

'Tariff war is lose-lose situation... you just make it more costly for consumer'

IN NOVEMBER 2020, the then Prime Minister of Luxembourg, **Xavier Bettel**, held the first virtual summit with Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the Covid-19 pandemic. Now, as Deputy PM and Foreign Minister, Bettel, who is on a three-day official visit to India, held talks with External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Monday.

In an interview with **Shubhaji Roy**, Bettel, who was the PM of Luxembourg between 2013 and 2023, talks about bilateralism in India, AI, tariffs, immigration and the Russia-Ukraine war. Edited excerpts:

Six years after the virtual summit with PM Modi, how has the relationship evolved?

In six years, Covid is gone; it was difficult. I had a Luxembourgish company which was doing clothing of vaccines at that time. They wanted to open a factory in India, and it was very difficult. Then on the call, PM Modi told me 'I will do this' and the next day it was fixed. How Indian efficiency. It's because usually when we have administrative questions, it takes weeks. But here, it was done in 24 hours. Since then, we have done a lot in logistics, also in finance. We have also strengthened ties in education, we have hundreds of Indian students in Luxembourg universities.

What are the areas of cooperation agreed upon during your conversation with PM Jaishankar?

AI, logistics, finance, satellites, space. We have a big Indian community in Luxembourg, we

love them. I love Indian food, I love India, and we have successful companies in Indian knowledge.

How does the India-EU Free Trade Agreement impact bilateral trade and the relationship between Luxembourg and India?

Now it's the framework. We need to put elements in the framework. So that's the reason why I think it's important, since now we have this FTA, to see how we can have new opportunities. Indian companies do not know what are the opportunities in Luxembourg, and Luxembourg companies do not know what are the opportunities in India now. We need to bring them together. I see some Indian companies which need European licences and see the opportunities to come to Luxembourg. There will be to Luxembourgish companies which don't yet know everything they can do in India, and so I need some time show them the opportunities.

After President Donald Trump assumed office, there has been a tendency to be protectionist; there are tariff wars going on right now. How do you view these tariff wars?

I think tariff wars, at the end of the day, are a lose-lose situation. There is no winner because someone needs to pay the tariff, and so you just make it more expensive for the consumer, and especially you know when you see this escalation — you do 50, we do 50, you do 60,



XAVIER BETTEL
DEPUTY PM, LUXEMBOURG

we do 60. At the end of the day, it's in fact the middle class consumer who pays the price. Rich people don't care if it costs 2, 3, or 10% more... It's the middle class and less fortunate people who pay the price of commercial wars; we destroy jobs, we destroy economies, so it's a lose-lose situation. It's a pity that for some it is for protectionism that they think tariffs are the new rules.

You have come here just ahead of the BRICS Summit, which Russian President Vladimir Putin will also attend. What should the Indian government tell him about the war in Ukraine?

That we won't rewrite history. So there is one aggressor that is Russia, that is in fact... I had a lot of contacts with President Putin and President Zelenskyy at the beginning of the war. I'm happy that your Prime Minister and your Foreign Minister went to Moscow and to Kyiv because most people visit one, not both, and we need someone to talk to them. But at the end of the day,

when we will have to count how many people died, how many were destroyed, it's a shame. And if I would still have contact with President Putin, I would tell him why... He will have to justify to orphans in 15 years why their father died, and he will have to explain to mothers in two years why their son died for nothing. I hope someone will be able to tell him that it is easier to start the war, than to finish the war. That's leadership.

Do you think India's purchase of Russian energy has funded the Russian war machinery?

I don't know the figures now. It's important, not important. The fact is, we should avoid financing the defence industry and letting money come in. But then you need alternatives. If you have alternatives, I would prefer the alternatives than the Russian ones, to be very honest, as long as this war is on. But the fact is, with Russia we had history, we had common interests, we shared the continent, we had common goals, and I'm so sad that everything has been destroyed this year. Especially for me, my grandmother's Russian, and I feel that even today, when I meet Russian people during holidays, they don't know if they should say they are Russian or not, and that makes me sad, because everybody needs to be proud about their roots and history.

An anti-immigration mood has emerged in the US and in some parts of Europe as well. We just saw AfD win the elections in a state in

Germany. How do you view this immigration debate?

The problem is, we just see the negative parts. We have to know that our continent was built with migration... People migrated from Europe to other countries when there was not enough food, when there were wars. So we also looked for a better future...

You have subjectivity and objectivity. Objectivity is the fact that we need migration, so we need regulated migration. Subjectivity would be that you say we don't control migration, so it is important to have borders that are functioning, mechanisms that are functioning, and countries taking back the people that are not allowed to stay. This is exactly what makes AfD and other parties strong. It's this subjectivity of insecurity, migration, jobs, uncertainty, housing, jobs, future...

When I read the papers today, all the Democrats will tell you, it's an attack on democracy, the elections in Germany. No, it was an election... It's the people who have chosen, and we need to, instead of complaining and blaming them, find answers to their questions. If we don't find them, they will continue, because the difference between me and the populist is that I often have the most complicated answer to the easiest question, and the populist has the easiest answer to the most complicated question. But if this solution is right or not, nobody will complain... But we should not blame the people. We should blame ourselves.

FULL INTERVIEW
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

In flood-hit Varanasi, teachers bring school to children in relief camps

22 teachers hold classes for 663 children across relief camps

Manish Sahu
Lucknow, September 7

At 8 am on Monday, 10-year-old Ayaz put on his school uniform, picked up his bag and walked into his classroom at the Government Primary School in Varanasi's Saraya.

For the past four days, the school building has also been Ayaz's home. He, his parents and his six siblings are among 10 families who moved into the school after floods in the district drove them from their homes. "The excitement every day of getting ready for class — we play games and study too. I love staying here," Ayaz said.

Inside the classroom, desks and benches have given way to white sheets spread across the floor, where barefoot children sit cross-legged in front of Principal Singh who occupied a self-plastic chair.

Mothers in dupattas sit near the windows. Stainless steel cooking pots and food provisions are stacked in open wall alcoves, while personal belongings line the walls beneath faded educational charts.

"The school is home to 10 flood-displaced families, said Principal Singh said. "Classes are running at this scheduled time."

The school is one of 22 relief camps running across Varanasi since August 29, where the administration has made arrangements for children to continue studying. Together, the



Mohammad Sayeed teaches children aged six to ten. EXPRESS

camp are sheltering 2,675 people, including 663 children, with the Basic Education Department deploying a teacher to each camp.

Another teacher, Shikha Mitt, 28, said, "Classes are being held in a relief camp, travelling about a kilometre from the Government Primary School in Saraya, where he is posted, to teach eight children at a makeshift relief camp."

The children, aged between seven and 10, attend class from 8 am to 2 pm. "These children aren't from the school where I'm posted. Many fled to the shelter without their books or copies, so we're arranging those for them as well," said Alam, who has been working as a Shiksha Mitra since 2007.

At camp housing families from flood-hit Nakhli Ghat, Mohammad Sayeed, 35, has been

teaching 10 children aged six to 10 for the past two days.

"I'm enjoying how this teacher teaches us — it's different from how we're taught in school. I'd like to stay a few more days at the camp because the facilities here are good," said 12-year-old Alisha.

Sayed, a primary school teacher from Chohara who is posted at City Girls Inter College in Alipur, said the children are all from different schools.

The Ganga was flowing at 70.2 metres at 4 pm on Sunday, below its warning level of 70.26 metres, according to the Central Water Commission. Around 11 localities in the district have been partially affected by the flooding, officials said, with families displaced by the swollen Varana river being moved to safer locations as needed.

72nd NATIONAL FILM AWARDS

Statue of Unity gets ready for red carpet moment on September 22

Vadoti Raja
Aurangabad, September 7

FOR THE first time in more than seven decades, India's National Film Awards ceremony will step out of Delhi. With the 72nd edition set to be held against the imposing backdrop of Gujarat's Statue of Unity (SoU) on September 22, President Droupadi Murmu will present the awards to 92 winners.

Preparations for the high-profile ceremony are underway at Ekta Nagar in Gujarat's Naroda district, where authorities are planning a specially constructed venue to accommodate the President, award winners and nearly 1,000 guests.

A release issued by the Naroda district administration on Monday stated that a German aluminium structural dome will be erected in the Bus Bay area of the Statue of Unity complex for the ceremony. The district administration and the Gujarat government are coordinating preparations for what will be one of the most prominent national events organised at the Statue of Unity precinct. The choice of Ekta Nagar marks a significant departure for the National Film

Awards, which have for decades been presented in Delhi. The move also brings one of India's most important cultural ceremonies to a destination that has increasingly been positioned as a venue for major national and international events. The September 22 event will honour winners of the 72nd National Film Awards, recognising achievements in Indian cinema for films released in 2024. The winners were announced by the Union Ministry of Information and Broadcasting in July. Article 370 won the Best Feature Film award, while Yami Gautam was

named Best Actress in a Leading Role for her performance in the film. Mammootty and Karthi Ajanth were named the Best Actor in a Leading Role award for *Bravaman* and *Chandu Chanderprabhu*, respectively. Among other major honours, *Bhangra* was named Best Non-Fiction Film and *Ram-Nani* won the Best Documentary. Randeep Hooda received the Best Debut Director award for *Swaatwari*. *Veer Savarkar*, while several commercially successful films, including *Kalki 2898 AD* and *Anuraag* were among those recognised across categories.

Man drowns in Dombivli quarry

Thane: A 19-year-old man drowned in a water-filled quarry in Dombivli East in Thane district, officials said on Monday. Atharva Umesh Phokane died on Sept 3, the official said. PTI

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