



## India looks to forge special relationship on Vance visit

**N**arendra Modi welcomed JD Vance and his family to Delhi yesterday for bilateral talks to pursue a trade deal after the White House placed 26 per cent tariffs on India (Amrit Dhillon writes).

Vance received a warm welcome and a hug from the Indian prime minister, who showed the US vice-president, his wife, Usha, and their three children around his official residence. A video released by his office showed Modi giving peacock feathers to Ewan, seven, Vivek, four, and Mirabel, three. Usha Vance's

parents emigrated to America from south India in the 1970s.

After the meeting, Modi's office said that he was looking forward to President Trump's visit to India later this year. He also said there had been "significant progress in the negotiations" between the two countries during the first stages of a trade deal.

India currently benefits from a 90-day reprieve from Trump's tariffs. However, Modi's government hopes to secure a relief after this period ends. America is India's largest trading partner, with bilateral trade valued at \$190 billion.

The goal is for trade to reach \$500 billion by 2030. Delhi is hoping it can fend off the worst tariff punishment by offering concessions on its own tariffs on US goods, as well as by offering to buy American military equipment.

However, the prospect of a deal was not welcomed by all. India's oldest farmers' union, the All India Kisan Sabha, voiced its opposition to Vance's visit and called for nationwide protests. The union fears that farming incomes — particularly in the heavily subsidised dairy sector — would stand to suffer if was included in a deal. Modi's government will also want to explore how to capitalise on China's difficulties. The fact that Vance is a known anti-China hawk is something India will hope to leverage to its advantage. Indian



commentators have been arguing that the country needs to act swiftly to become an appealing base for American companies leaving China — especially before countries such as Vietnam or Mexico step in.

India was also expected to use Vance's visit to express concern over the future of H-1B visas, on which Indian technology workers in America rely (200,000 were issued last year). India is also worried about students in the US having their visas revoked.

Professor Debashis Chakrabarti, a foreign affairs expert, told a TV news channel: "The abrupt cancellation of visas without a transparent rationale is deeply troubling." He called for a formal diplomatic protest — but commentators say this is unlikely. Modi wants to maintain his rapport

JD Vance, his wife, Usha, and their three children flew into Delhi, where they were greeted by Narendra Modi

with Trump, who has often described him as a friend.

On Tuesday, the Vances will travel to Jaipur in Rajasthan, where they will see its famous forts and palaces. The walk up to Amber Fort involves a sharp incline and most tourists take a jeep. For the Vances, tradition will see them ride on two bejewelled elephants, as rose petals are showered on them from a balcony.

In Jaipur, the vice-president will make his only speech of the visit; it will be watched closely for clues as to what India can expect from Trump on trade. The trip is also expected to lay the groundwork for Trump's visit to India later this year.