

# No commitment to US on tariff cuts; deal talks on: Govt

Commerce, foreign secs brief House panel on current scenario

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In its first official response to US President Donald Trump's recent claim that India had agreed to cut its tariffs way down, the Union government on Monday told a parliamentary panel that New Delhi had not made any commitment to the US on reducing tariffs. The government conveyed to the panel that negotiations were still on and that India had sought time until September, while clarifying that the Trump administration had not set a deadline of April 2 for New Delhi.

At the meeting of the parliamentary standing committee on external affairs held on Monday evening, Commerce Secretary Sunil Barthwal told the panel members

that India could reduce tariffs on some of the items, such as nuts, but would protect its dairy industry. However, any reduction in tariffs will be done bilaterally and not replicated for multilateral agreements.

This comes after a series of fast-paced developments around India-US trade relations, including statements from Trump and US Secretary of Commerce Howard Lutnick on issues linked to tariffs and bilateral deal. Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal had also visited the US last week to discuss trade issues in a reset world order.

To questions from panel



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Govt representatives on Monday told a 30-member parliamentary standing panel on external affairs that ...

■ India can reduce tariffs on some of the items, such as nuts, but will protect its dairy industry

■ Any reduction in tariffs will be done bilaterally and not replicated for multilateral agreements

■ India's trade and security ties are not comparable to those of Mexico and Canada

members that countries, such as Canada and Mexico, have threatened retaliatory tariffs against the US, Barthwal said India's trade and security ties were not comparable to that of Mexico and Canada. He said Canada, Mexico and the US shared borders, and there were security and immigration implications.

The commerce secretary pointed out that the joint statement issued after Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with the

US President in Washington on February 13 had specified that the two sides would "negotiate the first tranche of a mutually beneficial, multi-sectoral Bilateral Trade Agreement (BTA) by fall (September) of 2025", highlighting that the New Delhi is negotiating a BTA between the two countries that would indeed be mutually beneficial.

Barthwal briefed the 30-member panel headed by Congress MP Shashi Tharoor on the "current developments in India's foreign trade and policy" while Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri briefed the panel members on the "current foreign policy developments". The meeting lasted a little over two hours with MPs asking a series of questions on the implications of the US demands on India to cut tariffs.

On Friday, Trump said India had agreed to cut its tariffs "way down". In his remarks, following Goyal's trade talks with Lutnick, the US President said: "Canada, Mexico and then you just go right down the line. India charges us massive tariffs, massive, you can't even sell anything into India". Trump said that India had agreed to cut its tariffs now "because somebody's finally exposing them for what they've done".

Earlier last week, Trump had reiterated that reciprocal tariffs on countries that impose levies on American goods will kick in on April 2. However, the government representatives told the parliamentary panel that the US has not officially conveyed to India that it should cut tariffs by April 2.

The government representatives also briefed the panel members on China's reported plans to build a mega hydropower dam on the Brahmaputra River.

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