

Trade deals made from a 'position of strength', says Modi

Slew of trade agreements will expand global market access for MSMEs, says PM; he urges private sector to take advantage of policy framework

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

India recently entered into a slew of trade agreements, including with the European Union and the United States, "from a position of strength", Prime Minister

Narendra Modi said on Sunday, adding that these deals were designed to expand global market access for Indian manufacturing and services.

In a written interview to the Press Trust of India, Mr. Modi said that the 2026 Budget gave the private sector the opportunity to step up and take advantage of government's investment in infrastructure and capital expenditure.

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NARENDRA MODI
Prime Minister



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Opposition slams PM's interview

NEW DELHI

The Congress dismissed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's interview with the Press Trust of India as a "carefully scripted" one and a "desperate PR exercise". » PAGE 10

Trade deals made from a ‘position of strength’

The Prime Minister’s remarks comes as Parliament remains in recess after the first part of the Budget Session where the government faced an attack by the Opposition on the terms of the trade deals.

Mr. Modi defended the agreements, noting that while long negotiations by the previous Congress-led UPA government had not yielded any results, his government’s “political stability and political predictability” had restored investors’ confidence in India.

His government’s top three reform priorities

for the next decade, Mr. Modi said, would be continued structural reforms, deepening innovation, and further simplification of governance.

“I am proud to say that we have moved from incremental adjustments to systemic transformation,” the Prime Minister said.

Looking beyond tariffs

The Prime Minister spoke at length about his own government’s efforts to enable the environment to strike these deals as well as his expectations from the private sector in taking advantage of these agreements.

“Trade competitiveness is not only about tariffs. It is about liquidity, certification, technology adoption and compliance with global standards.

Our Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) are designed to reduce non-tariff barriers and expand market access for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) in sectors such as textiles, leather, processed food, engineering goods, chemicals, handicrafts and gems and jewellery,” Mr. Modi said.

“Indian MSMEs are more export-ready than before, and India’s trade policy now deliberately places MSMEs at the centre of global integration. These FTAs are tools to ensure that our youth are not just suppliers to the domestic market, but active participants in global trade and growth,” he said.

Private sector responsibility

But, he added, “policy can only create the enabling framework. The next phase of transformation requires a decisive response from the private sector.”

“As a country that is part of various trade agreements, making Indian products and services globally competitive is crucial. Our stance on ‘Zero Defect, Zero Effect’ has resonated deeply with the youth, start-ups and small and medium businesses,” the Prime Minister said. “MSMEs must move beyond being peripheral suppliers. They must become technologically upgraded, globally integrated and export-oriented enterprises that form the backbone of India’s participation in global value chains,” he added.

Defence focus

On defence expenditure and reforms, he noted that his government's focus on the issue had visibly paid off during the course of Operation Sindoor against Pakistan.

"During the operation, one could see the benefits of the reforms we have undertaken in the last decade. Therefore, defence budgets, modernisation, etc., all these are parts of our continuous effort and need not be linked to any particular issue," he said.

Asked whether the higher budgetary allocation to the defence sector was part of the lesson learnt from Operation Sindoor, he answered in the affirmative. "Yes, the reality is that our country has to be strong and be prepared at all times, and that is what we are doing," the Prime Minister said.

"In this year's budget, a record ₹7.85 lakh crore have been allocated to the defence sector. This is 15 per cent higher than the previous budget and is also the biggest chunk allotted to any ministry or department," he said.

Speaking on the eve of the global AI Summit to be held in New Delhi from Monday, Mr. Modi said that "tax incentives announced in the Budget are designed to accelerate investment in this space, lower the cost of building advanced facilities and position India as a globally competitive destination for data infrastructure. The result of this, too, will be a massive number of jobs for our youth..."

Opposition slams PM for 'hollow words' in 'scripted' interview

Opposition says Modi's interview means 'little in reality' and attempts to divert attention from a 'damp squib' Budget and capitulation before U.S.

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Congress on Sunday dismissed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's interview with the news agency Press Trust of India as "no interview at all", describing it as a "carefully scripted" and "desperate PR exercise".

The Left criticised Mr. Modi for comments divorced from micro-realities of the Indian economy, while the Trinamool Congress said the Prime Minister spoke "hollow words".

Congress general secretary (communications) Jairam Ramesh alleged that the Prime Minister, "under siege and attack" over what he termed a surrender to the U.S. on a trade deal, was once again resorting to his "favourite tactic" of headline management.

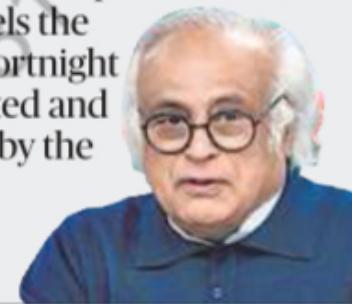
Calling the Union Budget a "damp squib", Mr. Ramesh said it clearly showed "every sign of intellectual exhaustion". "Markets have reacted negatively and investors have been unimpressed. This is why the Prime Minister feels



Markets have reacted negatively and investors have been unimpressed. This is why the Prime Minister feels the need to give an interview a fortnight after the Budget was presented and days after it was taken apart by the Opposition in Parliament

JAIRAM RAMESH

Congress leader



the need to give an interview a fortnight after the Budget was presented and days after it was taken apart by the Opposition in Parliament," he said.

Mr. Ramesh took a swipe at Mr. Modi's remarks in the interview, saying they were marked by "Modi-style one-liners that mean little in reality". He accused the Prime Minister of attempting to divert attention from what he called a "betrayal" of lakhs of farmers and other "capitulations". "His so-called interview is no interview, but a carefully scripted and desperate PR exercise," Mr. Ramesh said, adding, "Pradhan Mantri jhuke bhi hain, aur thake bhi hain (Prime Minister has surrendered and is tired)."

Trinamool Rajya Sabha

leader Derek O'Brien branded Mr. Modi's comments as "hollow words".

"More hollow words from PM Modi, aka Teleprompter Tycoon who runs away from speaking on the floor of Parliament," he said.

CPI general secretary D. Raja called Mr. Modi's remarks a mockery of the "toiling masses" who are facing an unprecedented distress. "PM should stop this rhetoric, he must be realistic and reasonable in addressing the concerns and issues of the nations. He does not seem to be familiar with micro-realities of the economy and the country," he said.

Mr. Raja added that there was still no clarity on how the recent trade deals would help the unemployed youth.

Congress questions impact of India-U.S. trade pact on agriculture, crop prices

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Stepping up his attack on the government over the India-U.S. trade deal, Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of "betraying" Indian farmers and raised a series of questions about the agreement's impact on the agricultural sector.

Mr. Gandhi, who has repeatedly alleged that the deal represents a "sell-out", asked whether India was effectively opening the door to foreign control over its farm economy. "In the name of a U.S. trade deal, we are witnessing a betrayal of Indian farmers," the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha wrote on X.

Questioning the implications of importing Dried Distillers' Grains (DDG), he asked whether Indian cattle would now be fed distillers' grains derived from genetically modified (GM)



Rahul Gandhi

American corn, and whether this would make Indian dairy products dependent on the U.S. agricultural industry.

He sought clarity on the possible import of GM soy oil and its effects on soy growers in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan, and other States. "How will they withstand another price shock," he asked.

Mr. Gandhi pressed the Prime Minister for details on the reference to "additional products" in the deal, suggesting it could eventually open India's market to U.S. pulses and

other crops. He questioned the government's intent in agreeing to remove "non-trade barriers", warning this could translate into pressure to dilute India's stance on GM crops, weaken procurement systems, or reduce MSPs and bonuses. "Once the door is opened, will it be prevented from opening wider each year, or will more crops be put on the table," he asked, insisting that farmers deserve transparency.

"This isn't just about today. It's about the future – are we allowing another country to gain a long-term hold on India's agriculture industry?" he said.

A day earlier, he had accused the government of hurting cotton farmers and textile exporters, arguing that the interim deal unfairly advantaged Bangladesh with zero-tariff access. He claimed the agreement could "finish the textile sector, cotton farming, or both".

Amit Shah accuses Rahul of spreading 'lies' on trade deals

Press Trust of India

GANDHINAGAR

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Sunday accused Congress leader Rahul Gandhi of spreading "lies" and misleading farmers about India's trade pacts with the U.S., the U.K., and the EU, asserting that the government has fully safeguarded the country's agriculture and dairy sectors.

He termed the Congress's allegations that trade agreements would harm farmers as "laughable". "I feel like laughing when the Congress's *Shahzada* [prince] Rahul Gandhi stands in Parliament and talks about protecting farmers. The Congress has a long history of misleading the country and now they are spreading lies about trade deals," Mr. Shah said.

He was addressing a gathering in Gandhinagar after launching India's first Central Bank Digital Currency-based Public Distribution System.

"Rahul Gandhi is



Amit Shah

spreading lies that trade deals with the EU, England and America will damage our farmers and end our dairy sector. I want to assure the farmers, cattle-rearers and fishermen of this country that their interests have been fully protected in every agreement signed by the Prime Minister. There is no need to worry," he said.

Defending the trade agreements, Mr. Shah said: "Through these agreements, our agricultural produce and fishermen's products will get access to world markets. The BJP and Prime Minister can never compromise on farmers' interests".

Cotton farmers oppose Goyal's U.S. import remarks, warn of price crash

Groups of farmers across the country protest against the statement that India can import raw cotton from the U.S., process it into cloth and export it back at zero reciprocal tariff; farm bodies say this will intensify indebtedness in crisis-ridden fields

A.M. Jigeesh

NEW DELHI

Groups of cotton farmers across the country have protested against Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal's recent statement that if India purchases raw cotton from the United States, processes it domestically, makes cloth and exports the finished products back to the U.S., then the country can avail itself of a zero reciprocal tariff – similar to a facility reportedly extended to Bangladesh.

Farmers' organisations argue that by taking such a stand, the Centre has ignored the interests of domestic cotton cultivators.

Mr. Goyal had said that the Opposition was misleading the public by claiming Bangladesh had secured greater benefits. "Just as Bangladesh has a facility that if raw material is purchased from Ameri-



Price slump: Farmer bodies warn zero-duty U.S. cotton imports will further lower already low domestic prices. FILE PHOTO

ca, processed into cloth and exported, it will be available at zero reciprocal tariff, India also has the same facility and will get it," he said.

Farmers voice concern
Several farmer bodies, particularly those working among cotton farmers, have decided to launch protests. Gurbhej Singh

Rohiwal, a district leader of the Bharatiya Kisan (Union) (Ekta-Ugrahan) in Fazilka, Punjab, said the district was once known as the "Manchester of Punjab" for its high-quality cotton.

"Five blocks in this district were known for cotton production. We even had a separate market for cotton procurement. In

the past decade, production declined primarily due to poor prices. Now we know the real reason for this neglect. If the government wants to import cotton from the U.S., what is its plan for cotton farmers in Punjab and other States," he asked.

Palbhai Ambalia, a farmers' leader from Gujarat, echoed similar concerns. "Mr. Goyal is working for big textile companies. What should farmers do if India allows cheap U.S. cotton to be dumped here," Mr. Ambalia asked.

The Samyukt Kisan Morcha (SKM) reiterated its demand for Mr. Goyal's resignation. Importing raw cotton at zero tariffs will devastate the cotton farmers of India by depleting the domestic prices, the SKM said. If calculated as per the M.S. Swaminathan formula, the minimum support price (MSP) for cotton should have been

₹10,075 per quintal, and the MSP fixed was ₹7,710 per quintal. "Cotton imports from the U.S. surged 95.5% from \$199.30 million in January-November 2024 to \$377.90 million in January-November 2025," the SKM said.

The All India Kisan Sabha said, "Import of U.S. raw cotton will further reduce the already low domestic price, and the crisis-ridden cotton fields will witness intensifying indebtedness as well as greater peasant suicides." It stated

India's cotton production for 2025-26 is estimated at 29.22 million bales, whereas U.S. production for 2024-25 stood at 14.41 million bales. If Indian farmers are exposed to unrestricted global competition, the likely outcome would be further distress, pushing already crisis-ridden cotton farmers towards abandoning agriculture altogether, the AIKS said.

AI Impact Summit 2026 begins today, Modi to inaugurate an India AI Expo

Global tech leaders, including Sundar Pichai and Sam Altman, along with representatives from around 20 countries, are expected at the AI Impact Summit this week; participation of Bill Gates, amid scrutiny over his association with convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, has drawn criticism

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

Global tech leaders Sundar Pichai and Sam Altman and leaders of about 20 countries, including Brazil and France, are among those from about 100 countries expected to attend the Artificial Intelligence (AI) Impact Summit this week. The event kicks off on Monday with Prime Minister Narendra Modi inaugurating the "India AI Impact Expo 2026", which includes pavilions from 13 other countries.

The event is being hosted from February 16 to 20 at the Bharat Mandapam complex in Delhi where the G-20 Summit was hosted first in 2023. It marks the fourth AI Summit after summits in the U.K., South Korea, and France. Officials said it would be showcased as the first time the summit on the transformative effect and challenges from AI is hosted in a Global South country.

India has consistently championed the voice of developing economies in digital policy forums. The summit will push for equitable access to AI resources



Preparations on for the AI Summit at Bharat Mandapam in Delhi on Sunday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

and fair rule-making," a senior government official said. Unlike developed countries, India was not seeking to build regulatory frameworks, but was focusing the summit on a "human-centric" approach, for the "economic good" of all, the official added.

Over 3,000 speakers

According to a statement issued by the Prime Minister's Office on Sunday, the AI Impact event will feature more than 3,000 speakers over 500 sessions and host more than 300 exhibitions and live de-

monstrations of AI technology and start-ups, which are "structured across three thematic chakras – People, Planet and Progress". The government hopes to attract more than 2.5 lakh visitors to the event, the statement said.

After the Expo inauguration on Monday, the summit will see an "all-woman" hackathon on Tuesday in Delhi.

Mr. Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron will hold bilateral talks in Mumbai on February 17. On February 18, he will host a dinner banquet for the dignitaries and then

chair a leaders' summit followed by a Tech-CEOs event on February 19. Brazil President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who will hold bilateral talks with Mr. Modi, is accompanied by a large AI official and tech company delegation and will host an entire session on February 20.

The heads of 18 other countries are attending. They range from European countries such as Switzerland, Spain, Serbia, Slovakia, Croatia, Estonia, Netherlands, Finland and Greece, to Mauritius, Bhutan and Sri Lanka in the neighbourhood and Ka-

Restricted access on Day 1, expo to open from Day 2

NEW DELHI

Entry to the India AI Impact Summit 2026 will have some restrictions on the first day of the event, and the expo being organised along with it will open for all from February 17, according to an official advisory issued on Sunday. "Registration is free," a Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology official said. PTI

also attend. Officials said that big tech leaders such as Google's Sundar Pichai and Open AI CEO Sam Altman will "headline" sessions as will Demis Hassabis (CEO of DeepMind Technologies), Dario Amodei (Anthropic CEO) and Brad Smith (Microsoft president). NVIDIA CEO Jensen Huang, who was to be a key speaker, pulled out on Saturday "due to unforeseen circumstances".

Microsoft founder Bill Gates, who is at the centre of allegations over his links with American businessman and convicted sex offender Jeffrey Epstein, is expected to attend. When asked, officials did not confirm what his role in the event would be.

On Monday, Mr. Gates will be in Andhra Pradesh for a series of meetings with Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu and others to discuss digital technologies and health development issues.

Reacting to a poster of Mr. Gates at the AI Summit, Opposition MP Priyanka Chaturvedi called the invitation to him "shameful" and has asked the government not to give "platform and promote" him.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, whose tenure ends this year, will

MEASURES COME JUST FEW DAYS AFTER INDIA-US DEAL; CONTENT REMOVAL DEADLINE SLASHED TO 2-3 HOURS FROM 24-36 HOURS PROPOSED EARLIER

Why India is pushing social media companies to block content quicker

Soumyarendra Barik
New Delhi, February 15

THE UNION IT Ministry on Tuesday notified amendments to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021. One of the most contentious changes it has implemented is that social media platforms must now remove content within two-three hours as opposed to 24-36 hours before.

Industry executives say the new timeline is the shortest takedown window prescribed by any government in the world.

The rules have set alarm

bells ringing within tech companies, who say that they were never formally consulted with before the change was notified. Government officials, though, say that there were enough discussions with the industry, and the timeline has been compressed following feedback from people who have been impacted as platforms did little to curb content virality quickly.

This could set the stage for a fresh tiff between tech companies and the government.

These measures also come just a few days after India and the US announced a framework for an interim trade deal, signalling, among other



things, a general reduction in non-tariff barriers in digital trade.

However, many fear that the strict social media rules could significantly add to tech companies' regulatory compliance burden and affect a number of American social

media companies.

On February 6, when the two countries issued a joint statement on the trade pact, they said, "The US and India commit to address discriminatory or burdensome practices and other barriers to

digital trade and to set a clear pathway to achieve robust, ambitious, and mutually beneficial digital trade rules as part of the Bilateral Trade Agreement. The measure does not exclusively apply to US tech firms, but also impacts local and non-US ones such as Sharechat and Telegram. However, India's online, social media and AI space is largely dominated by American companies such as Facebook, Instagram, WhatsApp, Google, YouTube, X, ChatGPT, Adobe etc.

Strict rules

The requirement to take down content quicker does

not just apply to AI-generated content but a wide range of content that the law deems unlawful. Platforms must now remove non-consensual intimate imagery within two hours, as opposed to 24 hours earlier, and other forms of unlawful content within three hours, from an earlier requirement to act on it within 36 hours. This change is expected to receive wide pushback from big tech firms. They may raise concerns around heavy compliance burden, because if they fail to act on flat content within the new prescribed timelines, it might result in a loss of safe harbour — a critical immun-

ity that protects them from legal actions for hosting user generated content.

The government official said timelines have been compressed as they received feedback from several stakeholders that the previous timelines were too long and did not prevent a content's virality. "Tech firms certainly have the technical means to remove unlawful content much more quickly than before," the official said.

Social media executives, however, said content blocks in such a short window won't be technically feasible.

New AI guidelines

New rules for the creation and dissemination of AI generated content online were also notified.

Under the amendments, the Centre has removed an earlier proposal to apply a label to content generated through AI tools to cover at least 10% of the space, but under the notified rules, that has been changed to place "prominently" visible labels. The specific 10% requirement has been done away with.

The changes will come into effect on February 20, the final day of the upcoming India-AI Impact Summit.

FULL REPORT ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Death sentences in India: fewer confirmations, higher acquittals

A staggering 34.6% of death sentences decided by High Courts in the last decade resulted in acquittals

DATA POINT

The Hindu Data Team

As of December 31, 2025, 550 men and 24 women were on death row in India – a 43.5% increase in the country's death row population since 2016. About 45% were on death row for murder while 37% were on death row for murder involving sexual offences (Chart 1).

Data also show an increase in the number of persons being removed from the death row since 2020 (Chart 2). The latest Annual Death Penalty Statistics Report, released by the Square Circle Clinic at NALSAR, attributed this trend to an increased hesitance in the appellate judiciary to confirm death sentences.

Over the last decade, the Sessions Courts imposed 1,310 death sentences (822 cases). While 842 of these sentences were considered for confirmation by High Courts, merely 70 of them (8.31%) were upheld. Only 37 of them were decided by the Supreme Court and none were confirmed (Chart 3).

The number of cases confirmed by the High Courts has reduced by more than 60% since 2019. Of the 1,085 death sentences decided by the High Courts over the past decade, 34.65% resulted in acquittals. The highest share of acquittals were recorded at the Patna High Court (78.31%), Karnataka High Court (50.46%), Jharkhand High Court (46.97%), Andhra Pradesh High Court (44.44%), and Allahabad High Court (41.51%).

Further, the Supreme Court has not confirmed any death sentence in the last three years. In fact, in 2025, the Supreme Court acquitted and released 10 death row prisoners – the highest since 2016 (Chart 4B).

The report stated that this indicates concerns regarding the handling of evidence, procedural fairness, and substantive rights by Sessions Courts.

Varying judgments

The data for the charts were sourced from 'Death Penalty in India Annual Statistics report 2025 & 10 Years of Death Penalty Data (2016-2025)' published by The Square Circle Clinic, NALSAR University of Law

CHART 1:



CHART 2:



CHART 3: Appellate Court outcomes of death sentences imposed by Sessions Courts between 2016 and 2025

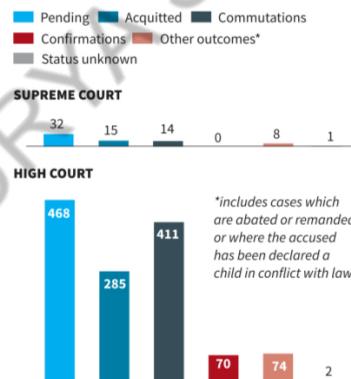
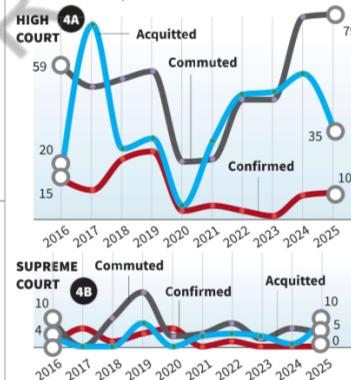


CHART 4A&B: Trend analysis of outcomes at High Courts and the Supreme Court from 2016 to 2025



While the Supreme Court decided 38 death sentence cases (involving 42 prisoners) in the last three years, between 2023 and 2025, it did not confirm any

For the purpose of analysis, the report has mostly used the unique IDs that are allotted to each death sentence imposed, as opposed to the unique IDs allotted to cases or persons. Unique IDs that are assigned to each person sentenced to death would lead to inaccurate analysis because of the possibility that a single individual may be sentenced to death in multiple cases. Unique IDs attached to each case would also not be accurate because of the possibility of reimposition of the death sentence in cases of remand

CHART 5: Time spent on death row before acquittal by High Court (Figures in number of persons)

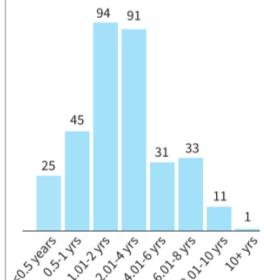
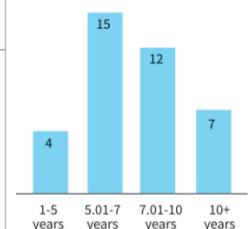


CHART 6: Time spent on death row before acquittal by the Supreme Court (Figures in number of persons)



Birla to represent India at Rahman's swearing-in

Suhasini Haidar

NEW DELHI

Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla will represent India at the swearing-in of Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) chief Tarique Rahman as the Prime Minister

of Bangladesh, the Ministry of External Affairs announced on Sunday.

Mr. Rahman's BNP swept 209 of 297 elected seats to win the first general election in Bangladesh since the ouster of former premier Sheikh Hasina in

August 2024.

Chief Election Commissioner A.M.M. Nasir Uddin is likely to administer the oath of office to the newly elected MPs at 10 a.m. on Tuesday.

Later in the day, at 4 p.m., President Mo-

hammed Shahabuddin will administer the oath of office to the BNP chief and his Cabinet.

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'DOMINANCE' TO BE TESTED

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Birla to represent India at Rahman's swearing-in

Muhammad Yunus, Chief Adviser to the interim government in Bangladesh, sent an invitation to Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday for Tuesday's ceremony, a day after Mr. Modi and Mr. Rahman spoke over the telephone.

However, citing the visit of French President Emmanuel Macron to Mumbai that day and the AI Impact Summit in Delhi this week, Mr. Modi declined the invitation. Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and other officials are expected to accompany Mr. Birla.

Mr. Birla's participation "underscores the deep and enduring friendship" between India and Bangladesh, and reaffirms "India's steadfast commitment to the democratic values that bind our two nations", the Ministry said in a statement.

"As neighbours united by a shared history, culture, and mutual respect, India welcomes Bangladesh's transition to an elected government under the leadership of Tarique Rahman, whose vision and values have received an overwhelming mandate of the people," the Ministry statement added.

Mr. Birla's nomination to attend the ceremony is significant as the Opposition has submitted a no-confidence motion against him, and he has not been attending Parliament until it is disposed of. However, Parliament is in recess until March 9.

Launch vehicle debris with ISRO logo, National Emblem found on Maldives island

The Hindu Bureau

BENGALURU

The debris from a launch vehicle bearing the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) logo and the National Emblem has reportedly been found recently on an uninhabited island in the Maldives.

The debris of the payload fairing, believed to be from the ISRO's Launch Vehicle Mark-3 (LVM-3), washed up on an island near L. Kunahandhoo in the Maldives and was found on February 12.

A website which tracks Indian spaceflight and aerospace developments said on X that the debris was likely from the LVM3-M6 mission.

"A PLF [payload fairing] has washed up on an uninhabited island near L. Ku-



The debris could be from the LVM3-M6 mission, says website that tracks Indian spaceflight.

nahandhoo, #maldives (found February 12, 2026). The @isro logo's position below the national emblem suggests it is likely from the LVM3-M6 launch. This follows a similar recovery on December 28, 2025, in Sri Lanka (Trincomalee), which also appeared to be from the same mission," the website

indianspaceflight.in posted on X.

On December 19, 2025, the ISRO launched the LVM3-M6/BlueBird Block-2 Mission, a dedicated commercial mission aboard the LVM3 launch vehicle.

During the mission, it successfully launched the BlueBird Block-2 satellite of AST SpaceMobile, U.S., and on November 2 the space agency used the LVM-3 to launch the CMS-03 communication satellite.

The LVM3 is the heaviest rocket developed by the ISRO and is a three-stage launch vehicle comprising two solid strap-on motors, a liquid core stage, and a cryogenic upper stage. The ISRO is yet to confirm whether the debris is from an Indian launch vehicle.

India has agreed to stop buying Russian oil, says Rubio

Press Trust of India

MUNICH

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio has said that India has committed to stopping buying Russian oil, days after New Delhi reiterated that “national interests” will be the “guiding factor” for India’s energy **procurement**.

U.S. President Donald Trump, while announcing a trade deal with New Delhi early in February, said India had agreed not to

procure crude oil from Russia.

Since then, the U.S. has claimed multiple times that India will stop buying oil from Russia.

Speaking at the Munich Security Conference on Saturday, Mr. Rubio said, “In our conversations with India, we’ve gotten their commitment to stop buying additional Russian oil.”

He was responding to a question on the Russia-Ukraine war and the sanctions imposed on Moscow.

After announcing the deal, in an executive order, Mr. Trump rolled back an additional 25% tariffs on India that he imposed in August for India’s procurement of crude oil from Russia.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri said this week that India would maintain multiple sources for crude oil purchases and diversify them to ensure stability in the supply chain, with national interests remaining the “guiding factor” for procurement.

Board of Peace states have pledged \$5 bn for Gaza humanitarian relief, announces Trump

Stanly Johny

U.S. President Donald Trump on Sunday said member states of the so-called Board of Peace, which he heads, have pledged more than \$5 billion for Gaza humanitarian relief and reconstruction efforts, and committed thousands of personnel to a proposed force that would assume security responsibilities in the war-ravaged Palestinian enclave.

“The Board of Peace has unlimited potential. Last October, I released a Plan for the permanent end to the Conflict in Gaza, and

our Vision was unanimously adopted by the United Nations Security Council. Shortly thereafter, we facilitated Humanitarian Aid at record speed, and secured the release of every living and deceased Hostage,” Mr. Trump wrote in a social media post.

‘Bold vision’

“Just last month, two dozen distinguished Founding Members joined me in Davos, Switzerland, to celebrate its official formation, and present a bold Vision for the Civilians in Gaza, and then, ultimately, far beyond Gaza – WORLD



Donald Trump

PEACE!” wrote Mr. Trump. The Board has announced 26 founding members in total, including Egypt, Hungary, Indonesia, Pakistan, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Turkiye and the UAE. India, which has

been invited to join the Board, says it is “reviewing” the invitation.

Mr. Trump said the Board’s members would join him at the Donald J. Trump Institute of Peace in Washington on February 19. At the meeting, “we will announce that Member States have pledged more than \$5 BILLION DOLLARS toward the Gaza Humanitarian and Reconstruction efforts, and have committed thousands of personnel to the International Stabilization Force and Local Police to maintain Security and Peace for Gazans,” he added.

According to Mr. Trump’s 20-point plan, the ISF would be deployed to take charge of Gaza’s security and train Palestinian police personnel, while the enclave would be administrated by a new technocratic government, under the guidance of the Board of Peace. The Board’s executive core has eight members, including Chairman Trump. Secretary of State Marco Rubio, special envoy Steve Witkoff, Mr. Trump’s son-in-law Jared Kushner and former British Prime Minister Tony Blair are among the executive members.

China the real threat, says Taiwan in rebuff to Wang speech

Reuters

Taipei, February 15

CHINA IS the real threat to security and is hypocritically claiming to uphold UN principles of peace, Taiwan Foreign Minister Lin Chia-lung said on Sunday in a rebuff to comments by China's top diplomat at the Munich Security Conference.

China views democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory, a view the government in Taipei rejects, saying Taiwan's people can decide their future.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, addressing the annual

security conference on Saturday, warned that some countries were "trying to split Taiwan from China", blamed Japan for tensions over the island and underscored the importance of upholding the UN Charter.

Taiwan's Lin said in a statement that whether viewed from historical facts, objective reality or under international law, Taiwan's sovereignty has never belonged to the People's Republic of China.

Lin said that Wang had "boasted" of upholding the purposes of the UN Charter and had blamed other countries for



Taiwan's Foreign Minister Lin Chia-Lung during a press conference in Taipei city. AP

regional tensions. "In fact, China has recently engaged in military provocations in sur-

rounding areas and has repeatedly and openly violated UN Charter principles on refraining from the use of force or the threat of force," Lin said.

This "once again exposes a hegemonic mindset that does not match its words with its actions." China's military, which operates daily around Taiwan, staged its latest round of mass war games near Taiwan in December.

Senior Taiwanese officials like Lin are not invited to attend the Munich conference.

China says Taiwan was "returned" to Chinese rule by

Japan at the end of World War Two in 1945 and that to challenge that is to challenge the postwar international order and Chinese sovereignty.

The government in Taipei says the island was handed over to the Republic of China, not the People's Republic, which did not yet exist, and hence Beijing has no right to claim sovereignty.

The republican government fled to Taiwan in 1949 after losing a civil war with Mao Zedong's communists, and the Republic of China remains the island's formal name.

US boards another oil tanker after tracking it from Caribbean Sea

Associated Press

Washington, February 15

US MILITARY forces boarded another sanctioned tanker in the Indian Ocean after tracking the vessel from the Caribbean Sea in an effort to target illicit oil connected to Venezuela, the Pentagon said Sunday.

Venezuela had faced US sanctions on its oil for several years, relying on a shadow fleet of falsely flagged tankers to smuggle crude into global supply chains.

President Donald Trump ordered a quarantine of sanctioned tankers in December to pressure then-President Nicolas Maduro before Maduro was apprehended in January during an American military operation.

Several tankers fled the Venezuelan coast in the wake of the raid, including the ship that was boarded in the Indian Ocean overnight. The Defence Department said in a post on X that US forces boarded the Ve-

“The vessel tried to defy President Trump’s quarantine - hoping to slip away. We tracked it from the Caribbean to the Indian Ocean...”

THE PENTAGON

ronica III, conducting “a right-of-visit, maritime interdiction and boarding.”

“The vessel tried to defy President Trump’s quarantine - hoping to slip away. We tracked it from the Caribbean to the Indian Ocean, closed the distance, and shut it down,” the Pentagon said. Video posted by the Pentagon shows troops boarding it. The Veronica III is a Panamanian-flagged vessel under US sanctions related to Iran, according to the website of the Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control.

Ishan blitz sinks Pakistan

Convincing win in Colombo takes India to T20 World Cup Super Eights

