

India a trusted friend in era of conflicts: EU chief

Ursula von der Leyen to meet PM today



PHOTO: PTI

EAM S Jaishankar (left) and European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen during a meeting in Delhi on Thursday

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The top leadership of India and the European Union (EU) is expected to inject fresh momentum into sealing an ambitious trade deal, as the 27-nation bloc seeks to re-energise economic ties amid growing friction with the US over tariffs.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, accompanied by the EU College of Commissioners, began a high-profile two-day visit to India on Thursday afternoon. "In an era of conflicts and intense competition, you need trusted friends. For Europe, India is such a friend and a strategic ally," Von der Leyen said. "I'll discuss with @narendramodi how to take our strategic partnership to the next level," she posted on X shortly after being received at the Delhi airport by Union Minister Anupriya Patel.

Her talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday come against the backdrop of rising tensions between the EU and the Trump administration over tariffs. In sharp remarks, US President Donald Trump on Wednesday accused the EU of being formed to "screw" the US and threatened to impose 25 per cent tariffs on European imports. In response, the EU vowed to react firmly against unjustified trade barriers.

Von der Leyen and Modi will hold extensive discussions on finalising the long-awaited free trade agreement and enhancing cooperation in areas such as defence, technology, and climate

change. The talks will also cover the Russia-Ukraine conflict, developments in the Indo-Pacific, and West Asia. A joint statement is expected after their meeting.

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar met Von der Leyen, discussing key bilateral issues. "Appreciate her thoughts on re-energising India's engagement with Europe," he posted on X.

A senior Ministry of External Affairs official emphasised the partnership's significance, stating that both sides are looking for concrete progress, particularly in trade and defence. He noted that while the EU is urging India to reduce tariffs on cars, wine, and agricultural products, India also has its own expectations from the bloc. Discussions will also explore ways to deepen defence and security cooperation, with efforts underway to finalise a security of information agreement, which will set a framework for stronger defence ties. Additionally, the EU is expected to appoint a liaison officer at India's Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) to enhance maritime security collaboration.

Earlier, Von der Leyen paid tribute to Mahatma Gandhi at Rajghat. The EU is eager to expand trade with India, with both sides believing that a free trade agreement will significantly boost economic engagement. In the financial year 2023-24, bilateral trade in goods between India and the EU reached \$135 billion, with India's exports at \$76 billion and imports at \$59 billion, making the EU India's largest trading partner in goods.