

Vance Touts Big Future for U.S.-India Ties

Vice president's comments contrast with opprobrium for European leaders

By SHAN LI

On his first trip to India, Vice President JD Vance dined with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, announced progress toward a trade deal between the two countries and compared New Delhi favorably with Western capitals.

"There's a vitality to India, a sense of infinite possibility," Vance said in a speech during a four-day visit with his Indian-American wife, Usha Vance, and their three children. "It's a striking contrast with too many in the West, where some in our leadership class seem stricken by self-doubt and even fear of the future."

Vance said the relationship between the U.S. and India would define the 21st century.

"I also believe that if we fail to work together successfully, the 21st century could be a very dark time for all of humanity," he said.

Pride in its history and culture, he said, contrasts India with Western countries that took on the "same bland, secular, universal values." Visiting Europe in February, the vice president accused its leaders of repressing free speech and ignoring the will of voters on issues such as mass migration.

Under Modi, India has promoted its Hindu-majority identity, though critics say the rights of religious minorities, including the large Muslim population, have eroded during the hard-right leader's



Vice President JD Vance and his sons watch a cultural performance Tuesday at Amber Fort, a historical site in Jaipur, India.

more than decade in power.

India and the U.S. have grown closer in recent years as trade partners and defense allies to counter an expansionist China. New Delhi is working to cement a trade agreement with the U.S., its largest trade partner, before a 90-day pause on high tariffs announced by the Trump administration expires in July. What are called reciprocal tariffs would levy duties of 26% on Indian exports. President

Trump in the past has called India a "tariff king."

The U.S. and India announced broad terms of negotiation after Vance's meeting with Modi on Monday evening. The Office of the U.S. Trade Representative said the U.S. would seek increased market access, lower tariffs and nontariff barriers, and a "robust set of additional commitments." During Modi's visit to Washington in February, the Indian leader and Trump

said they aimed by 2030 to nearly quadruple trade from last year's level, to \$500 billion. Neither side has disclosed details about what it is asking for—or offering.

Last month, the Office of the U.S. Trade Representative outlined nuisances limiting U.S. trade with India apart from high tariffs. These include technical or quality measures that hold up or limit exports, and compliance inspections that disrupt busi-

ness. The report also noted that India subjects foreign e-commerce firms to different rules than homegrown competitors on what they can sell.

Past big-ticket Indian purchases of U.S. goods—such as Boeing airplanes for civilian airlines and GE engines for domestic military production—have faced delays.

Vance said on Tuesday that the U.S. planned to increase co-production of defense equipment with India, boost

energy exports to India and help New Delhi explore its own offshore natural-gas and critical-mineral supplies. He urged India to buy more American ethanol.

"This administration recognizes that cheap dependable energy is an essential part of making things," Vance said. It is "an essential part of economic independence for both of our nations."

He also raised the issue of a liability law that has deterred U.S. companies from investing in nuclear-power plants in India. Indian officials have signaled in recent weeks they plan to amend the law, which holds suppliers responsible for accidents at power plants they take part in building.

Vance's remarks offered further reassurance to Indian officials and policy experts who have seen opportunities arising from the tariffs unleashed on Trump's "Liberation Day." If the reciprocal tariffs are applied at the announced rates, India faces far lower tariffs than China or even Vietnam. The U.S. trade deficit with India stood at nearly \$46 billion in 2024.

At the end of his speech, Vance said his three children—3, 5 and 7 years old—have taken a great liking to only two of the world leaders they have met so far: Trump and Modi. When Vance first met Modi at an artificial-intelligence conference in Paris in February, the prime minister made a point of wishing his son Vivek a happy fifth birthday and bringing him a gift.

"The great thing about kids is they are brutally honest," Vance said. "Our kids just like him."

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