

World

Indian PM Modi wraps up Washington trip with appeal to tech CEOs

By Steve Holland, Simon Lewis and Jeff Mason

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[1/7] U.S. President Joe Biden and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi meet with senior officials and CEOs of American and Indian companies, including Apple CEO Tim Cook and Satya Nadella, CEO of... Read more



WASHINGTON, June 23 (Reuters) - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi met with U.S. and Indian technology executives in Washington on Friday, the final day of a state visit where he agreed new defense and technology cooperation and addressed challenges posed by China.

U.S. President Joe Biden **rolled out the red carpet** for Modi on Thursday, declaring after about 2-1/2 hours of talks that their countries' economic relationship was "booming." Trade has more than doubled over the past decade.

Biden and Modi gathered with CEOs including Apple's ([AAPL.O](#)) Tim Cook, Google's ([GOOGL.O](#)) Sundar Pichai and Microsoft's ([MSFT.O](#)) Satya Nadella.

Also present were Sam Altman of OpenAI, NASA astronaut Sunita Williams, and Indian tech leaders including Anand Mahindra, chairman of Mahindra Group, and Mukesh Ambani, chairman of Reliance Industries, the White House said.

"Our partnership between India and the United States will go a long way, in my view, to define what the 21st century looks like," Biden told the group, adding that technological cooperation would be a big part of that partnership.

Observing that there were a variety of tech companies represented at the meeting from startups to well established firms, Modi said: "Both of them are working together to create a new world."

Modi, who has appealed to global companies to "Make in India," will also address business leaders at the Kennedy Center for Performing Arts.

The CEOs of top American companies, including FedEx (FDX.N), MasterCard (MA.N) and Adobe (ADBE.O), are expected to be among the 1,200 participants.

NOT 'ABOUT CHINA'

The backdrop to Modi's visit is the Biden administration's attempts to draw India, the world's most populous country at 1.4 billion and its fifth-largest economy, closer amid its growing geopolitical rivalry with Beijing.

Modi did not address China directly during the visit, and Biden only mentioned China in response to a reporter's question, but a joint statement included a pointed reference to the East and South China Seas, where China has territorial disputes with its neighbors.

Farwa Aamer, director for South Asia at the Asia Society Policy Institute, in an analysis note described that as "a clear signal of unity and determination to preserve stability and peace in the region."

Alongside agreements to sell weapons to India and share with it sensitive military technology, announcements this week included several investments from U.S.-firms aimed at spurring semiconductor manufacturing in India and lowering its dependence on China for electronics.

White House national security spokesperson John Kirby said the challenges presented by China to both Washington and New Delhi were on the agenda, but insisted the visit "wasn't about China."

"This wasn't about leveraging India to be some sort of counterweight. India is a sovereign, independent state," Kirby said at a news briefing, adding that Washington welcomes India becoming "an increasing exporter of security" in the Indo-Pacific.

"There's a lot we can do in the security front together. And that's really what we're focused on," Kirby said.

Some political analysts question India's willingness to stand up to Beijing over Taiwan and other issues, however. Washington has also been frustrated by India's close ties with Russia while Moscow wages war in Ukraine.

DIASPORA TIES

Modi attended a lunch on Friday at the State Department with Vice President Kamala Harris, the first Asian American to hold the No. 2 position in the White House, and Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

In a toast, Harris spoke of her Indian-born late mother, Shyamala Gopalan, who came to the United States at age 19 and became a leading breast cancer researcher.

"I think about it in the context of the millions of Indian students who have come to the United States since, to collaborate with American researchers to solve the challenges of our time and to reach new frontiers," Harris said.

Modi praised Gopalan for keeping India "close to her heart" despite the distance to her new home, and called Harris "really inspiring."

On Friday evening, Modi will address members of the Indian diaspora, many of whom have turned out at events during the visit to enthusiastically fete him, at times chanting "Modi! Modi! Modi!" despite protests from others.

Activists said Biden had **failed to strongly call out** what they describe as India's deteriorating human rights record under Modi, citing allegations of abuse of Indian dissidents and minorities, especially Muslims. Modi leads the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and has held power since 2014.

Biden said he had a "straightforward" discussion with Modi about issues including human rights, but U.S. officials emphasize that it is vital for Washington's national security and economic prosperity to engage with a rising India.

Asked on Thursday what he would do to improve the rights of minorities including Muslims, **Modi insisted** "there is no space for any discrimination" in his government.

"There is no end to data that shows Modi is lying about minority abuse in India, and much of it can be found in the State Department's own India country reports, which are scathing on human rights," said Sunita Viswanath, co-founder Hindus for Human Rights, an advocacy group.

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Jeff Mason is a White House Correspondent for Reuters. He has covered the presidencies of Barack Obama, Donald Trump and Joe Biden and the presidential campaigns of Biden, Trump, Obama, Hillary Clinton and John McCain. He served as president of the White House

Correspondents' Association in 2016-2017, leading the press corps in advocating for press freedom in the early days of the Trump administration. His and the WHCA's work was recognized with Deutsche Welle's "Freedom of Speech Award." Jeff has asked pointed questions of domestic and foreign leaders, including Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korea's Kim Jong Un. He is a winner of the WHCA's "Excellence in Presidential News Coverage Under Deadline Pressure" award and co-winner of the Association for Business Journalists' "Breaking News" award. Jeff began his career in Frankfurt, Germany as a business reporter before being posted to Brussels, Belgium, where he covered the European Union. Jeff appears regularly on television and radio and teaches political journalism at Georgetown University. He is a graduate of Northwestern University's Medill School of Journalism and a former Fulbright scholar.



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