Modi set to join Asean event virtually, won't meet Trump

Jaishankar to lead delegation for Malaysia summit on October 27

ARCHIS MOHAN
New Delhi, 23 October

Ending days of speculation over a possible meeting with US President Donald Trump on the margins of the East Asia Summit (EAS) in Kuala Lumpur, India's Ministry of External Affairs said on Thursday that Prime Minister (PM) Narendra Modi will not travel to the Malaysian capital.

The MEA said that the PM will "virtually attend" the annual Association of Southeast Asian Nations (Asean)-India meeting on October 26, while External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar will represent him at the EAS on October 27.

On Thursday morning, in a social media post, the PM said he had a phone conversation with his Malaysian counterpart, Anwar Ibrahim, and was looking forward to joining the Asean-India summit virtually.

In his Facebook post, Ibrahim said Modi had informed him that he would attend the summit online since the "Deepavali festival was still being celebrated" in India. The phone call took place on Wednesday evening.

Sources attributed Modi's inability to attend the meetings in Kuala Lumpur to scheduling conflicts. This will be only the second occasion since 2014 that the PM will not attend the EAS. The then Vice President Jagdeep Dhankhar represented the PM at the EAS in Phnom Penh in November 2022.

Trump is among several world leaders attending the EAS, along with Canadian PM Mark Carney and Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva.

India and the US are currently negotiating a trade deal, having narrowed their differences substantially. The White House has been pressing India to curb its purchases of Russian oil, with New Delhi not disputing Trump's claim that it has agreed to reduce these purchases to nearly zero by year-end.

However, as evident from the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) readout of Modi's latest phone call with Trump on Wednesday, the two sides disagree on Trump's claim that he mediated a ceasefire between India and Pakistan.

On Wednesday, the PMO said Modi thanked Trump for his Diwali greetings and "reiterated India's unwavering commitment to combating terrorism and fostering international cooperation". On X, Modi posted: "On this festival of lights, may our two great democracies continue to illuminate the world with hope and stand united against terrorism in all its forms."

"LOOK FORWARD TO JOINING THE ASEAN-INDIA SUMMIT VIRTUALLY, AND TO FURTHER DEEPENING OF THE ASEAN-INDIA COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP"

PM Narendra Modi, on X

In contrast, speaking to the media on Wednesday morning (India time), Trump said the two discussed trade, India's purchases of Russian oil, and India's military conflict with Pakistan. Official sources in New Delhi later clarified that Pakistan was not discussed during the call.

On Thursday morning, Trump repeated his claim that India has agreed to "stop" buying oil from Russia and would reduce purchases to "almost nothing" by year-end. He added that it is a process and will take time. "India, as you know, has told me they are going to stop... It's a process. You can't just stop... By the end of the year, they'll be down to almost nothing, almost 40 per cent of the oil. Spoke to PM Modi yesterday. They've been absolutely great," he told reporters at the White House.

Trump also claimed that tariffs have helped prevent conflicts. "I solved eight wars. Of the eight, five or six were because of tariffs," he said. He added that he told India and Pakistan, "If you want to fight, that's okay. But you're going to pay tariffs. Two days later, they called up and said they're not going to fight anymore. They have peace."

The Asean-India meetings and the EAS are scheduled for October 26 and 27, coinciding with the Chhath festival in poll-bound Bihar.

Modi and Trump last met on February 13 in Washington, DC. They have not met at any multilateral summits or events since then. With the Quad Summit, which India was scheduled to host, unlikely to take place this year, the chances of their meeting during the remainder of the year remain slim.

The PM is likely to travel to Johannesburg for the G20 Summit on November 22-23, while Trump has already announced he will not attend, citing South Africa's "very bad policies", including land redistribution.

New ethanol supply tender slammed by industry

SANJEEB MUKHERJEE
New Delhi, 23 October

The recent allocation of ethanol by Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) for the 2025-26 supply year against a tender of 10.50 billion litres has drawn flak from both grain ethanol makers as well as those who produce ethanol from sugarcane for a variety of reasons.

While the Grain Ethanol Manufacturers Association (Gema) on Thursday questioned the allocation policy saying that it has left surplus zones unrepresented, the Indian Sugar and Bio-Energy Manufacturers Association (Isma), in its statement issued earlier said limited allocation for ethanol produced from sugarcane would have serious negative impact on the sector.

A few days back, OMCs had floated a tender for supply of around 10.50 billion litres of ethanol for the 2025-26 supply year that will start from November. The supplies were for meeting the Centre's 20 per cent blending target.

Against this, offers of 17.76 billion litres from distilleries were received, which was reflective of the surplus capacity in the sector.

Gema said a serious imbalance in the ethanol procurement process is threatening the viability of hundreds of existing distilleries.

It added that industry players are raising concerns about the methodology, which has favoured new entrants in deficit zones while sidelining operational units with surplus capacity.

Gema said while the policy appears to support local sourcing, the allocation methodology bypasses distilleries that were established with understandings such as Long-Term Offtake Agreements (LTOAs), which would deprive over 350 grain-based ethanol units of fresh orders.

ACCENT REGION

UTTAR PRADESH

State to procure paddy worth ₹14,000 crore

VIRENDRA SINGH RAWAT
Lucknow, 23 October

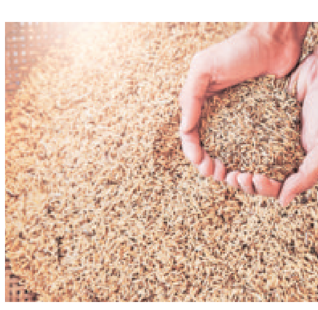
The Uttar Pradesh government is planning to purchase 6 million tonnes (Mt) of paddy in the current Kharif marketing season 2025–26 worth around ₹14,000 crore.

For the current season, the minimum support price (MSP) for paddy has been hiked to ₹2,369 per quintal (100 kg) for the common variety and ₹2,389 per quintal for Grade A, compared to ₹2,300 per quintal and ₹2,320 per quintal respectively last year.

While procurement of paddy began in the western UP districts on October 1, the process will commence on November 1 in the eastern UP region.

"The paddy procurement under the MSP mechanism would continue till January 31 and February 28, 2026 in the western UP and eastern UP districts respectively," a senior official said.

Meanwhile, the government has introduced an OTP-based single registration system to enable farmers to register seamlessly using their mobile phones. The registration of farmers is mandatory for participation in the MSP-based procurement process, which also entails the Direct Benefit Transfer (DBT) of cash to Aadhaar-linked bank accounts within 48 hours.



To ensure transparency and eliminate middlemen, procurement will only be done through biometric verification using e-POP (Electronic Point of Purchase) devices.

Moreover, the Yogi government gives priority to small farmers so that they do not resort to distress sales or face impediments at purchase centres.

In UP, the three cash crops — paddy, wheat, and sugarcane — are vital for the growth of the agricultural sector, the livelihood of the farming community, and the food processing industry.

The state is also encouraging farmers to cultivate other cash crops such as pulses, oilseeds, and nutri-cereals or 'Shree Anna', since India largely depends on costly imports to meet domestic demand.

CHHATTISGARH

Bhilai Steel Plant conducts captive 5G network trial

R KRISHNA DAS
Raipur, 23 October

Bhilai Steel Plant, the Chhattisgarh-based arm of the state-run Steel Authority of India Limited (SAIL), recently became the first public-sector undertaking (PSU) to successfully conduct the first-ever captive 5G network trial.

This marks a significant step towards next-generation industrial connectivity and automation. The initiative was undertaken by the telecommunications department of BSP, in collaboration with the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Delhi.

A spokesperson for the steel plant said that during an assessment of the premises, it was observed that due to heavy metallic structures and high noise levels within the shop area, both mobile and walkie-talkie signals were weak, leading to difficulties in effective communication and impacting operational performance. After detailed deliberations, a joint decision was taken to conduct a trial of the captive 5G network equipment developed by IIT Delhi within the SMS-3 area.

The captive 5G network was also utilised to establish wireless connectivity between CCTV cameras and computers.

The IIT Delhi team further recommended a more extensive round of high-intensity testing to be carried out during their upcoming visit.

RAJASTHAN

Eight mines may become operational this yr

ANIL SHARMA
Jaipur, 23 October

Rajasthan aims to get eight major mineral mines operational this year and has asked government departments to give permissions, including environmental clearance, on priority, said a senior civil servant. The state is committed to bringing auctioned major mineral mines into operation quickly, said T Ravikant principal secretary for mines and petroleum. Two mines became operational earlier this year and efforts are being made to issue environment clearances for eight more.

Making mines operational will lead to Rajasthan getting an incentive of ₹300 crore under a central government assistance scheme. The money will help the state in seeking investments in mining, employment, and revenue generation, said Ravikant.

Rajasthan earned ₹9,228 crore from mining in FY25 — almost 24 per cent more from the previous year and among the top revenue sources. It aims to collect ₹12,980 crore as mining revenue in FY26. Government officials have been asked to focus on collecting mining arrears and impose penalties for illegal mining, said an official.

The state produces 22 major and 36 minor minerals and it is the country's sole producer of lead, zinc, wollastonite, selenite, calcite, and gypsum. In 2024 it announced a policy that aims to expand mining's contribution to the state's gross domestic product from 3.4 per cent to 5 per cent by FY30 and 6-8 per cent by FY47.