

China and India eye border trade resumption

AFP, New Delhi

India and China are discussing resuming border trade five years after it was halted, foreign ministry officials on both sides have said, as US tariffs disrupt the global trade order.

Past trade across the icy and high-altitude Himalayan border passes between the neighbours was usually small in volume, but any resumption is significant for its symbolism.

The two major economic powers have long competed for strategic influence across South Asia.

But caught in global trade and geopolitical turbulence triggered by US President Donald Trump's tariff regime, the countries have moved to mend ties.

Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi is expected for talks in New Delhi on Monday, according to Indian media.



Rescue teams evacuate victims from the rubble following a blast in Idlib, which, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, struck "a base for non-Syrian fighters containing a weapons depot" in the northwestern Syrian province yesterday. Four people were killed and five were injured in the explosion, state media said.

PHOTO: AFP

Heavy rain in Indian Kashmir leaves 38 dead Over 200 missing

REUTERS, Srinagar

At least 38 people died and more than 200 were missing following sudden, heavy rain in Indian Kashmir, officials said yesterday, the second such disaster in the Himalayas in a little over a week.

The incident occurred in Chasoti town of Kishtwar district, a stopover point on a popular pilgrimage route. It comes a little over a week after a heavy flood and mudslide engulfed an entire village in the Himalayan state of Uttarakhand.

The flood washed away a community kitchen and a security post set up in the village, a pit stop along the pilgrimage route to the Machail Mata temple, one of the officials, who declined to be named because he was not authorised to speak to the media about the incident.

"A large number of pilgrims had gathered for lunch and they were washed away," the official said, and offered "condolences to the bereaved families".

Jitendra Singh, from PM's office, said the reported cloudburst could result in "substantial" casualties.

BID TO END UKRAINE CONFLICT

Putin praises 'sincere efforts' by the US

Floats the prospect of a nuclear arms deal ahead of a summit with President Donald Trump

REUTERS, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin said yesterday that the United States was making "sincere efforts" to halt the war in Ukraine and suggested Moscow and Washington could agree a nuclear arms deal as part of a wider effort to strengthen peace.

Putin was speaking to his most senior ministers and security officials on the eve of a summit in Alaska with US President Donald Trump, who is pressing for an end to the war.

He said in televised comments that the US was "making, in my opinion, quite energetic and sincere efforts to stop the hostilities, stop the crisis and reach agreements that are of interest to all parties involved in this conflict".

This was happening, Putin said, "in order to create long-term conditions for peace between our countries, and in Europe, and in the world as a whole - if, by the next stages, we reach agreements in the area of control over strategic offensive weapons."

His comments signalled that Russia will raise the issue of nuclear arms control as part of a wide-ranging discussion on security when he sits down with Trump in Anchorage for the first Russia-US summit since June 2021.



This handout video grab shows a scene from a reported Ukrainian strike in Belgorod, Russia, yesterday.

Putin's aide Yuri Ushakov said earlier that Putin and Trump will also discuss the "huge untapped potential" for Russia-US economic ties, as well as the prospects for ending the war in Ukraine.

Ushakov told reporters that the summit would start at 1930 GMT, which would be 1130 am local time in Anchorage, with the two leaders meeting one-on-one, accompanied only by translators.

He said delegations from the two countries would then meet and have a working lunch, and the presidents would give a joint news conference.

Ushakov said it was "obvious to everyone" that Ukraine would be the

focus of the meeting, but broader security and international issues would also be discussed.

Russia and the United States have by far the biggest nuclear arsenals in the world. The last remaining treaty between them that limits the numbers of these weapons is due to expire on February 5 next year.

The New START treaty covers strategic nuclear weapons - those designed by each side to hit the enemy's centres of military, economic and political power - and caps the number of deployed warheads at 1,550 on each side. Both are likely to breach that limit if the treaty is not extended or replaced.

Taliban use force to divert aid

Says US watchdog

REUTERS, Washington

Afghanistan's Taliban rulers divert international aid by force and other means, block minority communities from receiving aid and may collude with UN officials to seek kickbacks, a US watchdog said.

The US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) said its findings were based on input from nearly 90 current and former US officials, UN officials and others. The sources included Afghans in Afghanistan, the report said.

"In Afghanistan, SIGAR found that the Taliban use every means at their disposal, including force, to ensure that aid goes where they want it to go, as opposed to where donors intend," the report said.

Taliban spokesman Hamdullah Fitrat denied the allegations. He said international aid is distributed independently in Afghanistan and government agencies cooperate "to ensure transparency" and prevent diversion.

India wants US ties based on mutual respect

Says its arms purchases are on course

REUTERS, New Delhi

India said yesterday that it hoped relations with the United States would move forward based on mutual respect and shared interests, seeking to temper worries that ties were headed downhill in the aftermath of high tariffs imposed by Washington.

A US defence policy team will be in New Delhi this month for talks with Indian officials and its arms purchases from the US are on course despite the strain in ties, the Indian foreign ministry said.

A new friendship built between the two countries has hit a rough patch after President Donald Trump raised tariffs on Indian goods to 50 percent last week from an earlier 25 percent saying it was a penalty for India's continued imports of Russian oil.

New Delhi has accused the US of double standards in singling it out for Russian oil imports and called the tariffs unfair, unjustified and unreasonable.

At the same time, it has also indicated that the warming of ties that began at the turn of the century covers a wide range of areas and should not be seen only through the prism of trade, although it hopes that trade talks will continue and result in a deal.

Pakistan to create military force to supervise missiles

Says PM Sharif after conflict with India in May

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan will create a new force in the military to supervise missile combat capabilities in a conventional conflict, apparently a move to match neighbouring arch-rival India.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif announced the creation of the Army Rocket Force late Wednesday at a ceremony held in Islamabad to commemorate the conflict with India in May, the worst in decades.

The ceremony was held a day ahead of Pakistan's 78th Independence Day.

The force "will be equipped with modern technology," Sharif said in a statement from his office.

"This force, capable of targeting the enemy from all sides, will prove to be yet another milestone with regard to further strengthening our conventional war capability," he said later in a speech broadcast yesterday by local TV news channels.

He did not give any further details. A senior security official, however, said that the force would have its own command in the military which will be dedicated to handling and deployment of missiles in any event of a conventional war.

"It is obvious that it is meant for India," he said. The two nuclear-armed nations have kept upgrading their military capabilities, fuelling a longstanding rivalry since their independence from British rule in 1947.

PLASTIC POLLUTION

Talks at risk of ending with no deal

Oil-producing nations against curbs on production of virgin plastics

REUTERS, Geneva

Talks to create the world's first legally binding treaty to tackle plastic pollution are at risk of ending without a deal as countries race to find a potential compromise on the final day of negotiations in Geneva.

Talks headed into their final hours yesterday after countries who want an ambitious plastics treaty threw out the text proposed on Wednesday.

States pushing for a comprehensive treaty, including Panama, Kenya, France and Britain, shared frustration that key articles on the full life cycle of plastic pollution from the production of polymers to the disposal of waste, as well as the harm to health, had been removed entirely from the text.

Oil-producing nations are against curbs on the production of virgin plastics derived from petroleum, coal, and gas, while others want it to be limited and

to have stricter controls over plastic products and hazardous chemicals.

"It's proving unlikely all countries will be able to bridge their differences," said Zaynab Sadan of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), adding that agreement was as far away as it had ever been in nearly three years of talks.

Panama described the new draft text as "repulsive" and called for a complete rewrite. Saudi Arabia, which is resisting major curbs, said nothing could be agreed until the treaty's scope is clearly defined.

More than 1,000 delegates gathered in Geneva for the sixth round of talks, after a meeting of the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee (INC-5) in South Korea late last year ended without a deal.

The OECD warns that without intervention, plastic production will triple by 2060, further choking oceans, harming health, and exacerbating climate change.



WASHINGTON CITY

Trump wants to extend federal control over police

REUTERS, Washington

US President Donald Trump said on Wednesday he would ask the Republican-controlled Congress to extend federal control of Washington's city police force beyond 30 days, escalating his campaign to exert presidential power over the nation's capital.

Trump also asserted that any congressional action could serve as a model for other US cities. He has previously threatened to expand his efforts to other Democratic-run cities such as Chicago that he claims have failed to address crime.

The Republican president's extraordinary moves in Washington are reflective of how he has approached his second term in office, shattering political norms and legal concerns to test the limits of his office's power.

It was not clear how Trump's takeover of Washington's Metropolitan Police Department could be replicated elsewhere. In seizing control on Monday, Trump took advantage of a federal law, the District of Columbia Home Rule Act, that permits the president to do so under emergency circumstances for up to 30 days. There is no basis for Trump to attempt similar takeovers in other cities, according to John P Fishwick Jr, a former federal prosecutor in Virginia, who said that Washington represents a "unique situation."

Trump also announced on Monday that he was deploying 800 National Guard troops to the city, a tactic he employed in Los Angeles in June when he mobilized thousands of Guard soldiers and US Marines over the objections of state and local officials in response to protests over his administration's immigration raids.

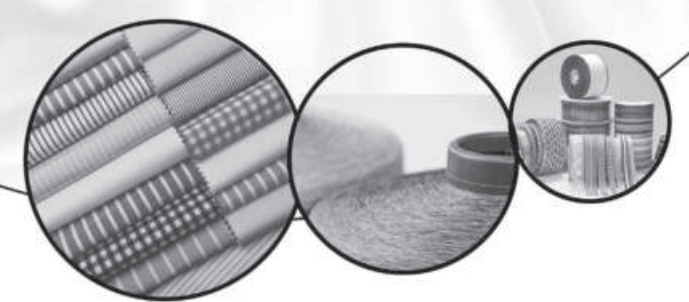
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