

India-New Zealand FTA to come into effect on Oct. 20

Both countries ratify agreement which aims at doubling bilateral trade to ₹35,000 crore in 'next four to five years'; India's dairy, sensitive agriculture sectors protected, says Commerce Minister

Saptaparno Ghosh
NEW DELHI

The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and New Zealand that was ratified on Monday and comes into effect on October 20 aims at doubling bilateral trade to ₹35,000 crore in the "next four to five years", according to Union Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal.

"The entry into force of the India-New Zealand FTA will translate this goal into concrete economic outcomes," he told journalists.

According to New Zealand's foreign trade office, the FTA is set to erase import levies on all Indian goods, while 95% of exports to India will either be allowed tariff-free or at "sharply" reduced levies.



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PIYUSH GOYAL
Union Commerce Minister



It [the FTA] gives confidence to our business communities to grow, form relationships, and trade

TODD McCLAY
Minister of Trade and Investment,
New Zealand

Mr. Goyal insisted that India has safeguarded its sensitive sectors, such as dairy and agricultural produce, including onions, almonds, chickpeas, peas, artificial honey, and sugar, not granting Wellington any relaxation or concessions on these products in

the agreement. The deal will benefit India's micro, medium, and small enterprises, farmers, handloom artisans, and weavers, the Minister added.

New Zealand also has technological expertise in manufacturing of engineering and other goods,

Mr. Goyal said. "They could look to support our companies or invest and set up manufacturing in India to capture global markets," he added.

New Zealand's Minister of Trade and Investment, Todd McClay, emphasised the significance of the two countries getting the deal done at a time of global "uncertainty", with escalating tariffs and trade barriers. "It gives confidence to our business communities to grow, form relationships, and trade," he said.

India is New Zealand's ninth largest export market, and the value of bilateral trade between the two countries stood at \$1.3 billion in the fiscal year 2024-25.

CONTINUED ON
» **PAGE 10**

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Elaborating on the potential avenues for investment, Mr. Goyal said: “There are many areas where they have cutting-edge technology and innovation. Agriculture is one of their strengths in certain products.” He pointed to kiwi farming and apiculture as prime examples.

Wellington has committed \$20 billion worth of foreign direct investment into India as part of the deal.

The Commerce Minister said that global investors are interested in setting up manufacturing in India not only for access to the large Indian market but also to help “seamlessly export” to about two-thirds of the global economy where India has preferential market access.

Asked about India’s response to recent United States legislation imposing sanctions on countries buying Russian oil, Mr. Goyal said that the fine print of the law was being studied.

Responding to a query from *The Hindu* about progress on India’s trade deal with Chile, Mr. Goyal said that, following productive talks, “in the coming months, we will hear some good news.”

About the trade deal with Canada, the Union Minister noted that both sides have resolved to fast-track discussions. Indian negotiators are slated to visit the North American country for the fifth round of talks on October 5, he said.

India to attend session on UN-based multilateralism

EU, Brazil, Kenya, Canada launch grouping beyond 'superpower politics'; the P4M initiative seeks a more representative UN that is prepared for global challenges, including AI and climate change

Suhasini Haidar

NEW DELHI

India will join a number of countries committed to supporting United Nations (UN)-based multilateralism, away from "Superpower" politics, as External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar was set to attend the "Partners for Multilateralism" (P4M) meeting at the United Nations.

Mr. Jaishankar landed in New York on Monday at the start of the UN General Assembly's "High-Level debate" session. He is due to hold a number of bilateral meetings and multilateral meetings there, and will address the UNGA on September 26.

The P4M initiative, founded by leaders of the European Union, Brazil, Kenya and Canada is expected to make a pitch for the grouping this week.

In a joint editorial, leaders of the four founders said the grouping will support the UN but push for it to be more representative and prepared for global challenges, including AI (artificial intelligence), climate change, health security and digital transformation.

"P4M will support the reform of the UN and other multilateral institutions, to make them more representative, legitimate, effective and trusted," the leaders, including European Council President Antonio Costa, Brazil President Lula da



Gearing up: Security guards checking IDs of people ahead of the United Nations General Assembly in New York. REUTERS

Silva, Kenyan President William Ruto and Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney wrote in an editorial published in the U.K.-based *Financial Times*.

Mr. Carney had delivered a speech on "Middle powers" coming together at the World Economic Forum in Davos in January, which signalled growing dissatisfaction not just with Russia and China for unilateral moves and conflicts, but with the United States over trade and tariffs, expansionist moves, and the conflict in Iran that have been undertaken during U.S. President Donald Trump's second term.

It is unclear whether India was asked to join the joint message.

India is already part of a number of groups like the Non-Aligned Movement,

India is already part of a number of groups like BRICS and G20 that have similar objectives

BRICS, G20, and G-4 that have similar objectives.

The editorial on Monday pointed to comments by United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres in which he had said that "superpowers are discovering their limits", adding that the P4M grouping believes that the "international community must rediscover the extraordinary potential of collective action".

Mr. Guterres, who departs office later this year, spoke to *The Hindu* amongst five global outlets in U.S., U.K., South Africa,

the Gulf region and India.

"We have superpowers that have not yet recognised that their power has limits and they get into adventures that produce terrible results," Mr. Guterres had said, specifically pointing to Russia, which was still embroiled in the war in Ukraine four years later, while the U.S. is facing "difficulties" with its war in Iran.

'Limits to powers'

"I think it's time for superpowers to understand the limits of their power, and that will help the world become more peaceful," Mr. Guterres said, speaking to *The Hindu* in New Delhi, where he attended the 18th BRICS Summit.

The editorial also said that the 'Partners for Multilateralism', would not create another exclusive bloc or international bureaucracy.

"Its purpose is the opposite: to create a flexible, open framework for countries from different regions and political traditions that are willing to work across divides, to build coalitions for reform and to translate shared principles into practical action," the co-authors wrote, pointing out that 2025 saw the highest recorded number of state-based armed conflicts since 1946, in 35 countries, and highest recorded military spending of nearly \$3 trillion.

Accused entitled to release if grounds of arrest not given: SC

Right to know grounds of arrest, availability of counsel of choice are fundamental rights under Article 22(1) of Constitution, and 'cannot be breached under any situation', says Supreme Court

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court in a judgment on Monday held that an arrested person kept in the dark about the grounds of arrest and without access to a lawyer was entitled to immediate release.

The right to know the grounds of arrest in writing in a familiar language, and the availability of a counsel of choice, was a sacrosanct fundamental right under Article 22(1) of the Constitution, and "cannot be breached under any situation", a Bench headed by Justice Ujjal Bhuyan said. It has to be followed without exception and at the earliest.

"Any breach or non-compliance would entail immediate release of the arrested person because such arrest is unconstitutional. We cannot tinker with the most important safeguards provided under Article 22... Any attempt to encroach upon the fundamental rights guaranteed under Article 22(1) of the Constitution has to be

 Any attempt to encroach upon the fundamental rights guaranteed under Article 22(1) of the Constitution has to be frowned upon by the courts and dealt with strictly. It would vitiate the process of arrest and remand

JUSTICE UJJAL BHUYAN
Supreme Court judge



frowned upon by the courts and dealt with strictly. It would vitiate the process of arrest and remand," Justice Bhuyan observed.

The Bench, also comprising Justice Atul S. Chandurkar, said the right under Article 22(1) was a "mandatory constitutional safeguard". It applied across the spectrum, including offences under the Indian Penal Code and under special enactments, which include the laws on terrorism and money laundering.

Probe agencies cannot shrug off a breach of Article 22(1) as a "mere procedural lapse", Justice Bhuyan observed. Agencies cannot

contend that a violation of the Article would not render custody illegal or entitle an accused to bail. The agencies had it completely wrong, the Bench said.

"When an accused is released for violation of his fundamental rights under Article 22(1), he is not enlarged on bail. He is released from illegal and unconstitutional detention," Justice Bhuyan emphasised.

Even subsequent filing of chargesheet and order of cognisance would not validate such an arrest, Justice Bhuyan underscored.

No blanket immunity

The court was answering a question as to whether an

accused who had suffered breach of Clauses (1) and (2) of Article 22 could be re-arrested for the same offence, and if so, under what circumstances. Clause (2) of the Article mandates the production of an accused person before the Magistrate within 24 hours of arrest.

There cannot be a blanket immunity against future arrest, Justice Bhuyan said, as some cases relate to grave offences. However, any such move by the probe agencies must be based on stringent judicial oversight in order to protect citizens from police arbitrariness.

The apex court directed that a specific sanction from the Magistrate concerned must precede any attempt by the police to arrest for the second time a person whose earlier arrest was declared illegal for violating rights under Article 22(1) of the Constitution.

The police must apply before the Magistrate, providing recorded reasons for seeking arrest, the judgment said.

Far-right and far-left make gains in German State polls

Far-right AfD celebrates another State election win; far-left Die Linke could take power in Berlin; Merz vows to stay course despite poll 'disaster'; coalition partner hints talks on economic reforms

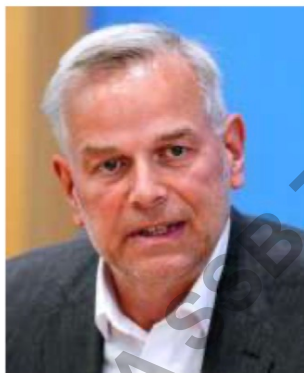
Reuters

BERLIN

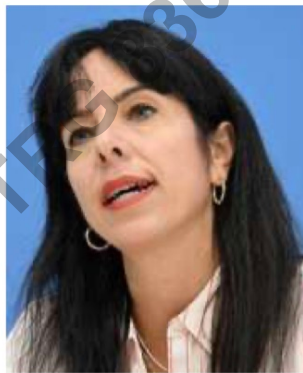
Chancellor Friedrich Merz was clinging to power on Monday after his conservative party Christian Democrats (CDU) tumbled to its worst regional election defeat in postwar Germany.

The far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD) took first place in the Sunday election in the northeastern State of Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania. Mr. Merz described the party's loss there as a "disaster" after the CDU missed the minimum threshold to enter the regional Parliament.

While the AfD fell well short of a majority, it was the second time it had topped a State Election



(left) Leif-Erik Holm, AfD lead candidate for Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania; Elif Eralp, Die Linke's top nominee for Berlin. AP, AFP



within a month and sees its regional wins as building momentum towards national power.

Mr. Merz's party also bled votes in a second election in the State of Berlin, which could see the far-left Die Linke party take power in a coalition after winning

most seats. The party campaigned to nationalise housing from corporate landlords and put a cap on rents.

The election losses also looked set to cause more turbulence between the CDU and its junior coalition partner, the centre-left

Social Democrat (SPD). While SPD leaders pledged to remain in the coalition, they hinted that they wanted to reopen talks on social and economic reforms.

The AfD's top State candidate, Leif-Erik Holm, said on Monday that "the Chancellor certainly won't make it to the end of the year. I think the twilight of the Chancellor's era has begun."

But Mr. Merz made clear he has no intention of quitting.

"We are determined to live up to the historic responsibilities our country is facing," said Mr. Merz. "It is about nothing less, and nothing more, than the democratic future of our country."

(With inputs from AFP)

Interim governing body set up to run India-built cultural centre in Jaffna

Meera Srinivasan

COLOMBO

An interim governing body, comprising senior officials, local body representatives, artistes and professionals, has been set up to run the India-built Jaffna Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre in Sri Lanka's Northern Province.

Issuing a statement on Monday, the Indian High Commission in Colombo said a Trust was formally established on September 18 to administer and manage the cultural centre. Terming the move "a decisive step" in operationalising the facility, the High Commission said the Trust will act as an interim governing body, providing administrative and financial autonomy for the Centre's "sustained operations".

The Trust, the statement said, is "an effective



Heritage hub: Jaffna Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre in Sri Lanka's Northern Province was inaugurated in 2022. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

transitional mechanism" aimed at building institutional capacity to help the Centre become operational with financial self-sustainability, until it is handed over to the Municipal Council of Jaffna.

The Trust Board comprises four ex-officio members: Municipal Commissioner of Jaffna, Mayor of Jaffna Municipal Council, a Minister of Northern Provincial Administration (or nominee), and Secretary to

Sri Lanka's Ministry of Buddhasasana, Religious and Cultural Affairs. Five experts, from the fields of arts and culture, commerce, education, law, science and technology, all from Jaffna, are also part of the Board.

Key features

Originally named the Jaffna Cultural Centre, the facility is an 11-storeyed structure, with an auditorium that can seat 600 persons, a

conference hall, an amphitheatre and a digital library. Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2015 laid the foundation stone for the Cultural Centre, which India financed with a \$12 million-grant. It was completed in early 2020. External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar virtually inaugurated the building during his visit to Colombo in 2022, and in 2023, the building was dedicated to the people of Jaffna.

Early last year, the centre came into focus owing to a controversy surrounding an attempt to change its name, leaving out the word 'Jaffna'. A strong backlash from politicians and intellectuals prompted Indian authorities to put up yet another signboard with the name "Yazhpanam Thiruvalluvar Panpaattu Maiyam" [Jaffna Thiruvalluvar Cultural Centre].

RUSSIAN ELECTIONS

Pro-Putin party holds Parliament with record 355 seats, anti-war party gains tiny regional foothold

Reuters

Moscow, September 21

THE PRO-Putin ruling United Russia party won a record number of seats in the national parliament, according to near-complete official election results on Monday, while the anti-war Yabloko party appeared to have won a tiny foothold in one regional parliament.

President Vladimir Putin had cast the three-day election to the State Duma - the first since Russia launched its full-scale war in Ukraine in February 2022 - as a test of support for the war. Elections for some regional parliaments and governors were held at the same time.

In a tightly controlled political system, which critics say does not tolerate genuine dissent, under which many of Yabloko's candidates were barred, few surprises were expected.

With over 95% of the vote counted, Ella Pamfilova, chair of the Central Electoral Commission, said United Russia had scored 57.83%, up from the



Senior members of Russia's ruling United Russia party, at the party's headquarters in Moscow on Sunday. REUTERS

49.8% that it won in the last parliamentary election, in 2021.

United Russia was set to control 355 seats or nearly 80% of the 450-seat Duma, a total that includes results in individual constituencies. It would also be an all-time high, outstripping its 2016 record of 343 seats.

Yabloko, the only registered anti-war party in Russia, failed to win any seats at a national level, but in Novgorod with it appeared to have cleared the 5% barrier by one percentage point to enter the regional parliament.

Moscow oil refinery output halted after drone strike, fires

Moscow: Russia's major Moscow refinery, owned by Gazprom Neft, has halted crude oil processing after fires broke out at its primary crude distillation units following a Ukrainian drone attack on September 20, three industry sources said.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyannin said on Telegram on Sunday morning that an industrial facility on the refinery's premises had been damaged during a drone raid on the Russian capital.

The sources told Reuters on Monday that both of the refinery's primary crude distillation units caught fire after drones crashed onto the site and that it could take several weeks to repair the damage and restore operations.

Gazprom Neft did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment. REUTERS

India-NZ FTA to kick in on Oct 20

ENS Economic Bureau
New Delhi, September 21

THE INDIA-NEW Zealand Free Trade Agreement (FTA) will come into force October 20, 2026, opening a new phase in the bilateral economic relationship backed by a New Zealand commitment to facilitate \$20 billion of investment in India over the next 15 years.

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal and New Zealand Trade and Investment Minister Todd McClay announced the October 20 implementation date at a video conference, describing the pact as a major milestone in the economic partnership between the two countries.

The FTA follows the signing of the agreement in New Delhi on April 27 and New Zealand's passage of legislation giving effect to the pact on September 16. The countries have also set an ambitious objective of doubling



Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal with members of New Zealand delegation. X/PIYUSHGOYAL

bilateral trade in goods and services, with Goyal putting the target at around Rs 35,000 crore over the next four to five years.

The date coincides with Vijaya Dashami (Dussehra), which Goyal described as an auspicious occasion for beginning a partnership. He said the agreement would help remove barriers to trade, promote investment and technology sharing and create opportunities for

businesses, farmers, exporters, micro, small, and medium enterprises, professionals and consumers in both countries.

The FTA provides zero-duty access to New Zealand for 100% of Indian exports from the date of entry into force. Key Indian export sectors expected to benefit include textiles and apparel, leather and footwear, engineering goods, pharmaceuticals, agriculture and processed foods. FE

Greenland standoff ends. But with costs to NATO

ON THE face of it, the deal between the US, Denmark and Greenland, announced last Friday, does not appear to confer on Washington powers substantially greater than those it already enjoys under the Greenland Defence Agreement. Signed in 1951 against the backdrop of the emerging Soviet threat, that pact gave the US broad rights to construct and operate military facilities in Greenland, as well as access to its airspace and waters for military purposes. The new deal may expand the US military presence and give Washington a veto over third-party military activity and certain sensitive investments, but much of what President Donald Trump is presenting as “permanent control” appears to have roots in the existing arrangement. What the deal does, however, is seemingly close a chapter of repeated coercion and intimidation by Trump over his desire to “own” Greenland, a semiautonomous territory of Denmark.

The full details of the deal are not yet public, but it appears to offer something to all parties. Trump, with an approval rating well underwater, gets to present it as a diplomatic victory to American voters ahead of the November midterm elections. For Greenland and Denmark, it appears to remove, at least for now, the threat of a US attempt to take control of the territory — no small achievement given that only nine months ago, Denmark and other NATO allies deployed troops to Greenland in response to Trump’s threat of a takeover. The deal’s true significance, if Trump’s overtures to Russia and his criticism of Europe over the past 18 months are anything to go by, lies in what it could mean for the unity and coherence of NATO — particularly at a time when Europe is bracing for the possibility of a Russian escalation on its eastern flank.

Nevertheless, no country wants to be overly dependent on an ally that can issue threats, demand negotiations and then extract concessions. Diversification is the natural response, as seen in Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney’s recent announcement that Canada would seek some form of associate membership in the EU. Even though the new agreement puts the immediate Greenland crisis to rest, a worrying precedent has been set. The trust lost in the process will not be regained quickly.

'Nearly 40% of coal power plants critically low on fuel'

The number of power plants with critically low coal stocks of less than 25% of the required inventory rose sharply to 74 as of September 19 from about 60 plants last week, data show

Reuters

NEW DELHI

Nearly 40% of India's coal-fired power plants are operating with critically low fuel stocks due to a surge in power demand amid hotter-than-usual weather linked to El Niño, government data showed on Monday.

The number of power plants with critically low coal stocks of less than 25% of the required inventory or only able to generate power for less than three days rose sharply to 74 as of September 19 from about 60 plants last week, data from the Central Electricity Authority that is updated daily showed.

India's peak power de-



Power struggle: India's peak power demand has been hovering between 230 gigawatts and 250 gigawatts in the past week. REUTERS

mand, a measure of the maximum electricity requirement, has been hovering between 230 gigawatts and 250 gigawatts in the past week.

Peak power demand hit an all-time high of 270.70

gigawatts in May.

The decline in power plant stocks appears to be a temporary logistical issue rather than a sign of any structural supply constraints, Crisil analysts said. India's coal and rail-

way ministries said in early September they were increasing supplies to the plants after erratic monsoon rains had impacted shipments.

Renewable power generation rose about 21% between April and August, but due to the intermittent nature of clean energy, coal-fired power continued to play a critical role in meeting round-the-clock demand, Crisil said.

Meanwhile, Indian power producers' coal imports in August rose to a 15-month high as a heatwave boosted electricity demand while hydroelectric power generation remained subdued, prompting utilities to turn to costly overseas supplies, *Reuters* reported last week.