

India, EU to sign trade deal on December 16

Final touches

Negotiations on the India-EU Free Trade Agreement, dubbed the 'mother of all deals', were concluded in January 2026

The FTA will see the EU dropping tariffs on **99.5%** of Indian exports to the region, with most tariffs going down to **0%**



India will give tariff concessions on **97.5%** of the traded value between the two economies

After the signing, the deal will take 1-2 months to pass in the European Parliament, paving the way for an 'early 2027' roll-out



T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan

Suhasini Haidar

NEW DELHI

The Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between India and the European Union (EU) will be signed on December 16, two diplomatic sources have separately confirmed to *The Hindu*.

This will be part of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's back-to-back trips in December to Canada, the U.S., and Belgium, where three separate FTAs are currently either being negotiated or in the process of approval.

Further, as the EU FTA has received "majority ap-

proval" in Europe, it will not require separate ratification by each EU country once the European Council gives its go-ahead.

The next step, after the signing, will be passage in the European Parliament, which will take another one to two months, paving the way for a roll-out in "early 2027".

"The most recent development was the European Commission finalising the text of the deal and sending it to the European Council," a diplomatic source told *The Hindu*.

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“The signing is scheduled for December 16, after which it will go to the European Parliament.”

Negotiations on the India-EU FTA, dubbed the “mother of all deals” by leaders on both sides, restarted in June 2022 after a long hiatus and were concluded in January this year. The deal would see the EU dropping tariffs on 99.5% of items India exports to the region, with most tariffs going down to 0% immediately once the agreement comes into effect.

India, on the other hand, has given tariff concessions on 97.5% of the traded value between the two economies. A second source confirmed the date, adding that it would take place in Brussels in the presence of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

“The deal has majority support in Europe, and so it will not need to be individually ratified in each EU country,” the first source added. A reason for this support is that the two sides agreed to leave out contentious issues from the deal and not make “the best the enemy of the good”.

Mr. Modi is expected to travel to Canada first, probably around December 12, prior to the G-20 Summit in Miami. Confirming the visit, Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney said trade negotiations had made “good progress”. “Our commitment to each other, PM Modi and myself last year at the G20 (in Canada) was to look to conclude negotiations by G20 of this year (in the U.S.). That’s the middle of December, 14-15 December,” Mr. Carney said at a briefing in New York on Tuesday.

Germany ready to sign submarine deal with India: envoy

Kallol Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

Germany is ready to sign a “forward leaning” deal with India for six submarines worth \$8 billion, said its new ambassador to India Jasper Wieck. Speaking to journalists on Wednesday, Mr. Wieck described

Russia as the “aggressor” because of its actions in Ukraine amid the war and said that India can play a role in bringing the crisis to an end as New Delhi enjoys positive relations with both Kyiv and Moscow.

Mr. Wieck pointed out that both Germany and India have increased investments in their military capabilities because of the worldwide situation that he described as an “unfriendly geostrategic environment”. Germany’s

Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems and India’s Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders are in talks to build six submarines for India. The envoy said that Germany has



Jasper Wieck

eased barriers that had posed a challenge in defence cooperation with India.

“From the German side, we should sign tomorrow,” said Mr. Wieck describing the deal as one in its final stages. “The government has agreed to all the documents that have been worked on, in particular, the G2G agreement, the inter-governmental agreement which is very ambitious and is very forward-leaning with regard to Indian requests,” remarked Mr. Wieck.

The submarine deal will give a “big boost” to the existing India-Germany partnership, Mr. Wieck said.

Jaishankar takes up U.S. sanctions law in meeting with Rubio

Suhasini Haidar

NEW DELHI

In their first meeting since the United States enacted the Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act (SRIA), External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar raised concerns about the law with U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio in New York on Wednesday.

The law, which mandates U.S. President Donald Trump to penalise countries that buy Russian oil with up to 100% tariffs and extends sanctions on Iran trade, could affect India if implemented after the stipulated one-month period.

In a social media post, Mr. Jaishankar said he had “reiterated India’s interests and concerns with regard to SRIA” and discussed the situations in Ukraine and Iran. In a strongly worded reaction to the U.S. Congress passing the Act last week, the Ministry of External Affairs had said it conveyed to various U.S. interlocutors in recent months that the move would have “implications” for both the India-U.S. bi-

lateral relationship and the international energy market if India is pressured by the U.S. to drop its intake of Russian Ural, which currently makes up 51% of India’s total crude imports.

After the meeting, Mr. Rubio sidestepped the issue. In a social media post about the meeting, he said, “Together, we are building on the U.S.-India strategic partnership and coordinating on key regional priorities and upcoming multilateral efforts.”

Mr. Jaishankar and Mr. Rubio are also understood to be preparing for meetings between Mr. Trump and Prime Minister Narendra Modi later this year, with a possible meeting at the ASEAN Summit in November and then a bilateral expected in mid-December, when Mr. Trump hosts G20 Summit in Miami.

This is the third year in succession that India has failed to host the Quad Summit, and New Delhi has been keen to set a date later this year or early next year for Mr. Trump and leaders of Australia and Japan to travel to India.

SIR is illegal and needs to be reversed: former CEC Quraishi

Delimitation and SIR are intertwined and tailored to favour BJP, say Opposition leaders at *The Hindu* event; government has not yet prorogued the Monsoon Session of Parliament as it plans to bring the Bills around Oct. 11, says Jairam Ramesh

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls is illegal and needs to be reversed, former Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) S.Y. Quraishi said on Wednesday.

Mr. Quraishi made these remarks at an event to launch the book *The Delimitation Debate: The Union and its Units*, published by The Hindu Group. The book contains essays that examine critical questions of representation, federalism and demographic change.

Speaking at the event, Communist Party of India (Marxist) MP John Brittas said the issues of SIR and delimitation are inter-linked as the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) wants these tailored to make the party win.

Congress communications chief Jairam Ramesh said the Narendra Modi government has not prorogued the Monsoon Session of Parliament even after 41 days of Parliament being adjourned *sine die*, as it is keen to bring the Delimitation Bill during Navratri.

'Dubious procedure'

Speaking at a panel discussion, moderated by *The Hindu*'s Political Editor Nistula Hebbar, Mr. Quraishi referred to the newsbreak by *The Indian Express* in



(From left) Sobhana Nair, Senior Deputy Editor, *The Hindu*; Nistula Hebbar, Political Editor, *The Hindu*; Javed Ali Khan, Raja Sabha MP, SP; John Brittas, Raja Sabha MP, CPI(M); Jairam Ramesh, Raja Sabha MP, Congress; S.Y. Quraishi, former Chief Election Commissioner; Sanjeev Chopra, author and historian; Raja Sekhar Vundru, author; Varghese K. George, Resident Editor, *The Hindu*, Delhi; and Suresh Nambath, Editor, *The Hindu* at the launch of *The Delimitation Debate: The Union and its Units* in New Delhi on Wednesday. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

which it was mentioned that there were major differences between Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar and the other two Election Commissioners, Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi.

"I have been saying from the beginning, about a year and a half ago, that it is highly undesirable. And today it has come out that it was illegal," Mr. Quraishi said.

Questioning the procedure adopted for the ongoing SIR exercise, Mr. Quraishi described it as "dubious".

"I have been opposing it, and now today's revelations in *The Indian Express* have actually exposed the fact that the Election Commissioners themselves have been questioning the procedures being followed. In fact, it has raised a serious question of the legality of the decision. And

all illegal decisions need to be reversed," he said.

His co-panelist Sanjeev Chopra, former director of the Lal Bahadur Shastri Academy of Administration, argued for smaller States for a more representative democracy.

Raja Sekhar Vundru, former Additional Chief Secretary, Haryana government, argued for a system like France where there can be two rounds of voting so that the ultimate winner of an election should have at least 50% of the votes polled.

A separate panel discussion, moderated by Senior Deputy Editor Sobhana Nair, which included Mr. Ramesh, Mr. Brittas and Samajwadi Party MP Javed Khan, focussed on the political implications of the delimitation process.

"We have a lingering suspicion that the SIR and the delimitation are inter-

linked. Just as the SIR was the disenfranchisement of crores of people, they want to secure the delimitation in such a way that it favours the BJP," Mr. Brittas alleged.

'Broader implications'

Mr. Khan argued that the BJP was jolted by the 2024 Lok Sabha results in Uttar Pradesh, where his party, SP, won as many as 37 of the 80 Lok Sabha seats, and that prompted the BJP to push for delimitation.

Mr. Ramesh argued that even now the government does not have a two-thirds majority to push through the constitutional amendment that seeks to implement the 33% reservation for women after carrying out the delimitation exercise based on the last (2011) Census. But the government has not yet prorogued the Monsoon Session as it plans to bring the

Bills around October 11, during the auspicious period of Navratri.

The Congress MP said the issue should not be framed merely as a North-South divide, as it has much broader implications.

Welcoming the distinguished panelists and guests to the event, Suresh Nambath, Editor of *The Hindu*, said the book does not frame the delimitation debate as a North-South conflict, but as an examination of democratic and federal principles.

"We are here to make sure that democracy and federalism are not seen as undermining each other, but reinforcing each other," Mr. Nambath said.

Varghese K. George, Resident Editor (Delhi) of *The Hindu*, made a brief visual presentation on the book, underlining the consequences of delimitation.

Super El Niño to add 15,800 heat deaths in India: report

Climate Impact Lab says this year's El Niño is a 'postcard from our future', bringing temperatures climate change is projected to deliver 20 years later; national rainfall deficit is at 15% below normal

Jacob Koshy
NEW DELHI

India could see an estimated 15,800 additional heat-related deaths, give or take 1,600, between September 2026 and February 2027, as the current Super El Niño drives unusually high temperatures, according to a report made public on Wednesday by the Climate Impact Lab. The estimate is relative to average conditions during the corresponding months from 1996-2025.

Globally, the report projects 451,000 additional heat-related deaths during the first six months of the El Niño event, including 239,000 during the September 2026-February 2027 period. It projects 19,300 deaths in Indonesia; 19,400 across the Philippines, Vietnam, Thailand, and Cambodia; 13,300 in Brazil; and 66,800 across the Sahel, a 5,000-kilometre swathe of about 10 countries across Africa, including Senegal, the Gambia, and northern Nigeria.

"This report allows decision-makers to see exactly where emergency actions



Dry spell: Heat is increasing electricity demand with nearly 40% of coal-fired power plants clocking critically low fuel stocks. FILE PHOTO

can be taken now to save tens of thousands of lives in the coming months," Michael Greenstone, co-founder, Climate Impact Lab, University of Chicago, said.

The report describes the current event as a Super El Niño, an informal term generally used for exceptionally strong El Niño conditions. El Niño occurs when waters in the central and eastern tropical Pacific become unusually warm, altering atmospheric circulation and shifting rainfall and temperature patterns worldwide. Forecasts earlier this month projected a greater than 90% chance of a very strong El Niño

during the northern hemisphere autumn and winter, with eastern equatorial Pacific sea surface temperatures already more than 3°C above normal.

Its effects are already being observed in different regions. Indonesia has experienced conditions conducive to wildfires, while parts of Central America have faced drought-related agricultural impacts. "This year's El Niño is also a 'postcard from our future', bringing temperatures climate change is projected to deliver 20 years in the future. In this way, it offers a glimpse at what lies ahead without new invest-

ments in adaptation," an accompanying press statement noted.

Rainfall deficit

In India, the southwest monsoon is entering its withdrawal phase after a season marked by deficient rainfall. The national rainfall deficit stood at about 15% below normal up to September 22, 2026 with larger shortfalls in southern and eastern parts of the country.

The heat is also increasing the demand for electricity, with nearly 40% of India's coal-fired power plants reporting critically low fuel stocks amid increased power demand associated with hotter than usual weather linked to the El Niño.

The Climate Impact Lab says it applies previously estimated temperature-mortality relationships across 24,378 regions to seasonal temperature forecasts, accounting for local climate, vulnerability, and adaptive capacity. The report does not spell out the underlying numerical relationship or coefficients connecting a particular temperature increase to a number of deaths.

OECD forecasts India growth at 7.1% in '26-27

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan

NEW DELHI

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) has become the latest global body to raise its growth forecast for India in the last week, predicting that India's economy will grow by 7.1% in 2026-27, up from

6.3% forecast in June.

This comes soon after the three most-recognised global ratings agencies – Moody's, S&P Global, and Fitch Ratings – raised their respective growth outlooks for India over the last week. The OECD, in its Economic Outlook Interim Report September 2026 released on Wednesday, said

that several countries have been able to mitigate the damage from the West Asia crisis by rapid growth in artificial intelligence-related investment and production in many economies.

For India, however, it said domestic demand and government policy cushioned the impact.

“This was also the case

in China, whilst growth in several other G20 emerging market economies, such as India, Indonesia and Brazil, was underpinned by resilient domestic demand and government policies that cushioned households and firms from the impact of higher energy prices,” the report said.

'We are not terrorists, but victims of terror': Iran's Pezeshkian at UN

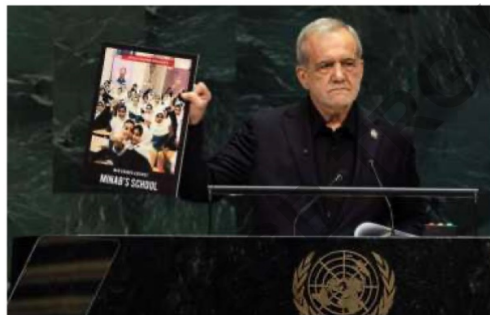
'Our innocent people have been the targets of cowardly attacks and aggressions imposed upon our country; we defended ourselves with utmost strength; we're hit, but we did not bend the knee,' says the Iranian President at the General Assembly

Associated Press
UNITED NATIONS

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian said on Wednesday that his people have been "victims of terrorism" by the United States, delivering a rare wartime speech at UN General Assembly a day after President Donald Trump said he could "annihilate" the Islamic republic.

In a defiant speech, President Pezeshkian held up large photos of the late Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and the more than 150 Iranian school children killed by U.S. strikes on the first days of the war.

"We have only defended ourselves. We are not ter-



Masoud Pezeshkian holds up a picture of an Iranian school that was bombed, while speaking at the UN headquarters on Wednesday. AFP

rorists," Pezeshkian said at the General Assembly. "Our innocent people have been the targets of cowardly attacks and aggressions imposed upon our country. And we defended our-

selves with utmost strength. America and Israel attacked us."

He added of the United States: "Yes they did hit us, but we did not bend the knee." Toward the end of

his speech, Mr. Pezeshkian called out Mr. Trump by name. "It must be understood by Mr. Trump and those who seek to bully us that we are ready for dialogue and diplomacy and negotiations without accepting the language of force."

He also said one thing that was measurably false: "We did not hit civilian populations."

Arriving in New York under heavy security and scrutiny, Mr. Pezeshkian – who, within Iran's political landscape, is considered a moderate politician – addressed world leaders a day after Mr. Trump used the same stage to suggest he may "annihilate" the Is-

lamic Republic if a deal isn't reached soon to end the nearly seven-month war.

Mr. Pezeshkian's address elaborated on where Tehran stands as more than a year of start-stop negotiations between the two longtime adversaries have failed to produce a sustainable solution.

His address last year came months after the 12-day Israel-Iran war.

"Ladies and gentlemen, you all bore witness that this past June, my country was subjected to a savage aggression and flagrant contravention of the most elementary principles of international law," Mr. Pezeshkian said at the time.

With Trump-Xi truce, China looks to reshape Asian order

NEWS ANALYSIS

Ananth Krishnan

BEIJING

As U.S. President Donald Trump hosts Chinese President Xi Jinping at the White House on Thursday, the world's two biggest powers appear to be looking to extend their truce.

In May, when Mr. Trump visited Beijing, both sides declared their commitment to build a “constructive relationship of strategic stability”, a Chinese coinage that the U.S. President, to the surprise of many observers, readily accepted.

This week, Mr. Trump is laying the red carpet for Mr. Xi, including by personally welcoming him at Joint Base Andrews, a courtesy he has not extended to any other leader.

Optics aside, the expectations for the visit are, however, largely modest on both sides, seen an effort to put a floor on a contentious relationship rather than a grand bargain. This is regardless of Mr. Trump's stated fondness for the idea of a “G2” which has concerned countries in the region, including India.

In the weeks after Mr. Trump's visit to Beijing, both sides have traded blows, including the listing of Chinese companies such as Alibaba and BYD by the Pentagon for “civil military fusion”, and mutual accusations over how the other side is conducting the AI race. Other sticking points remain unresolved, such as tariffs, restrictions on semiconductors and Chinese export controls, especially on rare earths. China is also pressing the U.S. to



Donald Trump speaks with Xi Jinping while leaving after a visit to the Zhongnanhai Garden in Beijing, China, in May. REUTERS

stop arms sales to Taiwan.

If this has led some observers to suggest this truce is merely a tactical pause while each side works towards reducing their vulnerabilities and building leverage, others argue there are compelling reasons for both powers to pursue a future relationship of stability.

Writing in *Foreign Affairs* before the visit, Da Wei, a leading voice in Beijing on the China-U.S. relationship and Director of the Center for International Security and Strategy at Tsinghua University, made the case for why despite structural challenges, there were reasons for both to pursue a detente.

“The rapid development of technologies such as AI will make it particularly difficult for either the U.S. or China to eliminate the other's sources of leverage,” he said. In the lead up to the visit, the two sides held talks in New York between Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent and Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng, including to set up a dialogue mechanism for AI cooperation.

The broader reason for a continued truce, in the view of Da Wei, was the narrowing power differential between the two coun-

tries. “China is looking at bilateral relations from a position of greater equality and with more confidence,” he said. “It is less anxious that competition will undermine its national development prospects. Instead, Beijing believes that competition can be effectively managed without presenting an existential threat.” For other Chinese strategists, the longer term goal is a grand bargain that will gradually see declining U.S. interest in Asia and a reshaped Asian security order. The view in Beijing is that Mr. Trump has already initiated that trend.

Li Kai, the Vice President of the influential China Institutes for Contemporary International Relations (CICIR) in Beijing, argued in the lead up to Mr. Xi's visit that “regional affairs should be led and managed by Asian countries themselves”.

“This is consistent with the principle of ‘Asian solutions to Asian problems’,” he said. “Confronted with an increasingly complex regional security landscape, we must fend off external interference, seek common ground while reserving differences, proactively manage divergences and facilitate peaceful settlement of disputes.”

After Trump's 'annihilation' threat, Pezeshkian says Iran won't surrender

Duelling speeches come amid first shuttle talks between US and Iran

Reuters

Dubai, United Nations,
September 23

IRAN AND the United States remain far apart on how to end their war but diplomacy must continue, a senior Iranian official told *Reuters* Wednesday, after Iran's president told the UN General Assembly Tehran would never surrender to US pressure.

Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian, in his speech in New York, condemned what he called "signs of a bullying mentality" from US President Donald Trump, who had used the same forum on Tuesday to threaten to "annihilate" Iran.

The duelling speeches at the annual UN gathering bookended the first shuttle talks between the US and Iran for months, though they appeared to have yielded no concessions in the public stance of either side

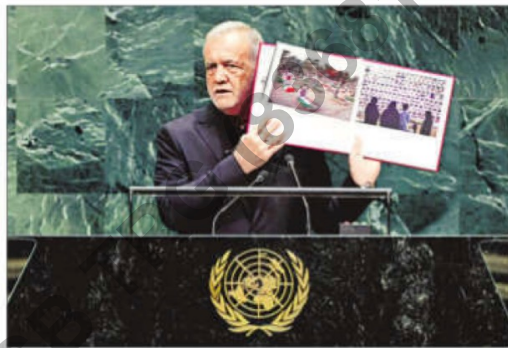
towards ending the war.

The senior Iranian official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said Tehran was reviewing Washington's response to its peace proposals, which prioritise lifting a US naval blockade on Iranian ports and reopening the Strait of Hormuz.

"There are still many differences between the Iranian and US positions, but diplomacy is continuing," the official said.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio told reporters on Wednesday that a deal with Iran would involve hard work over a period of time, adding that Trump also had military options.

The US has also said it will impose so-called secondary sanctions against any country that allows Iranian flights after Wednesday. Mohsen Rezaei, secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, told state TV Iran would ensure



Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian holds up photographs during his speech at the UNGA in New York on Wednesday. AP

neighbouring countries' airports could not function if they stop Iranian flights.

In his address to the 193-member General Assembly, Pezeshkian homed in on the US blockade of Iranian ports and on the Strait, conduit for a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas shipments before the war.

"It cannot be the case that everyone benefits from the Strait

of Hormuz while we are denied access to shipping through this waterway. The permanent deployment of hostile fleets and the expansion of the war will not lead to peace," he said. "The Iranian people will not bow to pressure," he added.

Iran wants to exert control over the strait and collect fees from ships that use it. Washington rejects this and says the strait

must remain fully open to international shipping.

Trump on Tuesday argued that he had prevented Tehran from obtaining a nuclear weapon and could "annihilate the Islamic Republic" if no deal is reached to end the conflict.

Pezeshkian on Wednesday reiterated Iran's line that it is not seeking nuclear weapons.

Iranian and US officials held their first known indirect talks on Tuesday since a ceasefire collapsed in July, with Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi and US envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner communicating through mediators.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said Tehran had conveyed conditions during a two-hour exchange of messages with Washington via Qatari mediator. It included an end to war, a halt to US "acts of aggression" and release of frozen Iranian assets.

The diplomatic contact in New York caused a backlash in Iranian media associated with hardliners.