas of Andhra, the TDP's letter called for temporary address declarations with basic documentation to be permitted. "Where voters are unable to submit documents at the time of visit, age-wise verification must be permitted," the letter said.

Reacting to the letter, Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leader in Bihar Shakeel Ahmad Khan said the process "stifles individual and voting rights". "No one will like it. There needs to be a time frame and objective for a survey and the SIR lacks both. It is against the Constitution," he said.

The RJD said it had made similar suggestions to the EC in the past. Saying that "the EC's intentions are not right", party spokesperson Subodh Kumar Mehta said: "The poll panel is working in violation of democratic norms and Constitutional principles. The Maneka Gandhi versus Government of India case established that the intention behind a procedure, along with the procedure itself, is open to challenge. It seems that the TDP has made the suggestions in this context."

The JD(U), which leads the NDA coalition in Bihar, refused to comment on the TDP letter.

Some other suggestions made by the TDP include district-wise data on voter addition and deletions, with explanation, on the EC portal; permission for Aadhaar-based cross-verification; penalties for inaction by EROS (Electoral Registration Officers) and DEOs (District Election Officers); a state-level ombudsman under the EC to handle unresolved grievances; and targeted re-enrolment campaigns for migrant workers, tribal groups and senior citizens.

SCO shouldn't compromise on terrorism: Jaishankar

External Affairs Minister says Pahalgam attack was carried out to 'sow religious divide'; SCO was founded to combat terrorism, separatism and extremism, he tells counterparts at meet in China

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

The Pahalgam terrorist attack of April 22 was carried out to hurt the Jammu and Kashmir economy and to "sow a religious divide", External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar told the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's (SCO) Council of Foreign Ministers (SCO-CFM) meeting in China, where other SCO Ministers – including Pakistan's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar – were present, and called for support to bring the perpetrators to justice.

On Tuesday, Mr. Jaishankar and the other SCO Ministers from Russia, Iran, Belarus and Central Asian states called on Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing before proceeding to the SCO meeting in Tianjin by train. The External Affairs Minister also held bilateral talks with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, both of whom he met earlier this month at the BRICS summit in Brazil.

Mr. Jaishankar's comments came a month after the SCO Defence Ministers' meeting failed to issue a joint statement following differences over the references to terrorism. While no statement was issued af-



Friendly ties: External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar during a meeting with Chinese President Xi Jinping in Beijing. PTI

ter the SCO Foreign Ministers' meeting as well, officials said it was not the practice to do so, as the Foreign Ministers were normally tasked with finalising the agenda for the Summit of leaders on August 31-September 1. PM Narendra Modi is expected to travel to Tianjin for the summit, which would be his first such visit since the Galwan clashes in 2020.

"The three evils that SCO was founded to combat were terrorism, separatism and extremism," Mr. Jaishankar said during his speech at the meeting, where he referred to the Pahalgam terror attack in which 26 men, mostly tourists, were religiously identified and killed. "It was deliberately conducted to undermine the tourism economy of Jammu and Kashmir, while sowing a religious divide," he added,

calling for the SCO to take an "uncompromising position" on the challenge of terrorism, and referring to the UN Security Council resolution issued in April about the attack.

A press statement issued by the SCO secretariat said that the members exchanged views on key areas of SCO cooperation including "political, economic, trade, cultural" issues and key international and regional issues, but did not specifically mention terrorism.

Mr. Jaishankar's meeting with Mr. Xi came a day after he held bilateral talks in Beijing with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and called on Chinese Vice President Han Zheng, where he hailed the "continued normalisation" of India-China relations. The Minister said that he had apprised President Xi of re-

cent developments in bilateral relations.

Chinese state media reported that Mr. Xi had told SCO Ministers that the organisation must play a "more proactive role" to ensure stability in a "turbulent and changing international landscape".

In his comments during the SCO-CFM, Pakistan Foreign Minister Mr. Dar did not refer to the issue of terrorism. In a post on social media, Mr. Dar said that he "underscored the importance of upholding international law and implementing relevant UNSC resolutions to resolve longstanding disputes", at the meeting and that Pakistan sought peace with "all its neighbours".

Referring to Afghanistan, Mr. Jaishankar said that the "compulsions of regional stability are buttressed by [India's] longstanding concern for the well-being of the Afghan people" and called for SCO members to increase development assistance.

Taking a swipe at Pakistan for closing transit for India-Afghanistan trade, Mr. Jaishankar said that the "lack of assured transit within the SCO space...undermines the seriousness of advocating cooperation in economic areas", and advocated for the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) that runs through Iran.

BOTH COUNTRIES TO REVIEW TRADE AGREEMENT, EXPLORE DE-CARBONISATION

Despite Indo-Pacific, our window for talks open: Albanese after meeting Xi

LEWIS JACKSON
& KIRSTY NEEDHAM
BEIJING, SYDNEY, JULY 15

CHINA AND Australia will keep open dialogue and look for areas of cooperation despite strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific region, Australia Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said on Tuesday after meeting China's President Xi Jinping in Beijing.

China was willing to "promote further development in the China-Australia relationship," Xi said in remarks at the start of the meeting. Albanese's visit to China comes as Beijing tries to capitalise on US President Donald Trump's sweeping trade tariffs by presenting itself as a stable and reliable partner.

Australia's trade relationship with China was separate to Canberra's handling of U.S. tariffs, Albanese told reporters, speaking after a lunch with Xi at the Great Hall of the People.

Albanese said a decade-old free trade agreement with China, Australia's largest trade partner, would be reviewed, and that the two leaders agreed to potential new cooperation on de-carbonisation. Albanese said he raised Australia's concerns over the



Australian PM Anthony Albanese with Chinese President Xi Jinping at Great Hall of the People in Beijing on Tuesday. AP

Chinese navy's conduct of short notice live fire exercises in the Tasman Sea between Australia and New Zealand in February.

Xi responded that China "engages in exercises just as Australia engages in exercises", Albanese told reporters.

"We have strategic competition in the region but we continue to engage in order to support peace and security in the region and stability in the region," he said.

Chinese state media outlet Xinhua said Xi emphasised in the meeting that China and Australia should continue to enhance strategic mutual trust, create a favourable business environment for both sides, and "safeguard multilateralism and free trade" in the face of a complex international landscape.

"Dialogue needs to be at the centre of our relationship," Albanese said in opening remarks to Xi.

China's military activities biggest challenge: Japan

ASSOCIATED PRESS
TOKYO, JULY 15

JAPAN CAUTIONED against China's rapid acceleration of military activity stretching from its southwestern coasts to the Pacific, describing the moves in a new defense report Tuesday as the biggest strategic challenge.

China's growing military cooperation with Russia also poses serious security concerns to Japan, along with increasing tension around Taiwan and threats coming from North Korea, the Defense Ministry said in the annual report.

"The international society is in a new crisis era as it faces the biggest challenges since the end of World War II," the report said, citing significant changes to the global power balance while raising concerns about an escalation of the China-U.S. rivalry.

The security threats are concentrated in the Indo-Pacific, where Japan is located, and could get worse in the future, the report said. China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian criticized the white paper, saying it "adopts



A Chinese aircraft carrier in the South China Sea. AP

a wrongful perception of China, unjustifiably interferes in China's internal affairs, and plays up the so-called China threat."

Beijing has lodged protests with Japan, Lin said, defending China's military activities as "legitimate and reasonable." He urged Japan to reflect on its wartime past and "stop hyping tension in the region and China-related issues as a pretext to justify its military buildup."

Japan has strengthened its military forces on southwestern islands in recent years and was preparing to deploy long-distance cruise missiles, as it worries about a conflict in Taiwan, which China claims as its territory to be annexed by force if necessary.

Brazil, China, India could be hit hard by curbs: NATO chief

Reuters

WASHINGTON

NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte warned on Wednesday that countries such as Brazil, China and India could be hit very hard by secondary sanctions if they continued to do business with Russia.

Mr. Rutte made the comment while meeting with senators in the U.S. Congress the day after President Donald Trump announced new weapons for Ukraine and threatened "biting" secondary tariffs of 100% on the buyers of Russian exports unless there is a peace deal in 50 days.

"My encouragement to these three countries, particularly is, if you live now in Beijing, or in Delhi, or you are the President of



Mark Rutte

Brazil, you might want to take a look into this, because this might hit you very hard," Mr. Rutte told reporters, who met with Mr. Trump on Monday. "So please make the phone call to Vladimir Putin and tell him that he has to get serious about peace talks, because otherwise this will slam back on Brazil, on India and on China in a massive way," Mr. Rutte added.

Xi pledges China's support in meeting with Russia's Lavrov

Agence France-Presse

BEIJING

Chinese President Xi Jinping told Russia's top diplomat on Tuesday that their countries should "strengthen mutual support", state media said, as Foreign Ministers gathered in Beijing for Shanghai Cooperation Organisation talks.

Beijing has long sought to present the SCO as a counterweight to Western-led power blocs such as NATO and has pushed for greater collaboration between its 10 members.

Top diplomats from the grouping have arrived in Beijing for a meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers, including Russia's Sergei Lavrov, India's S. Jaishankar and Iran's Abbas Araghchi.

Meeting Mr. Lavrov in

the Chinese capital, Mr. Xi said the two countries should "strengthen mutual support on multilateral forums", according to state news agency.

Uniting the South

Beijing and Moscow should work to "unite countries of the global South and promote the development of the international order in a more just and reasonable direction", Mr. Xi said.

Russia's Foreign Ministry said in an earlier statement that "a number of issues of bilateral political contacts at the highest and high levels were discussed".

They included preparations for President Vladimir Putin's visit to China to join a SCO summit and Second World War anniversary celebrations.

Syria announces ceasefire after outbreak of sectarian violence

ASSOCIATED PRESS

BUSRA AL-HARIR, JULY 15

SYRIA'S DEFENSE minister announced a ceasefire shortly after government forces entered a key city in Sweida province on Tuesday, a day after sectarian clashes killed dozens, while neighboring Israel again launched strikes in the area.

Murhaf Abu Qasra said in a statement that after an agreement with the city's "notables and dignitaries, we will respond only to the sources of fire and deal with any targeting by outlaw groups."

The latest sectarian violence to emerge under Syria's new leaders began with tit-for-tat kidnappings and attacks between members of Bedouin



Syrian forces on an armored personnel carrier as they withdraw from Sweida city on Tuesday. AP

tribes and Druze factions. Syrian security forces sent to restore order on Monday clashed with Druze armed groups.

Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Israel Katz in a joint statement said

Israel had struck to "prevent the Syrian regime from harming" the Druze minority "and to ensure disarmament in the area adjacent to our borders with Syria."

Syria's state-run news agency SANA did not give details.

Ultra-Orthodox party to quit Israeli government over military draft law

Once withdrawal comes into effect in 48 hours, it will leave the Israeli PM with a slim majority in a government that could now more heavily rely on the whims of two far-right parties; the two groups oppose concessions in truce talks with Hamas

Associated Press

TEL AVIV

An Israeli ultra-Orthodox party that has been a key governing partner of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Tuesday it was leaving the coalition government, threatening to destabilise the Israeli leader's rule at a pivotal time in the Gaza war.

United Torah Judaism's two factions said they were bolting the government over disagreements surrounding a Bill that would codify broad military draft exemptions for their constituents, many of whom study Jewish texts instead of enlisting in the military.



Losing strength: Benjamin Netanyahu, left, can find ways to bring back the UTF party into the coalition in 48 hours. REUTERS

The issue has long divided Jewish Israelis, most of whom are required to enlist, a rift that has only widened since the war in Gaza began and demands on

military manpower grew.

"After the government repeatedly violated its commitments to ensure the status of Jewish seminary students," the Degel

HaTorah faction said in a statement, its lawmakers announced "their resignation from the coalition and the government."

The departure of the United Torah Judaism (UTJ) party, which has seven members in the Knesset, leaves Mr. Netanyahu's government with the slenderest of majorities, with 61 in the 120-member parliament.

This leaves the Israeli Prime Minister more reliant on the two far-right parties, which oppose concessions in ceasefire negotiations with Hamas and have themselves quit or threatened to quit the government over moves to end or even pause the 21-

month-long war in Gaza.

The political shake-up comes as Israel and Hamas are discussing the terms of a truce for the 21-month war in Gaza. Despite heavy pressure by the U.S., Israel's top ally, and mediators Egypt and Qatar, there is no breakthrough yet in the talks. A recurring sticking point has been whether the war ends as part of any truce and Mr. Netanyahu's far-right coalition allies oppose ending the war while Hamas remains intact.

United Torah Judaism's departure has a window of 48 hours before becoming official, meaning Mr. Netanyahu can still find ways to satisfy the party and bring it back into the coalition.

Netanyahu under mounting pressure as religious party quits govt coalition

REUTERS

JERUSALEM, JULY 15

A RELIGIOUS party has quit Israel's ruling coalition in a dispute over military service, leaving Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu with a razor-thin majority in parliament but still enough political support to secure a potential Gaza ceasefire.

Six members of United Torah Judaism (UTJ) handed in resignation letters overnight from posts in parliamentary committees and government ministries, in protest against lawmakers' failure to guarantee future exemption from military conscription for ultra-Orthodox religious students.

Shas, a second ultra-Orthodox party closely allied with UTJ, may follow and leave the government with no parliament majority.

The UTJ lawmakers said their walkout would come into effect after 48 hours, giving Netanyahu two days to try and resolve the crisis which has dogged his coalition for months.

Even if that fails, parliament goes on summer break at the end of July, which would give the prime minister a further three months to seek a solution before any loss of his majority could threaten his position.

Netanyahu is also facing pressure from far-right parties in his coalition over ceasefire talks underway in Qatar.

The indirect negotiations be-



Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the Knesset on Monday. AP

tween Israel and Palestinian militant group Hamas aim to halt fighting in Gaza for 60 days to allow half of remaining hostages held by Hamas to be released and aid to flow into the battered enclave. It would also open a further phase of talks on ending the war entirely.

National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir and Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich want Israel to press on with the war, but Netanyahu would still be likely to have enough cabinet votes to secure a ceasefire without them.

Israelis have become increasingly weary of the 21-month war in Gaza, which began with a surprise attack by Hamas on October 7, 2023 that led to Israel's single deadliest day with 1,200 killed and 251 taken hostage by the Palestinian militants. Israel's subsequent offensive against Hamas has since reportedly killed more than 58,000 Palestinians.

ARBIL

Drone attack shuts U.S.-run oil field in Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan



AFP

A drone strike on Tuesday forced a U.S. firm to suspend operations at an oil field in Iraq's autonomous Kurdistan region, the latest in a string of attacks targeting the region's energy facilities. Officials said the Sarsang oil field in Duhok was hit, denouncing the strike "an act of terrorism against the region's vital economic infrastructure". AFP

BEIJING

Nvidia to resume sales of 'H20' AI chips to China as U.S. eases curbs



AP

U.S. tech giant Nvidia said on Tuesday it will resume sales of its H20 artificial intelligence chips to China, after Washington pledged to remove licensing curbs that had put a stop to exports. It had developed the H20 — a less powerful version of its AI processing units — specifically for export to China. AFP

Services exports cut India's trade deficit by 9.4% in Q1

Around 11% growth in services exports helps overall trade deficit contract to \$20.3 billion; current export growth on track to beat last year's record figures of \$825 billion, says Commerce Secretary

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

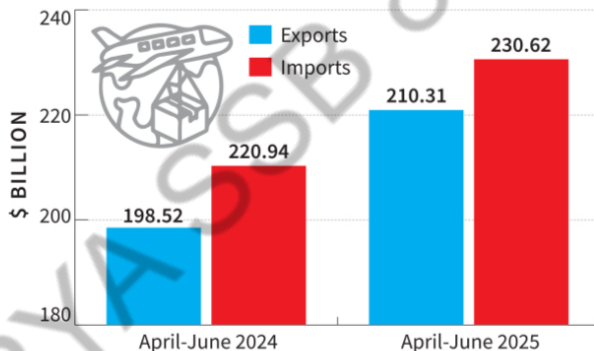
India's overall trade deficit contracted 9.4% to \$20.3 billion in the first quarter (Q1) of the current financial year, driven by a nearly 11% growth in services exports during this period, according to official data.

Data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry on Tuesday showed that India's overall exports grew to \$210.3 billion in the April-June quarter, up from \$198.5 billion in the corresponding period of the previous financial year, rising about 6%.

"If exports grow the way they have grown in Quarter One of this financial year, then we are going to beat last year's record exports," Commerce Secretary

Decline in deficit

The chart shows India's imports and exports in the April-June quarter in the manufacturing and service sectors



SOURCE: DIRECTORATE GENERAL OF FOREIGN TRADE

tary Sunil Barthwal said at a press briefing.

Positive territory

"In fact, if you look at this quarter, both merchandise as well as services are in the positive territory and better than what was ex-

pected by the WTO [World Trade Organisation] in terms of world trade," Mr. Barthwal added.

India's total exports stood at an all-time high of \$825 billion in the financial year 2024-25.

Within India's total ex-

ports, it was services that drove the growth. Services exports rose to \$98.1 billion this Q1, up nearly 11% from the \$88.5 billion seen in the corresponding quarter of last year.

Merchandise exports in Q1 of this financial year grew just 2% to \$112.2 billion. However, Mr. Barthwal emphasised that a large part of this slowdown was due to falling petroleum prices, since India's non-petroleum exports grew 6% during this period.

India's total imports grew 4.4% in Q1 of this financial year to \$230.6 billion, with merchandise imports growing 4.2% and services imports growing 4.9% during this period.

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‘Good progress on EU FTA talks, less so on ASEAN pact review’

Commerce Ministry officials confirm team from India is in Washington to negotiate the U.S. deal, the third such visit in the last few months

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan

NEW DELHI

The next few months is going to see a flurry of activity, with various teams of Indian negotiators actively seeking to sign new trade agreements with countries and regions such as the U.S. and European Union (EU) and amend the existing deal with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), according to government officials.

During a press briefing on Tuesday, senior officials in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry said that India was seeing “good progress” in its negotiations with the EU, and less satisfactory progress on the review of the free trade agreement with the ASEAN. They also said that the Fall deadline for a Bilateral Investment Treaty with the U.S. was still in place.

“With regard to the EU, we have just finished the 12th round last week that was on Friday,” Special Secretary in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry Satya Srinivas said. “We have exchanged our market access offers on services and non-services.”

Mr. Srinivas said that the negotiators on both sides could close a “couple of chapters” of the deal and that they held long discus-

Progress report

Commerce ministry officials reiterated the Fall deadline for the conclusion of a Bilateral Trade Agreement with the U.S.

- With EU, India finished the twelfth round of talks last week on Friday

- Negotiators on both sides closed a “couple of chapters” of the deal

- With ASEAN, the progress thus far has been chequered and more is expected



sions on other chapters where there was a divergence.

Regarding the India-U.S. trade deal, the Commerce Ministry officials confirmed that a team from India is currently in Washington to negotiate the deal, their third such visit in the last few months. They reiterated the Fall deadline for the conclusion of a Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA).

The Hindu has learnt that the Indian team has taken sectoral specialists this time around to address minute issues.

‘No tariff effect yet’

According to sources, U.S. President Donald Trump’s reciprocal tariff letters over the last week haven’t had any effect so far. “If you look at the tariffs today, there are only announcements of tariffs,” a source aware of the negotiations told *The Hindu*.

Special Secretary in the

Ministry of Commerce and Industry Rajesh Agrawal said that teams from India and ASEAN have held nine rounds of meetings so far.

“The progress thus far has been chequered and we would have liked much more progress,” Mr. Agrawal said.

“But the good part is we are moving on many aspects, especially on customs and trade facilitation. We are moving on technical cooperation, and there are discussions around market access.”

He added that the next two rounds are expected to be in New Delhi in August, and in Malaysia in October, respectively.

“We hope in these two rounds we should be able to see good progress and try to reach some kind of conclusion by the time the ASEAN-India Summit takes place in end-October,” he said. “The endeavour is in that direction.”