

Cannot penalise refusal to sing National Song, says SC

Top court seeks response from the Union government on a plea by renowned Carnatic vocalist T.M. Krishna challenging the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Act, 2026

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

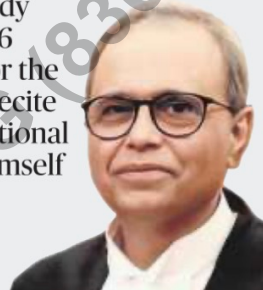
The Supreme Court on Tuesday observed that while a democratically elected government may give shape to the scope and length of the National Song, it cannot violate individual and collective religious freedoms or subject conscientious objectors, who refuse to sing one or all the stanzas of the *Vande Mataram*, to penal consequences.

“What is the National Song is not in dispute... It is for the democratically-elected state to decide and give aspiration as to what the National Song is, whether it should be two stanzas or four stanzas. But nobody can infract Article 25 and 26 [religious freedom] or subject a conscientious objector to pe-



What is the National Song is not in dispute... But nobody can infract Article 25 and 26 [religious freedom]... It is for the conscientious objector to recite one or all stanzas of the National Song without subjecting himself to criminal prosecution

JUSTICE JOYMALYA BAGCHI
Supreme Court Judge



nal consequences... It is for the conscientious objector to recite one or all stanzas of the National Song without subjecting himself to criminal prosecution,” Justice Joymalya Bagchi, part of a three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, observed. He said the 1986 Supreme Court precedent in *Bijoe Emmanuel versus State of Kerala*, upholding the right to religious free-

dom, constitutional tolerance, and silent objection, still holds true.

The court sought a response from the Union government on a petition filed by renowned Carnatic vocalist and author T.M. Krishna challenging the Prevention of Insults to National Honour (Amendment) Act, 2026, read with the administrative directions issued by the Union Home Ministry in January

and a subsequent circular in July.

Mr. Krishna, represented by senior advocate S. Muralidhar and advocate Prasanna S., said the amended law and executive orders compel the playing and mass singing of the entire six stanzas of the National Anthem at public functions. Non-compliance would risk three years’ imprisonment or fine or both.

Stanzas three to six of *Vande Mataram* were “expressly devotional, deity-invoking, and non-secular”, and the scheme violated fundamental rights guaranteed under the Constitution and offended the basic feature of secularism, the petitioner said.

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Trade agreement unlikely till U.S. probes India's competitor countries

Sriram Lakshman

WASHINGTON DC

India and the U.S. are unlikely to sign a trade deal until the U.S. launches a series of fresh 'Section 301 investigations', concludes them, and places tariffs on India's competitors such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines, a person familiar with the process has said. It was a "strategic mistake" that Pakistan was not included in the list of countries investigated in the 'excess capacity' 301 investigations opened in March 2026, according to the person.

An announcement of fresh 301 investigations against some of India's competitor countries is likely in the near future, *The Hindu* has learned, although the timelines and the subject matters for these 301s have not yet

Uneven markets

The U.S. uses 'Section 301' as an alternative to the 'reciprocal tariffs'

- India, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka were subject to probes for 'forced labour', but only India is on the probe list for 'excess capacity'
- India is likely to face 8% tariff in the 'excess capacity' investigation to bring the overall tariff rate it faces up to 18%



been decided.

For this reason, it is highly unlikely that a trade deal will be concluded around Union Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal's upcoming visit to the North American country for the G-20 trade ministerial that starts on September 30.

These developments appear to be consistent with Commerce Secretary Rakesh Agrawal's remarks at the Global Fintech Fest 2026 earlier this month.

Mr. Agrawal had said that India operates largely on an MFN (Most Favoured Nation) tariff basis, while the U.S. operates on an executive tariff basis, and that a trade agreement would require an architecture with differentials and preferential market access structure for India.

Supreme Court ruling

The '301s' are part of how the U.S. government is working around the February 2026 U.S. Supreme Court ruling that President Donald Trump's 'reciprocal' tariffs were an unlawful application of the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA). Prior to this ruling, In-

dia and the U.S. had arrived at an Interim Agreement on trade that was announced via an India-U.S. joint statement issued on February 6.

The general tariff rate for Indian goods entering the U.S. under the interim deal was going to be 18%, giving India an advantage over its main competitors. These include not just Pakistan (19%), which is the most politically sensitive country in New Delhi's calculus, but also Vietnam (20%), Sri Lanka (20%), Bangladesh (19%) and the Philippines (19%). Nepal and the Maldives did not fall under the reciprocal tariff schedule and were tariffed at 10%. Following the scrapping of these tariffs, they trade with the U.S. on an MFN basis.

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Trade deal 'unlikely' till U.S. completes probes

A central challenge to concluding the India-U.S. deal is that Pakistan, Sri Lanka and the Philippines were subject to 301 probes for forced labour, but are not on the 301 probe list for excess capacity, which India was subject to. Both probes were launched in March 2026. Pakistan, for instance, is tariffed at 10% as a result of the forced labour 301 investigation. So, at the moment, there are no similar legal instruments through which tariff rates on these countries could be raised further to their previous levels, while India is likely to be tariffed at 8% in the excess capacity investigation, bringing the overall tariff rate it faces back up to 18%.

To complicate matters, last Friday, Mr. Trump signed the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act into law, enabling the executive branch of the U.S. government to impose up to 100% tariffs on the top five importers of Russian oil. This includes India and China.

The relationship between the existence of this new law and the likelihood that a bilateral trade deal will be signed is not straightforward. Sanctions can be suspended in the American national interest, as per the wording of the law. Additionally, the Trump administration is mindful of global oil prices and their link to the price of U.S. gas (petrol) at the pump, with the midterm elections scheduled for November 3. Global oil prices are impacted by India's energy consumption and sourcing; New Delhi is the third-largest importer of crude oil globally and is the second-biggest market for Russian crude oil.

Siam to take over as High Commissioner of Bangladesh to India

Kallol Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

The current Foreign Secretary of Bangladesh, Asad Alam Siam, will be the next High Commissioner of Bangladesh to India, diplomatic sources have confirmed.

Bangladesh on Tuesday received the Indian diplomatic document – agrément – that will pave the way for Mr. Siam to take charge of the High Commission of Bangladesh in New Delhi in the coming weeks.

The appointment of Foreign Secretary Siam has taken place against the backdrop of negotiations between New Delhi and Dhaka for a possible India visit by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman sometime in November. Mr. Rahman



Asad Alam Siam

was earlier invited to visit Delhi for the BRICS summit, but the visit could not take place over tough exchanges that broke out after deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina held a virtual press interaction on August 5.

Mr. Siam will succeed Riaz Hamidullah, who was posted here in 2025 during the interim administration headed by Mohammed Yunus.

WHILE OTHERS HAVE SPOKEN OF PEACE, I HAVE MADE PEACE, SAYS PRESIDENT

In UN address, Trump says he faces a choice to make a deal or annihilate Iran

US President urges nations to enforce complete economic isolation of Tehran, expects deal after the midterm elections

Reuters

New York, September 22

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump used his UN General Assembly speech on Tuesday to make the case for his war on Iran, arguing he has prevented Tehran from obtaining a nuclear weapon and warning he could "annihilate the Islamic Republic" if no deal is reached to end the conflict.

While predicting his administration would strike a peace deal with Iran following the November 3 US midterm elections, Trump called on other nations to join America in isolating Iran economically to force it to the negotiating table. "I call on all nations to help to enforce the complete economic isolation of Iran," he said.

"I have a big decision to make. Will a deal be made with Iran that lets them rebuild and create a far greater country than it ever was before?" Trump said.

"Or do I annihilate the Islamic Republic and do it quickly, never giving them a chance to kill and destroy people and countries again?" Trump added: "Do I drive them into hell with no chance of survival and no hope of future greatness or generations? But I believe we'll make a deal right after the election."

Since returning to office last year for a second term, Trump has waded through global order, joining Israel to attack Iran, ordering a raid on Venezuela that captured country's leader, and threatening to seize Greenland.

In a 37-minute speech, Trump laid out his foreign policy vision, contending war with Iran would spare world threat of a nuclear-armed menace while maintaining US military dominance in the Western Hemisphere was essential to preventing crises from taking root.

"Our actions in Venezuela are proof that the United States



US President Donald Trump speaks during the 81st session of the United Nations General Assembly at the UN headquarters in New York on Tuesday. AP

will no longer permit threats to America to gain a foothold anywhere in the Western Hemisphere," Trump said. "While others have spoken of peace, I have made peace."

Trump brushed aside suggestions the midterm elections, in which his Republican Party risks losing control of Congress, could constrain his handling of the war. Some analysts have ar-

gued that a Democratic takeover of the legislature would weaken his leverage in the conflict.

"What they don't realize is that I'm not running," Trump said, referring to the leadership in Tehran. "I did that already, and won in a landslide. We won in a giant landslide, and I'll be here for 2-1/2 years."

Ahead of a UN Security Council meeting on AI and in-

ternational security on Wednesday, Trump acknowledged the challenges of the new technology but said "I'm not going to stifle growth of something that will be bigger than Industrial Revolution."

The speech kicked off a day of high-level diplomacy at the United Nations, where Trump was due to meet more than a dozen world leaders as wars in

"I have a big decision to make. Will a deal be made with Iran that lets them rebuild and create a far greater country than it ever was before. Or do I annihilate the Islamic Republic and do it quickly, never giving them a chance to kill and destroy people and countries again"

DONALD TRUMP,
PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES

West Asia and Ukraine continue to test his foreign policy agenda.

After his speech, Trump was scheduled to meet with no fewer than 11 world leaders, including British PM Andy Burnham, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Venezuela's interim leader Delcy Rodriguez, and the representatives of the Gulf states of the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar.

Turkey's Erdogan urges UN reform, wider recognition of Palestinian state

Reuters

New York, September 22

TURKISH PRESIDENT Tayyip Erdogan told the United Nations General Assembly Tuesday the UN had become unable to fulfill its duty of preserving peace and called for reform of the Security Council.

"Let's recognise that a system in which the will of more than 190 countries is subject to the whims of five countries is neither fair nor capable of fully

establishing trust," he said.

"The United Nations, established 81 years ago to maintain peace and security, has become unable to fulfil this mission, or rather it has been made unable to do so," he added.

Erdogan also condemned the situation in Gaza, saying "no one who holds humanity, compassion and mercy in their heart, with a sense of justice and conscience can turn a blind eye" to what was happening there.

"(Palestinian President) Mahmoud Abbas, has been unable to take his place in this hall for two consecutive years. This injustice against our Palestinian brothers and sisters wounds the consciences, Erdogan said.

He urged countries that do not recognise a Palestinian state to review their position and for all nations to increase pressure on Israel to end the war in Gaza, which he called "our time's most inhumane, most embarrassing concentration camp".

In his final UN speech, Guterres calls for a 'world built on interdependence'

Associated Press

United Nations, September 22

UN SECRETARY-General Antonio Guterres pleaded for "a world built on interdependence" as he made his final address Tuesday to the General Assembly gathering of world leaders.

The UN leader has long implored leaders not to give up on cooperation and shared decision-making in the face of accelerating global challenges and increasing great powers

competition. Tuesday's message took on additional urgency because he leaves office at the end of this year.

"The fault lines in our world are widening," he said, citing raging wars, rising temperatures and artificial intelligence, among other matters. Instead of letting the future continue to veer toward fragmentation, transactionalism and mistrust, he called for "a world built on interdependence" and sustained by a dense web of econ-

omic, political, social and technological connections.

Guterres also rebuked might-makes-right thinking, telling superpowers to recognise "that their power isn't so super." Recent years have made it clear that "military power alone cannot secure peace," he said.

The annual high-level gathering at the UN General Assembly will be consumed with wars in Iran, Gaza, Ukraine, Sudan, Congo and Myanmar and a persisting question.

Starting this week, IAF to host second edition of multinational air exercise Tarang Shakti

Amrita Nayak Dutta

New Delhi, September 22

THE INDIAN Air Force (IAF) will host the second edition of its largest-ever multinational air exercise, Tarang Shakti-26, beginning later this week in Jodhpur.

Around 40 countries are expected to participate in the exercise, which will bring together a range of advanced combat aircraft, including US F-35s, French Rafales and UAE F-16s, along with other aerial assets, for joint aerial operations, tactical training and interoperability drills.

The exercise, to be held between September 26 and October 12 at Air Force Station, Jodhpur, and adjoining air bases will see participation from eight forces — India, Australia, Bangladesh, France, the US, Germany, Sri Lanka and UAE. Thirty-two countries will attend the event as observers. Around 10 Air Chiefs or equivalents are likely to attend the exercise.

The maiden edition of the exercise took place in August-September 2024 in two phases.

India's Rafale, Mirage-2000, Jaguar, Tejas, MiG-29, Su-30 MKI will participate in the exercise, along with the US's F-35, France's Rafale, the UAE's F-16 and Bangladesh's C-130J, besides other air assets.

Explaining the criticality of the exercise, Vice-Chief of Air Staff Air Marshal Ashutosh Dixit told mediapersons on Tuesday that Tarang Shakti has changed the earlier approach of having an operational engagement with foreign air forces largely through bilateral exercises.

Talking about the first edition of the exercise, when 11 countries participated with their air assets and covered a wide canvas of air operations, he said it was an important transition from exercises primarily being bilateral to planning, operating and integrating with multiple air forces simultaneously for the IAF. "So Tarang Shakti-26 is the next logical step," he said.

The exercise aims to analyse tactical employment philosophy against modern Air-to-Air



Vice-Chief of the Air Staff Air Marshal Ashutosh Dixit addresses a press conference in the Capital on Tuesday. PTI

and Surface-to-Air weapons, to enhance interoperability among the participating forces and to identify best practices in operations. It will involve Beyond Visual Range and within Visual Range combat missions, air mobility operations and dynamic targeting, air-to-air refuelling missions and combat search and rescue operations.

Air Marshal Dixit emphasised that as world changes rapidly and nature of warfare evolves, recent conflicts have highlighted the critical importance of precision, integrated air defence, unmanned systems, information dominance, space-based capabilities and the ability to integrate these elements into multi-domain operations. "Operation Sindoor has reinforced many of these realities for us. It demonstrated the importance of intelligence-led operations, precision, integrated air and missile defence, counter-UAS, and jointness across domains."

"We do not conduct Tarang Shakti to demonstrate what we already know. We conduct it to discover what we still need to learn. Our operational experience, including Operation Sindoor, gives us lessons," he said adding: "Our partners bring their own operational experience. Bringing these together in a realistic training environment allows us to test assumptions, challenge procedures, understand different methods of employing air power and improve interoperability."

Trump signs US-Denmark-Greenland pact

Deal to expand US military presence in Greenland

Associated Press

United Nations, September 22

PRESIDENT DONALD Trump has signed an agreement with Denmark and Greenland aimed at strengthening Arctic and North Atlantic security, easing

tensions over his repeated calls for Greenland to become part of the United States.

The signing Tuesday on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York comes days after Trump announced the deal to bolster US military presence on the vast, icy island but keep it under Danish control. The agreement would still apply if Greenland eventually chooses independence.

"This is tremendous for Europe and for the United States

and for everybody," Trump said just before the agreement was signed. "And for Greenland, it's going to be incredible."

Trump has expressed his desire to acquire Greenland since as long ago as 2019 and, during his second term, has issued threats to seize the semiautonomous territory from Denmark, a NATO ally. On Tuesday, he did not respond to questions about whether a US acquisition of Greenland was off the table.

Officials from the US, Green-

land and Denmark negotiated for months behind the scenes, searching for solutions to address some of Trump's security concerns about the island.

Trump's designs on Greenland strained relations within NATO, with Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen warning a US takeover would amount to the end of the Atlantic alliance.

The standoff drove a wedge between the US and Denmark and its EU partners, who stepped up security exercises.

'Deciding between deal or driving Iran into hell'

Reuters

UNITED NATIONS

U.S. President Donald Trump told the United Nations General Assembly on Tuesday that he had to choose whether to "annihilate" Iran if it fails to make a deal to end the West Asia war.

"I have a big decision to make – will a deal be made with Iran that lets them rebuild and create a far greater country than it ever was before, maybe one of the greatest in the Middle East or even the world?"

Mr. Trump said.

"Or do I annihilate the Islamic Republic and do it quickly, never giving them a chance to kill and destroy people and countries again? Do I drive them into hell with no chance of survival and no hope of future greatness or generations?"



Donald Trump

But Mr. Trump reiterated that he thought an agreement was possible before U.S. midterm elections in November – in which his Republican party faces losing control of Congress at least partly due to high fuel prices caused by the war.

"I believe we'll make a deal right after the election because it doesn't make sense for them not to," Mr. Trump said.

"They're waiting to see

how I do in the midterm election. What they don't realise is that I'm not running. I did that already, and won in a landslide."

He also called for complete economic isolation of Iran.

Iran had earlier hinted at the prospect of reviving negotiations to end their almost seven-month-old conflict, with the Presidents of both countries due at the UN in New York.

Secretary of State Marco Rubio told NBC's "Today" show the U.S. was open to speaking with the Iranians, "especially if it has the prospects of leading to something positive and ultimately achieving the goal of what this is all about".

But in the combative speech to the UN General Assembly, Mr. Trump gave no sign of readiness to compromise.

We came out with our heads held high: Pezeshkian before UN speech

'We will make the best possible use of this opportunity to convey Iran's plight to the international community; we will firmly tell our adversaries that, despite all the injustices, the Iranian people have stood their ground,' says the Iranian President

Agence France-Presse
TEHRAN

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian on Tuesday vowed to "firmly defend" his country's positions, as he departed for New York to attend the UN General Assembly.

"We emerged with our heads held high, and this is a source of dignity and pride for all of us. Therefore, we will firmly defend our positions in international forums," he said before flying out of Iran, according to footage broadcast by state television.

The President is due to speak at the UN meeting



Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian speaks before departing for New York, at Mehrabad Airport in Tehran Tuesday. REUTERS

on Wednesday.

"We will make the best possible use of this opportunity to convey Iran's plight to the international community. We will firmly tell our adversaries that,

despite all the unfairness and injustices, the Iranian people have stood their ground," he said.

Mr. Pezeshkian will be the highest-ranking Iranian official to set foot on Amer-

ican soil since the start of the war, which began in late February with U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran.

The U.S. has approved the UN visits for part of the Iranian delegation despite the war, but the group will be subject to movement restrictions, according to the U.S. State Department.

The Iranian President's communications team has not been authorised to travel however, having been denied visas. Their barring was described as "hostile" by Iranian presidential spokesperson Habibollah Abbassi.

The reopening of the strategic Strait of Hormuz remains at the heart of the conflict between Tehran

and Washington.

Traffic in the vital maritime corridor, through which one-fifth of the world's hydrocarbons passed before the war, has been severely disrupted, with Iran firing on commercial ships and demanding it approve passage.

In response, the U.S. is maintaining a counter-blockade of Iranian ports while upping economic pressure on Iran.

The crisis escalated in recent months with Iran's alliance in Yemen, the Houthis attacking Saudi Arabia and launching an offensive in Yemen against the Saudi backed forces. The Houthis have since taken over Yemen's entire Red Sea coast.

Iran hints at Hormuz dialogue with US as Houthis advance in Bab el-Mandeb strait

Reuters

Dubai, September 22

A SENIOR Iranian official said Tuesday Iran could reopen the Strait of Hormuz to Gulf shipping within days if the United States lifts its blockade, describing the UN General Assembly as a “golden opportunity” to revive diplomacy with Washington.

US President Donald Trump and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian will attend UN General Assembly in New York, their first shared event since Trump launched “Operation Epic Fury” against Iran in February.

The Iranian official said Iran’s delegation had full authority to revive potential talks, although no direct meeting between the two presidents was planned. No direct Iran-US meeting is known since July, when an interim agreement to end the war collapsed weeks after Trump and Pezeshkian signed it.

“The US needs to announce that it wants to resolve the issue diplomatically, make that official, and then agree on a timeline for how the process will move forward,” the Iranian official said, adding Iran had sent its proposal to Washington through mediators on September 16.

US Secretary of State Marco

Rubio told NBC’s *Today* show that the US was open to speaking with Iran at the General Assembly, “especially if it has the prospects of leading to something positive” and ultimately achieving the goals of the war.

Gulf countries are keen to restore shipping through the Strait but wary of giving Iran, their rival, too much influence.

Saudi Arabia has been drawn deeper into the conflict this month, with Iran-aligned Houthi fighters advancing in Yemen, routing forces of a Saudi-backed government and threatening Saudi oil exports through the Red Sea. The Houthis aim to control Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the southern entrance to the Red Sea, and have attacked Saudi Arabia with missiles and drones.

A Qatari proposal for a framework bringing Iran and the Arab Gulf states into a common security architecture is also on the agenda for Gulf leaders’ meeting with Trump, regional sources said.

Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani said: “Lasting security cannot be built through repeated cycles of escalations and retaliation, or arrangements that leave any state permanently exposed to insecurity.”

Saudi restarts East-West pipeline

Singapore: Saudi Arabia has restarted operations at its East-West Pipeline and could resume exports from the Red Sea port of Yanbu later Tuesday, three sources briefed on matter said.

Drone attacks forced Saudi Arabia to shut its East-West Pipeline on September 13, halting crude loadings at the kingdom’s Yanbu port. The resumption of supplies on Tuesday helped to drive selling on global oil markets, traders said.

Brent crude futures fell by

more than \$2 a barrel to its lowest since September 8.

Since disruption to oil flows through the Strait of Hormuz following the US-Israeli war on Iran, OPEC’s leading oil exporter has been using the pipeline to re-route around 4 million barrels per day — around 4% of global supply — to Yanbu. The pipeline was pumping at a low rate after its restart, two of sources said.

State oil firm Saudi Aramco did not respond to a request for comment.

REUTERS