

Modi and Trump talk trade as India, US seek to repair ties

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● Trump and Modi may yet meet this month at the ASEAN summit of Southeast Asian leaders in Malaysia

AFP | New Delhi, India

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said yesterday he had held a conversation with Donald Trump, with the US president saying the pair had discussed trade as the countries negotiate a deal that could mend strained ties.

Relations plummeted in August when Trump raised tariffs on Indian exports to the United States to 50 percent and US officials accused India of financing Russia's war in Ukraine by buying Moscow's discounted oil.

During a ceremony to mark Diwali, the Hindu festival of lights, on Tuesday, Trump told reporters he had spoken by phone with Modi.

"We talked about trade -- we



US President Donald Trump and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi hold a joint press conference in the East Room of the White House in Washington, DC, on February 13, 2025

talked about a lot of things, but mostly the world of trade," Trump said while lighting candles for the celebration at the White House. "He's very interested in that."

Modi thanked Trump for the call, saying on X that he hoped

"our two great democracies continue to illuminate the world with hope."

India has yet to secure a formal trade deal with the United States, despite being among the first nations to initiate negotiations with Washington after

Trump began his second term.

Trump also repeated his claim -- first made on October 15 -- that India would cut Russian oil purchases. New Delhi has neither confirmed nor denied any policy shift.

Traditionally reliant on Mid-

dle Eastern producers, New Delhi started buying heavily discounted Russian crude in 2022, taking advantage of Western sanctions that limited Moscow's export options.

Several other sources of friction have strained Washington's

relationship with India this year.

They include Trump's assertions that he achieved a ceasefire between India and Pakistan to end an intense four-day conflict over the contested region of Kashmir in May.

Modi has said there was no such mediation by a world leader.

And last month, the Trump administration hiked fees for H-1B skilled-worker visas to \$100,000. Indians make up roughly three-quarters of all H-1B recipients.

Trump and Modi may yet meet this month at the ASEAN summit of Southeast Asian leaders in Malaysia, which Trump is set to attend.

New Delhi has not confirmed whether Modi will participate, as India is not a member of the 10-nation bloc.

But some Indian newspapers have reported that he may attend.



India, one of the world's largest crude oil importers, relies on foreign suppliers for more than 85 percent of its oil needs.

Israel deports 32 foreign activists who helped Palestinian olive harvest

Ramallah, Palestinian Territories

Israel's Deputy Prime Minister Yariv Levin said yesterday he had ordered the deportation of 32 foreign activists who had helped Palestinians harvest olives in the occupied West Bank, on the grounds they violated a military order.

Levin said the deportation order came after a complaint filed by Northern West Bank Settlements Council president Yossi Dagan, who said the activists were "anarchists who carried out provocations in the Samaria area."

Rudy Schulkind, a 30-year-old British national among the deported, told AFP he had come to the West Bank to support Palestinian farmers.

This year's olive season has been particularly violent, with several acts of vandalism and attacks from Israeli settlers.

Foreign activists often provide a presence meant to deter these incidents in rural West Bank areas.

Schulkind said he was held 72 hours by Israeli forces before being deported on October 19.

"We were arrested after they



Palestinians harvest olives in the occupied West Bank village of Turmus Ayya, on the outskirts of Ramallah

declared the area we were harvesting in as a military zone," he said, alleging that this was a common Israeli tactic against Palestinians.

He added that all 32 international volunteers were arrested in an olive grove near the West Bank city of Nablus.

Schulkind said that he and the other volunteers "were

never brought before a judge", during their detention.

Minister Levin said the deportation was co-signed by National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir, and accused the activists of violating "a military commander's order" and of belonging to the UAWC (Union of Agricultural Work Committees).

UK king to be first to pray with pope in five centuries

London, United Kingdom

King Charles III leaves for a state visit to the Vatican Wednesday, where he will meet Pope Leo XIV and make history as the first head of the Church of England to pray publicly with the pontiff since the schism between the churches 500 years ago.

The visit comes at a delicate time for the British king following new revelations about his brother, Prince Andrew, who is mired in a scandal surrounding late US sex offender Jeffrey Epstein.

Charles and Queen Camilla will meet Leo for the first time since he succeeded the late pope Francis in May.

On Thursday, Charles and Leo will pray together in the first such public religious moment since Henry VIII broke away from the Catholic Church after the then pope refused to annul his marriage to the Spanish princess Catherine of Aragon.

In 1961, the king's mother, the late queen Elizabeth II, became the first British monarch to visit the Holy See since the 16th-century fracture.

The two-day visit will "mark



Britain's King Charles III

a significant moment in relations between the Catholic Church and Church of England, of which His Majesty is Supreme Governor", Buckingham Palace said.

Thursday's ecumenical service in the Sistine Chapel will be held under the magnificent ceiling adorned with the paintings by Michelangelo.

Its main theme will be conservation and protecting the environment, a cause which has been Charles's life work.

It will bring together Catholic and Anglican traditions, with the choir from the Sistine Chapel being joined by that from Saint George's Chapel, Windsor Castle, one of the residences of the king and queen.

ICJ: Israel has not stood up claims many UNRWA staff are Hamas

The Hague, Netherlands

The International Court of Justice ruled yesterday that Israel has not stood up allegations that members of UNRWA, the UN agency for Palestinian refugees, also worked for the Hamas group it is fighting in Gaza.

"The court finds that Israel has not substantiated its allegations that a significant part of UNRWA's employees are 'members of Hamas...' or other terrorist factions," said ICJ President Yuji Iwasawa. Israel banned UNRWA from operating on Israeli soil after accusing some of its staff of taking part in the October 7, 2023, Hamas attack. A series of investigations, including one led by France's former foreign minister Catherine Colonna, found some "neutrality-related issues" at UNRWA.

However, the April 2024 report said Israel had "yet to provide supporting evidence" of its allegation that "a significant number of UNRWA employees are members of Hamas".