

UKRAINE DOMINATES MODI-BIDEN TALKS

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Mr. Modi, who spoke via videolink to Mr Biden, described the situation in Ukraine as “very worrying” and said he had spoken, several times, with both Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky and Russian President Vladimir Putin and had not just urged peace, but also direct talks between them. India’s unwillingness to call out Russia by name for its attack on Ukraine has not gone down well in Washington, but U.S. officials have also said that they hoped countries that have relationships with Moscow might leverage them to bring about a resolution to the situation.

“The United States and India are going to continue our close consultation on how to manage the destabilising effects of this Russian war,” Mr. Biden said in his opening remarks.

The government’s readout of the meeting said that Ukraine was also discussed. Speaking to presspersons after the meeting, a senior U.S. administration official said there was a “pretty detailed and candid exchange of views” on Ukraine but added that Mr. Biden made no “concrete ask” of India and Mr. Modi gave no “concrete answer”.

The comment by the official was in response to a reporter’s question on whether any explicit commitments were sought from India in terms of Russian oil, and also with regard to condemning Russia for attacking Ukraine. Both the official and Press Secretary Jen Psaki emphasised that while payments for energy from Russia were not sanctioned, the U.S. was discouraging India from increasing its purchases of Russian energy.

In comments shortly after the bilateral meeting, Ms. Psaki said that Mr. Biden had “made clear” what the impact of US sanctions would be, adding, “We expect everybody to abide by those”.

“The President made clear that he does not believe it’s in India’s interest to accelerate or increase imports of Russian energy and other commodities,” Ms. Psaki said, adding that Mr. Biden had reiterated a U.S. offer to help India diversify its energy imports. India currently imports only a small 1-2% of its energy from Russia as per official estimates.

Ms. Psaki used the words “constructive”, “productive” and “direct” to describe the conversation. She said the call was not “adversarial”. During the opening segment of the bilateral meeting, Mr. Jaishankar, Mr. Singh, India’s U.S. Ambassador Taranjit Singh Sandhu, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan were seen seated at the table with Mr. Biden.

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