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Modi visits Washington and meets President Donald Trump later on Thursday, there will be some warm hugs and shared laughs. But that will not be all. Trump and Modi have developed a strong personal rapport over the years, marked by high-profile meetings and joint appearances. This time, they will also hold a joint press briefing, according to the White House.

Since their first meeting in Washington in 2017, their bond has grown through other events, including joint appearances at massive rallies in Houston and Ahmedabad. Their chemistry stems from shared worldviews and politics and a mutual strategic focus on countering China, a concern that has also strengthened the broader US-India partnership. Not surprisingly, Trump has often criticised India, but he has never criticised Modi. And so, during Modi's visit, the two leaders will probably spend time mapping out next steps in the US-India strategic partnership, which is already in a good place. Modi will reportedly meet several members of Trump's cabinet, as well as US business leaders and members of the Indian-American community. He may also meet SpaceX and Tesla chief Elon Musk. Modi, keen to scale up India's burgeoning electric vehicles sector, would be happy if Musk opened a Tesla factory in India.

And yet the Trump-Modi conviviality and heady talk of strategic partnership may mask a sobering reality: during Modi's visit, the relationship's transactional side will come into sharp relief with each leader, especially Trump, armed with an array of demands. But an obstacle could become an opportunity: Modi may call on Trump to enter into bilateral talks on an economic partnership accord meant to reduce tariffs on both sides. India aims to meet half its energy requirements through renewable energy by 2030. Asking Trump to invest in nuclear fuel amounts to a potential happy medium: it is cleaner than fossil fuels, but far removed from the solar and wind power that may not strike the Trump administration as an attractive investment. Technology will probably be discussed as well. This was a fast-growing space for bilateral relations in the Biden era. Modi will likely seek assurances from Trump and his National Security Adviser Mike Waltz that they remain committed to this. Given Washington's focus on countering China by making India a bigger part of tech global supply chains, they probably will.