

India must seize the chance: U.S.

Glad tidings:U.S. Ambassador to India Kenneth I. Juster speaking in New Delhi on Thursday.PTI

India is a “leading power” in the Indo-Pacific and should gear up to become an alternative manufacturing destination to China to attract U.S. business, said U.S. ambassador to India Kenneth Juster.

In his first public address since taking over as the new envoy, Mr. Juster also made a pitch for India and the U.S. to negotiate a Free Trade Agreement.

“A number of U.S. companies have reported increasing difficulties conducting business in the largest market in the region — China. Accordingly, some companies are downgrading their operations there, while others are looking with great interest at alternative markets. India can seize the strategic opportunity — through trade and investment — to become an alternative hub for U.S. business in the Indo-Pacific region,” he told an audience in New Delhi.

Mr. Juster, who most recently served as assistant adviser to U.S. President Donald Trump on economic issues, also expressed the need for India to expand market access and intellectual property rights, both of which are the subject of U.S.-India litigation at the World Trade Organisation.

“We are concerned about persistent trade deficits, including the one we have with India. We welcome steps by India to continue its reform agenda, expand market access, and further enhance the protection of intellectual property. And we want to work with India to expeditiously resolve trade and investment disputes,” Mr. Juster said.

He said India and the U.S. can work together in Afghanistan, partner with Japan and Australia in the Indo-Pacific, coordinate their humanitarian assistance, as well as cooperate on connectivity projects in South Asia.

He said Mr. Trump’s recent decision to suspend security aid to Pakistan came because Islamabad “has not done all it can to eliminate terrorist sanctuaries in Pakistan that are contributing to unrest in Afghanistan.” However, he declined to comment on a specific question from *The Hindu* about whether groups that target India like the Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed would be viewed with equal concern.

“Pakistan is also important to the situation in Afghanistan. I don’t think we are going to get stability and security in Afghanistan if Pakistan does not contribute positively to that,” Mr. Juster replied, saying that the Trump administration would not tolerate “safe havens for terrorists anywhere” or “cross-border terrorism.”

He placed defence and counter-terrorism cooperation as the first pillar of the India-U.S. relationship, while calling economic relations, energy and environment, science and health, and regional cooperation as the other pillars.

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