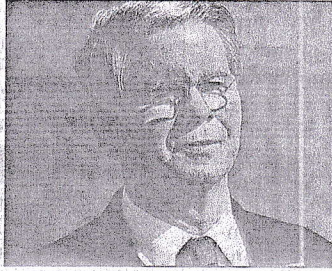


US trade deal: Bessent says India may be first

US TREASURY SECRETARY Scott Bessent has said that India is likely to become the first nation to finalise a bilateral trade agreement with the US — a development that would help New Delhi sidestep the 26% reciprocal tariffs that have been paused till July.

According to a *New York Post* report, Bessent told a group of journalists on Wednesday that trade talks with India are "very close" to reaching a successful conclusion as it doesn't have "so many high tariffs." "India also has fewer non-tariff trade barriers, obviously, no currency manipulation, very, very little government subsidies, so reaching a deal with the Indians is much easier," he said.



US Treasury secretary Scott Bessent

A bilateral trade agreement (BTA) between India and the US, proposed during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's meeting with US President Donald Trump in Washington in February, seeks to more than double

trade to \$500 billion by 2030 from over \$190 billion at present.

The first in-person meeting between the chief negotiators of India and the US got underway in Washington on Wednesday, after the finalisation of the terms of reference for the BTA. Both sides are seeking to iron out issues for a faster deal over three days. The Indian team led by chief negotiator Rajesh Agrawal left for the US earlier this week.

Both sides are attempting to cover as much ground as possible to reach some kind of an interim trade agreement or understanding with the US before the 90-day pause on the 26% reciprocal tariffs expires in early July. India, along with other nations, con-

tinues to face a 10% tariff under the prevailing US trade policy.

Finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, who was in the US earlier this week, said India hoped to "conclude positively" the first tranche of the BTA with the US by the fall of this year. "We are one of the countries which actively engaged with the new administration in the United States of America to see how best we can get a bilateral trade agreement done," she said, addressing the Indian diaspora in San Francisco.

In 2024-25, India's merchandise exports to the US grew 11.6% on year to \$ 86.51 billion, while imports grew 7.4% to \$ 45.3 billion.

—FE BUREAU