

Modi hails Australia's social media ban on minors, signals curbs

Aroon Deep

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday praised Australia's ban on social media access for teenagers, in the clearest indication so far that the Union government is mulling similar curbs. "I have followed you closely, and the way you have legislated and worked to protect society in IT and social media is inspiring the world," Mr. Modi told Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in remarks open to the press.

Australia's Online Safety Amendment (Social Media Minimum Age) Act, 2024, requires social media platforms to detect and block access to children below the age of 16. Union Minister of Electronics and Information Technology, Ashwini Vaishnaw, had confirmed discussions for similar curbs in India dur-

Digital **control**

Several countries are following Australia's footsteps to curb social media use by children

Malaysia: under-16s **barred from owning** social accounts

Indonesia: minors blocked from 'high-risk' **platforms**

France: Bill **passed** to ban social media use by under-15s



ing the AI Impact Summit earlier in February.

'Right way to go'

"Certainly there is a need for protecting our children, protecting our society... we are in a conversation regarding age-based restrictions with the various social media platforms... the right way to go about this," he said.

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Modi hails Australia's social media curbs

In conversations and public remarks, officials at the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology (MeitY) have said that India is exploring a “graded” set of restrictions that would allow some social media access while blocking some categories of content depending on the age cohort of a minor.

It is not yet clear if the government is planning to bring this into action with a law in Parliament or with amendments to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021, which have been the main legal way for the government to introduce rules for requirements like labelling AI-generated images.

In April, State governments moved to announce their own respective social media bans. Andhra Pradesh announced that it would pursue a law regulating children's social media use, as did Karnataka. “Officials have been tasked with studying best practices from countries such as Singapore, Australia, and Denmark to build a robust legal and technological framework [to enforce the law] tailored to India's needs.” the A.P. govern-

Navy orders probe into crash of unmanned aerial vehicle near Porbandar

Saurabh Trivedi

NEW DELHI

A Board of Inquiry (BoI) has been ordered after an Indian Navy Drishti-10 Starliner unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) crashed near Dharampur village in Gujarat's Porbandar district during a routine training sortie on Wednesday.

In a statement posted on X, the Navy said the UAV crashed during a training flight near the Porbandar airfield and there were no reports of injuries or casualties on the ground.

Security agencies recovered the wreckage from the crash site and have begun a technical examination.

Defence sources indicated that the UAV may have suffered a technical malfunction, though the exact cause will be established only after the inquiry.

The Drishti-10 is the In-



The Navy's unmanned aerial vehicle Drishti-10 after crashing into an open field near Porbandar, Gujarat, on Wednesday. PTI

dianised version of Israel's battle-proven Hermes-900 Medium Altitude Long Endurance UAV. It is licence-manufactured by Adani Defence and Aerospace at its Hyderabad facility in partnership with Israel's Elbit Systems.

Second mishap

The mishap is the second involving the Hermes-900-based platform acquired under the emergency procurement route.

In January last year, a

Drishti-10 being flown by the manufacturer during pre-acceptance trials ditched into the Arabian Sea after reportedly losing its communication link before formal induction into naval service. The aircraft was subsequently replaced by the manufacturer.

The Army and the Navy contracted two Drishti-10 drones each under the fourth tranche of emergency procurements in 2023 at a cost of around ₹140 crore per aircraft.

INSTANCES OF VEHICULAR DAMAGE CIRCULATED ON SOCIAL MEDIA OVERBLOWN: MINISTER

E20 affects mileage, but West Asia crisis shows India must explore alternatives, says Gadkari

On conflict of interest allegations, he says personal stake 'too insignificant' to impact government policy

Anil Sasi
New Delhi, July 9

AMID A raging debate over the impact on vehicular performance from the shift to higher ethanol blends, Union Road Transport and Highways Min-

ister Nitin Gadkari reckoned that average mileage can dip as ethanol content increases in the fuel, but said the West Asian crisis has shown India must explore all alternatives to fossil fuel imports.

He told *The Indian Express*



Union Road Transport and Highways Minister Nitin Gadkari. EXPRESS FILE

EXPLAINED

LESSONS FOR INDIA FROM BRAZIL'S ETHANOL PATHWAY
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that the calorific value of ethanol is lower than petrol. "This is a fact," he said, admitting mileage could be hit with higher blending, but added that

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E. EXPLAINED

Why explore fossil fuel alternatives

India imports fuel products, and spends almost Rs 2 lakh crore in forex every year. Blended fuel — ethanol in petrol & methanol in diesel — will help the country reduce dependence on fossil fuels.

• THE DIVERGENT ETHANOL BLENDING ARCS



Brazil's blending journey

1931

1st ethanol blending law for 5% blend of anhydrous ethanol

1975

In response to 1973 oil crisis, govt launches the National Alcohol Program to curb dependence

1979

Fiat launches the 147, the world's first vehicle powered entirely by ethanol. Volkswagen, GM and Ford follow suit

2025

Following studies, Brazil increases mandatory anhydrous ethanol blend in gasoline from 27% to 30%

2024

Laws passed to boost low-carbon vehicle tech and biofuel adoption

2017

National Biofuels Policy is passed

2003

Flex-fuel vehicles hit the market, enabling cars to run on petrol, ethanol, or combination of the two.



50 YEARS

How long Brazil took to get from E10 to E30

6 YEARS

How long India took to get from E5 to E20



India's blending journey

2003

5% blending (initial launch planned) 9 states & 4 UTs

2006

5%: For 20 states & 4 UTs. Mandatory push but hit by supply shortages

2014

1.5%: Same as last programme, with administered pricing mechanisms.

2018

4-5%: National Policy on Bio-fuels introduced

2026

20%: Nationwide target, 100% of petrol sold is E20 fuel.

2025

19.2%: E20 target met 5 yrs before schedule.

2023

12.1%: Nationwide phased roll-out of high-blend E20 fuel commenced.

2022

10%: blending achieved

2019-20

5%: Countrywide push; oil marketing companies aggressively expand distribution chains.

Govt waives import duty on inputs for manufacturing batteries, display assemblies

Ravi Dutta Mishra
New Delhi, July 9

THE UNION finance ministry has exempted customs duty on 85 capital goods used in lithium-ion cell manufacturing, as well as on inputs used in the manufacture of display assemblies and inductor-coil modules for wireless charging in cellular mobile phones, till March 2029 to promote domestic manufacturing in the electronics sector.

The items exempted from customs duty include backlight units, frames, anisotropic conductive film, cathode and anode extrusion coating machines, powder dryers and slurry transfer systems.

A finance ministry official said the duty exemptions on specified inputs and parts are intended to provide an impetus to domestic manufacturing of display assemblies used in the automotive, medical and industrial sectors.

The import duty exemption for inputs used in the manufacture of inductor-coil modules for wireless charging in cellular mobile phones will further deepen value addition in mobile phone manufacturing, the official said.

On the duty exemption for capital goods used in lithium-ion cell manufacturing, the official said the earlier exemption was linked to lithium-ion cells used in specific types of batteries, such as those for mobile phones, electric vehicles and energy storage systems.

"This notification merges the existing entries for specified capital goods used in the manufacture of lithium-ion cells and removes the restriction linked to specific downstream battery applications, and this will support lithium-ion cell manufacturing for batteries used across electronics, electric mobility, energy storage and other applications," the official said.

Experts said the government is gradually integrating India into the global electronics and smartphone value chain by ex-

• CUSTOMS RELIEF

THE DUTY exemptions on specified inputs and parts are intended to provide an impetus to domestic manufacturing of display assemblies used in the automotive, medical and industrial sectors.

EXPERTS SAID the government is gradually integrating India into the global electronics and smartphone value chain by extending duty relief to specified components used in smartphone and electronics manufacturing.

THE EXPANDED LIST of 85

tending duty relief to specified components used in smartphone and electronics manufacturing.

The expanded list of 85 exempted capital goods for lithium-ion cell manufacturing is expected to accelerate investments in domestic battery manufacturing, a strategically important segment for smartphones, consumer electronics and electric mobility.

Manoj Mishra, Partner and Tax Controversy Management Leader at Grant Thornton Bharat, said the government's decision to grant duty exemptions is another significant step towards strengthening India's electronics manufacturing ecosystem. "By reducing the import cost of critical components and capital goods, these measures are expected to improve cost competitiveness, encourage greater domestic value addition, and support the localisation of high-value manufacturing in smartphones and other electronic products. The exemption for inputs used in display assemblies for automotive, medical and industrial applications broadens support beyond consumer electronics, while the relief for inductor coil modules used in wireless charging will benefit smartphone manufacturers adopting advanced fea-



exempted capital goods for lithium-ion cell manufacturing is expected to accelerate investments in domestic battery manufacturing.

tures. The expanded list of 85 exempted capital goods for lithium-ion cell manufacturing is likely to accelerate investments in domestic battery manufacturing, an area that is strategically important for smartphones, consumer electronics and electric mobility," Mishra said.

Senior Research Fellow at the Academy of Business Studies (ABS), KS Chalapati Rao, said in a note on Thursday that electronics manufacturing, a key component of the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme and the broader domestic manufacturing push, saw new equity inflows almost halve in FY26 compared with FY25. "Electronics FDI fell from \$2.04 billion (FY25) to \$1.15 billion (FY26) despite record aggregate inflows. One possible interpretation is that the initial investment cycle associated with the PLI programme is moderating. Confirmation, however, requires firm-level evidence," Rao said.

In a Lok Sabha reply last July, Minister of State for Electronics and Information Technology Jitin Prasada said the number of mobile manufacturing units in India had increased to 300 in 2024-25 from just two in 2014-15. Mobile phone production rose 28-fold to Rs 5.45 lakh crore, while exports increased 127-fold to Rs 2 lakh crore.

India, Australia move to deepen cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

Amid geostrategic uncertainties, Prime Minister Modi, his Australian counterpart, Albanese, adopt declaration to expand maritime security ties and defence collaboration; the countries also seal pacts on civil nuclear energy and critical minerals

Saurabh Trivedi
NEW DELHI

India and Australia on Thursday adopted a Joint Declaration on Defence and Security Cooperation, committing to significantly deepen military engagement, strengthen defence industrial collaboration, and expand maritime security cooperation amid growing geostrategic uncertainty in the Indo-Pacific region. The two countries also sealed pacts on civil nuclear energy and critical minerals sectors.

The declaration, adopted by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Australian counterpart, Anthony Albanese, outlines an ambitious road map to elevate defence ties through closer strategic consultations, enhanced

interoperability between the armed forces, expanded military exercises, and greater collaboration in defence science, technology, and industrial supply chains.

A statement released by the office of the Australian Prime Minister mentioned that, under the declaration, the two sides agreed to hold regular consultations on defence-related developments in the Indo-Pacific affecting their shared interests, increase the complexity of bilateral and multilateral military exercises, accelerate efforts to improve interoperability and information sharing between their armed forces, and expand aircraft deployments from each other's territories.

The agreement also envisages deeper personnel



Tactical ties: PM Narendra Modi being greeted by his Australian counterpart, Anthony Albanese, in Melbourne on Thursday. AP

exchanges through education, training, and liaison appointments, while exploring opportunities to cooperate in recruiting skilled personnel for their respective defence workforces.

Mr. Modi emphasised the importance of a free and stable Indo-Pacific and highlighted the growing

engagement between the two countries in the defence domain. "The Indo-Pacific is not just the confluence of two oceans. It also symbolises the shared aspirations of like-minded democracies like India and Australia," he said.

The agreement on civil nuclear energy to facilitate the commercial supply of

uranium from Australia to India to fuel nuclear power projects came nearly 12 years after the two countries inked a historic civil nuclear cooperation pact.

"Today, we have signed an important agreement in the field of nuclear energy. This will open the way for uranium supplies from Australia to India and give new impetus to our clean energy objectives," Mr. Modi said.

He also announced the launch of the Australia-India Partnership on Cyber, Critical Technologies, and Supply Chains and said both sides will also work together on a critical minerals corridor.

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CALL FOR DIALOGUE

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India, Australia move to deepen cooperation

Under the provisions of the energy security framework, India and Australia vowed to strengthen energy security by maintaining a stable, secure and reliable supply of coal, diesel, other liquid fuels and natural gas.

The two countries will implement an India-Australia Maritime Security Collaboration Road Map to strengthen coordination across the Indian Ocean and the wider Indo-Pacific.

Both sides committed to encouraging greater integration between their defence industries, building resilient supply chains and expanding collaboration in defence innovation, advanced science and technology.

The leaders noted that the new declaration builds upon the India-Australia Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation signed in 2009 and complements existing institutional mechanisms, including the Foreign Ministers' Framework Dialogue, the 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministerial Dialogue, and the Defence Ministers' Dialogue.

They also reiterated support for regional institutions, including the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), ASEAN-led regional architecture and the Pacific Islands Forum, describing them as key platforms for addressing regional challenges.

(With inputs from PTI)

AI poses a relatively lower risk to India's GCC jobs: CEA

Nageswaran says most of India's Global Capability Centres are engaged in cutting-edge work rather than providing low-cost support, which is what AI can easily and cheaply replace

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

India's Global Capability Centres (GCCs) are not just low-cost support in a new form, but are areas where cutting edge work is taking place, Chief Economic Adviser (CEA) V. Anantha Nageswaran said on Thursday. As such, these GCC jobs are also at a relatively lower risk of being replaced by Artificial Intelligence (AI), he added.

However, the CEA did warn against the dangers of complacency, saying that other countries are already copying India's model.

"It is cutting edge and increasingly so," Mr. Nageswaran said while speaking at a session during the Confederation of Indian Industry's (CII) GCC Business Summit. "Global banks run their risk systems and trading platforms in Mumbai and Bangalore and elsewhere as well, car makers design their vehicles' embedded systems from Chennai and Pune, semiconductor firms carry out chip design, pharmaceutical companies run clinical analytics here, and consumer firms build and own entire digital products here in India," he added.

Mr. Nageswaran said that the intellectual property created in these centers is real, with the patents being filed here, the products shipped from India and global roles increasingly held by people



CEA V. Anantha Nageswaran speaks at the inaugural session of the CII GCC Business Summit 2026 on Thursday. BY ARRANGEMENT

sitting in India.

The CEA also sought to answer whether these GCCs would be under threat from the rise of AI and would these GCC jobs be automated soon.

"Part of the model is indeed exposed," Mr. Nageswaran conceded. "The work that was routine, repetitive and rule bound is exactly the work that AI does most easily and most cheaply as well. If a centre's value rests only on doing simple tasks at low cost, then the value is under real threat. We should not pretend otherwise."

However, he also said that this is not where most Indian centres are today, and that this was not the direction in which they are headed.

"Artificial intelligence does not build, deploy or govern itself," Mr. Nageswaran explained. "Someone has to design these systems, train them, test them, correct them and

hold them to account. Someone has to decide where they should be used and where they must not be used."

"Someone has to carry the responsibility when they fail," he added. "And that work is expanding and not shrinking. And a large and growing share of this kind of work is being done in India."

Complacency matters

The CEA, however, cautioned against complacency, saying that standing still meant allowing others to catch up. "Other countries are watching us and copying us," he asserted. "Our costs are rising. In some skills, our talent is already scarce, so indispensability is not a title that India can hold on to forever."

He added that the move from cost centres to capability centres, and from execution to innovation has to be made by firms and by people, with the govern-

'India aims to be strategic leader in hosting GCCs'

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Thursday said India aspires to become a "strategic leader" in hosting global capability centres (GCCs) of MNCs and become indispensable to the world's knowledge economy. India possesses "every ingredient" required to lead this transformation, she said. PTI

ment acting as a support.

"Skilling is the clearest case," Mr. Nageswaran said. "We produce a very large number of graduates each year. We do not yet produce enough of those who are ready on day one. By some estimates, fewer than half of them are ready for the job on the day they arrive."

"Closing that gap means universities, industry and the government working together, not one after the other, but at the same time," he said.

He further said that the position India currently holds in the global capability centre market was one that it has to keep earning, over and over.

"The moment we believe we have arrived is the moment others begin to catch up," he said. "So let us not celebrate too early. Let us treat this success not as a finishing line, but as a foundation or a milestone."

U.S., Iran exchange more attacks across West Asia, threatening deal

Iran reports U.S. strikes around the perimeter of Bushehr nuclear plant as U.S. officials say they hit about 90 Iranian military targets; new fighting erupted hours before the burial of Khamenei; Tehran officials report that U.S. attacks killed 17 people

Agence France-Presse
MASHHAD

New fighting erupted between the United States and Iran hours ahead of the burial of long-time Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei on Thursday, with Tehran targeting U.S. allies in the region and American strikes hitting the perimeter of an Iranian nuclear power plant.

The renewed hostilities, triggered by tensions over the Strait of Hormuz, sparked concerns of a return to full-scale war after an April ceasefire and a June U.S.-Iran accord ended five weeks of conflict.



Mourners carry a banner against Donald Trump as they gather on the day of Khamenei's burial in Mashhad on Thursday. REUTERS

This was the second day in a row that the decades-old foes exchanged attacks, with Iranian officials reporting the U.S. attacks had killed 17 people.

The Islamic republic said it had resumed its attacks targeting U.S. assets in Kuwait, Bahrain and Qatar, while sirens blared in Jordan – another U.S. ally

– where the military said it had intercepted eight missiles launched from Iran.

The fighting came with Iran preparing to bury Khamenei, who was killed alongside close family members on the first day of the U.S.-Israeli war against Iran on February 28, in his hometown of Mashhad.

targeted civilian infrastructure, including railway bridges, and described the strikes as a “gross war crime”.

U.S. military officials said Thursday's strikes hit approximately 90 Iranian military targets, including air defence systems, missile and drone storage sites.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards accused the United States of an “effort to overshadow” Khamenei's funeral with its attacks.

In a sign of the security tensions, at least one fighter jet escorted the plane carrying Khamenei's coffin to its final burial in Mashhad.

‘Effort to overshadow’

The United States targeted the perimeter of Iran's only civilian nuclear plant with a strike on Thursday, Iranian state media reported, citing the deputy governor of Bushehr province.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry said the U.S. attacks

Syria welcomes U.S. announcement of removal from blacklist

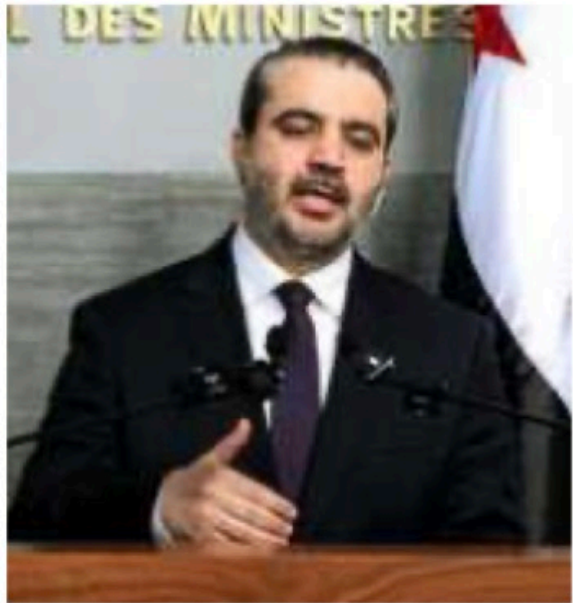
Agence France-Presse

DAMASCUS

Damascus welcomed a U.S. announcement that it would remove Syria from its list of “state sponsors of terrorism”, a move that one economist said opened the door to economic recovery and foreign investment.

“A dark page in Syria’s history has been turned,” Foreign Minister Asaad al-Shaibani wrote on X.

The United States announced on Wednesday that it would remove Syria from its blacklist of countries it accuses of supporting terrorism, a designation it placed on Syria nearly five decades ago

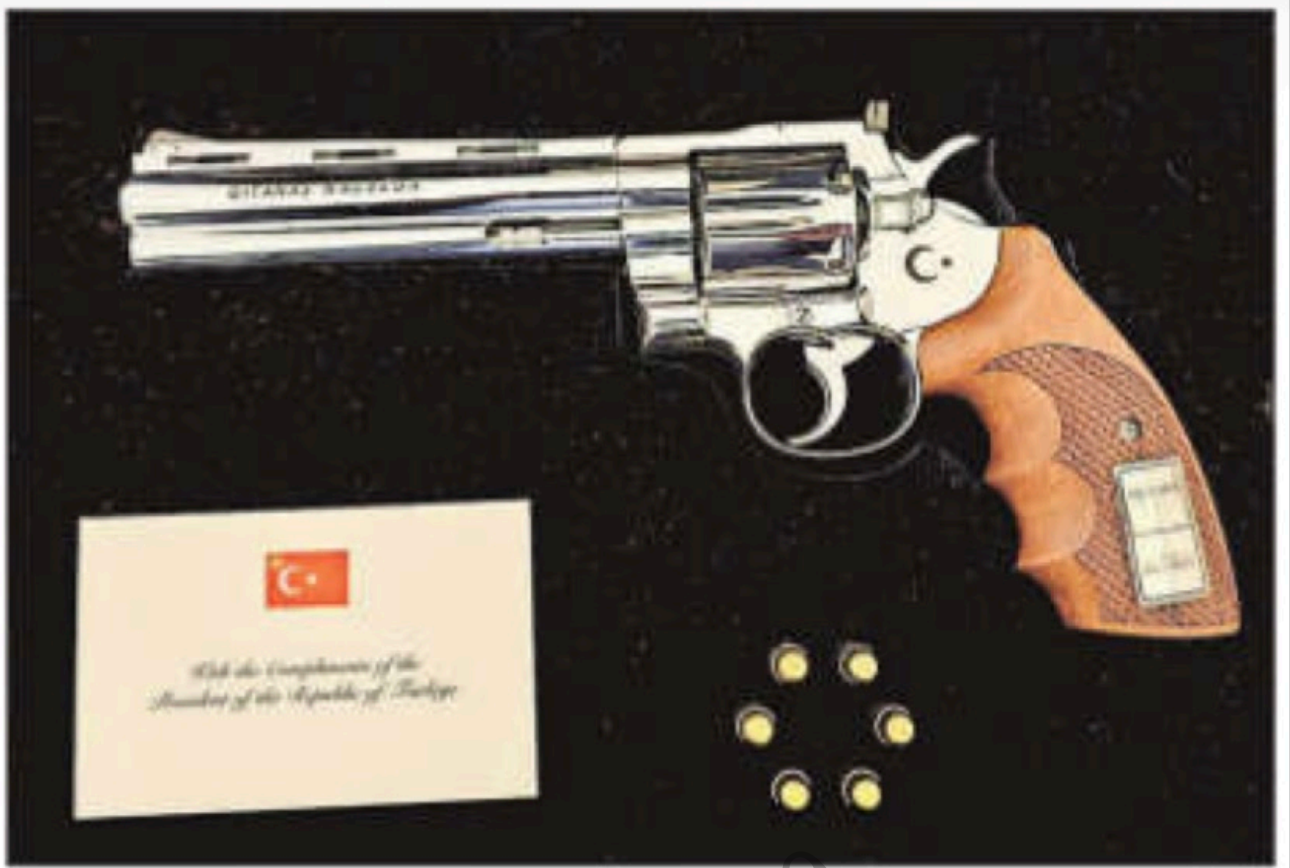


Asaad al-Shaibani

and which had curbed investment in the country.

The Syrian Foreign Ministry called the move “an important development in the course of Syrian-American relations”.

The move will be effective in 45 days unless lawmakers take the unlikely step of blocking it.



A gun gifted by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan to Lithuanian President Gitanas Nauseda at the NATO summit in Ankara. REUTERS

Turkey's Erdogan gifts NATO leaders a revolver conundrum after summit

Reuters

Madrid, July 9

BELGIUM'S PRIME minister was a little surprised on landing back home from Wednesday's NATO summit in Turkey to find that he had a handgun and ammunition in his luggage.

After NATO leaders gathered for Wednesday's fractious summit in Ankara, their host, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, handed each an unusual parting gift: a vintage revolver, along with live ammunition indicating it was not just for show.

Erdogan wanted to showcase Turkey's defence industry, which has become a key export and foreign policy tool.

Images shared by the office of Lithuanian President Gitanas Nauseda showed what appeared to be the Gumusay .357 Magnum, a rare six-shooter produced by Turkish arms maker MKE in the 1990s.

It was set in a wooden dis-

play box featuring Turkey's flag and the NATO logo as well as a placard inscribed "Gumusay, the first revolver-type handgun produced in our country" in Turkish and English.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's spokesperson said all the leaders had been given the same model, engraved with their own names. The Belgian premier, Bart De Wever, handed his to Brussels' airport police to be secured in a safe.

An aide to Polish President Karol Nawrocki told Radio RMF FM that his revolver was awaiting customs clearance at Warsaw Airport and would be kept in an appropriate place "so that it is firstly safe and secondly respected as a gift". "Certainly no one will be shooting it," he added.

The offices of the Dutch and Swedish prime ministers said their revolvers had been taken to their respective embassies in Ankara. The Dutch one was due to be disabled while the Swedish one awaiting import paperwork.