

India's Modi Offers Olive Branch to Kyiv

Leader makes first visit to Ukraine after infuriating with his trip to Moscow

Weeks after his visit to Moscow infuriated Ukraine, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday made his first-ever trip to Kyiv and offered his help to end the Russia-

By Rajesh Roy, Tripti Lahiri and Isabel Coles

Ukraine war as a "friend" to President Volodymyr Zelensky. "India was never neutral, but always on the side of peace. I want to assure you that in all efforts toward peace, India is ready to play its role. And as a friend, I am ready, too" in the largest interest of the world, Modi told Zelensky during the first visit to Ukraine by an Indian prime minister since the fall of the Soviet Union.

Ukraine had sharply criticized Modi's visit to Moscow in July, which began on the same day Russia launched a salvo of missiles at Ukrainian cities that struck, among other targets, a Kyiv children's hospital where two people died and dozens were wounded.

At the time, Zelensky called footage of Modi's warm greeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin "a huge disappointment and a devastating blow to peace efforts." U.S. officials said they had expressed concern over the visit to India and closely tracked outcomes. In Kyiv on Friday, Zelensky



Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, left, and Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky on Friday.

made a point of reminding the Indian leader of the price Ukraine's youngest generation has paid since Putin launched his invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

Modi, as he met Zelensky, conveyed what he had broadly gathered from his Moscow visit last month, according to Indian officials. And he reshaped his thoughts on diplomacy and dialogue, not victory on the battlefield, as the path to an enduring peace.

The Ukrainian president took Modi to an exhibition in

Kyiv dedicated to the 570 children Kyiv says have been killed since the war began, whose names and faces are displayed at the site. After a minute's silence for the victims, both leaders placed soft toys at a memorial to the young victims—a dark space that simulates the conditions inside a bomb shelter.

Modi shook hands and hugged President Zelensky. "The first casualty of any war is the death of innocent children. No society based on human values can ever accept such a

painful thing," Modi said.

The prospects of a near-term peace deal have dimmed in recent days as Kyiv seeks to build on an incursion that has seized dozens of Russian towns and villages. Russian presidential aide Yuri Ushakov said recently that Moscow wasn't ready to hold talks with Ukraine in light of the incursion into Kursk, but that earlier peace proposals remained on the table. Those proposals, which would entail Ukraine's withdrawal from four regions partially occupied by Russia,

including several major cities, would be tantamount to capitulation for Ukraine.

Current and former Indian diplomats said criticism of Modi's visit to Moscow didn't affect the timing of his travel to Ukraine. "The war can't go on forever," said Harsh Vardhan Shringla, a former foreign secretary of India, calling it significant that Modi headed "on an exploratory visit to Ukraine soon after returning from Moscow."

Ukraine is hoping the trip signals a more-balanced ap-

proach on the part of India.

"They view India as basically supportive of Russia," said James Crabtree, visiting fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations.

India has close ties with Russia dating back to the Cold War, and deep reliance on Russian military equipment. India has declined to take part in Western-led efforts to isolate Moscow, buying up Russian oil at large discounts in what officials say is a national necessity.

On a trip to India this month, Richard Verma, the State Department's new special representative for Ukraine's economic recovery, said he "was delighted" about Modi's visit to Kyiv. He didn't address a question about whether it was overdue.

Donald Lu, a State Department official for South Asian affairs, told the House Foreign Relations Committee in July he was disappointed by the timing and the symbolism of Modi's Russia visit, which came as Washington was hosting a summit of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. He also noted that no substantive defense or technology agreements had emerged from the trip.

Before the Kursk incursion, Ukraine had intensified diplomatic efforts as it faced setbacks on the battlefield, while the looming U.S. election threw the future of Western aid into doubt. Kyiv has struggled to garner support for its terms to end the war beyond its core partners in the West.

—Ann M. Simmons and Matthew Luxmoore contributed to this article.

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