

INDIA

Is Bangladesh's largest export destination in Asia: Indian High Commissioner

DHAKA, Feb 13 (PTI)

INDIA is today Bangladesh's largest export destination in Asia, the Indian High Commissioner here has said, highlighting the importance of multimodal connectivity in unlocking the true potential of bilateral cooperation between the two countries.

High Commissioner Pranay Verma made these remarks on Monday after Shipping Minister Khalid Mahmud Chowdhury inaugurated the Sultanganj port, establishing naval connectivity between Bangladesh's Rajshahi and India's Murshidabad.

"The future of our partnership lies in efficient multimodal

connectivity - encompassing road and rail, inland waterways, and coastal shipping," he said. This inauguration marks the first of the five trial movements of cargo vessels between Maia Port in India and Sultanganj, Godagari Port of Call in Bangladesh on Indo Bangladesh Protocol (IBP) Route 5 and 6.

US Senate OKs \$95bn aid to Ukraine and Israel but fate uncertain in hostile House

Washington: The Senate passed a long-awaited foreign aid package for Ukraine and Israel on Tuesday, delivering a bipartisan endorsement of the legislation after months of negotiations, dire battlefield warnings and political mudslinging. But the measure faced a buzz saw of opposition in the House, where Republican resistance threatened to kill it.

The 70-29 vote reflected a critical mass of support in Congress for the \$95 billion emergency aid legislation and for continuing to arm Ukraine in its fight against Russian aggression. The measure would provide an additional \$60.1 billion for Ukraine — which would bring the total US investment in the war effort to more than \$170 billion — as well as \$14.1 billion for Israel's war against Hamas and almost \$10 billion for humanita-



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rian aid for civilians in conflict zones, including Palestinians in the Gaza Strip.

But it also splintered Republicans and foretold a bumpy road ahead in the GOP-led House, where the speaker suggested late Monday that he would not act on it.

Twenty-two Senate Republicans voted with almost all Democrats for the bill — five more than had helped it over a final procedural hurdle on Monday — while the rest of the party argued against continuing to

fund a foreign nation's battle to protect its sovereignty without first cracking down on an influx of migration into the US across its border with Mexico. The vote took place after an all-night Senate session in which a parade of Republican opponents made speeches denouncing various aspects of the bill.

Republican hostility to the measure has been egged on by former President Trump, who encouraged GOP senators to reject an earlier version that would have included a biparti-

san border security deal, and by Speaker Mike Johnson.

"House Republicans were crystal clear from the very beginning of discussions that any so-called national security supplemental legislation must recognise that national security begins at our own border," Johnson said in a statement Monday, adding: "In the absence of having received any single border policy change from the Senate, the House will have to continue to work its own will on these important matters."

His comments suggested that the foreign aid bill's only path through the House may be for a bipartisan coalition like the one in the Senate — including more mainstream, national security-minded Republicans — to come together and use extraordinary measures to force action on it. **NYT**

India seeks reform of WTO dispute system

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New Delhi: Ahead of all-important meeting of WTO trade ministers in a fortnight, India has called for a comprehensive reform of the dispute settlement system and underlined the need for a comprehensive package, instead of a piece-meal approach pushed by certain members.

WTO's dispute settlement body is defunct as the US under multiple presidents, starting with Barack Obama, has stalled appointments to the appellate body, second tier of the mechanism. While almost all countries are seeking to revive the system as it gave all member nations a chance to challenge rules that were seen to be against global norms, the US has blocked any attempts to revive it.

Given the mandate at the last meeting of ministers, WTO members are seeking to work out a solution, ahead

of next ministerial in Abu Dhabi but the proposals on the table are not seen to be equitable by countries such as India, prompting it to join hands with Indonesia, South Africa, Bangladesh, Egypt and Bangladesh. The countries submitted a proposal on Monday.

Proposal seeks changes in the composition of the panel that will impact interests of developing & least developed nations

They have argued that central interest of reviving the appellate body has not been addressed during the deliberations so far. Instead, the attempt has been to undermine the fundamental nature of the "rules-based, two-tier" system, with a standing appeal mechanism

and decisions that are binding, the paper said. The current system allows for a dispute settlement panel, whose decisions can be appealed.

The proposal, which has been discussed, has sought changes in composition of the panel, which India and the other countries that have submitted the paper, argued will impact interests of developing and least developed nations. The panel is being given powers to categorise cases into standard, complex and extraordinarily complex cases, which are being opposed. Similarly, expedited timeframes, are seen to be impacting the possibility of arriving at amicable solutions.

There are also concerns that composition of the dispute settlement panels is sought to be reworked in a way that it could increase the possibility of certain geographies and legal systems dominating them.

Modi thanks UAE prez for carrying forward IMEC

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The treaty follows the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) that the two countries signed in 2022. The agreement resulted in an increase of 16% in bilateral trade last year. The UAE was the fourth largest source of FDI for India in 2022-23, accounting for \$3.5 billion investment.

The agreement on IMEC, a transcontinental connectivity and economic integration initiative launched last year on the margins of the G20 summit, is expected to build on previous understandings and cooperation, allowing the two countries to pursue regional connectivity.

Modi also thanked the UAE president for carrying forward the corridor initiative. "Your support for the IMEC initiative will help connect the region but it will also open new doors of development. Future generations will remember how the President showed the way to the world and did this important work, which will benefit generations to come," the PM said.

Modi thanked the President for granting the land on which a Hindu temple has

AGREEMENTS INKED

- Bilateral Investment Treaty
- MoU on cooperation in the field of **electrical interconnection and trade**
- An intergovernmental framework agreement between India and UAE on the **India- Middle East- Europe Economic Corridor**
- MoU on cooperation in **digital infrastructure** Projects
- Cooperation protocol between the **national archives** of the two countries
- MoU for cooperation in the field of **heritage and museums**
- Agreement on interlinking of the instant payment platforms - **UPI (India) and AANI (UAE)**



- Agreement on inter-linking domestic debit cards/credit cards - **RuPay (India) with JAYWAN (UAE)**

been constructed in Abu Dhabi, which he will inaugurate Wednesday. According to the Indian govt, both sides noted that the BAPS temple was a celebration of UAE-India friendship, deep-rooted cultural bonds and an "embodiment of the UAE's global commitment to harmony, tolerance and peaceful coexistence".

The leaders reviewed bilateral cooperation and discussed new areas of cooperation, as also regional and global issues like the situation in Gaza.

"The leaders also dis-

cussed the strengthening of energy partnership. They appreciated that in addition to the UAE being among the largest sources of crude and LPG, India is now entering into long-term contracts for LNG," the Indian govt said.

Two of the agreements related to interlinking their instant payment and domestic credit/debit card platforms. There was another agreement for digital infrastructure cooperation and one for collaboration in the field of energy, including energy security and energy trade.

Modi pegs cost of rooftop solar plan at ₹75,000 crore

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday announced the launch of rooftop solar scheme for free electricity, naming it 'PM Surya: Muft Bijli Yojana', envisaging free electricity for one crore households.

"In order to further sustainable development and people's well-being, we are launching PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana. This project, with an investment of over Rs 75,000 crore, aims to light up one crore households by providing up to 300 units of free electricity every month," Modi posted on X.

The scheme was PM Modi's first official decision after consecration of Ram idol in Ayodhya. Presenting the Interim Budget on Feb 1, finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman put Rs 10,000 crore on the table as seed



The scheme aims to light up 1 crore homes by providing up to 300 units of free electricity every month, Modi said

money for the scheme and promised 300 units of free power as well as hope for annual savings of Rs 15,000-18,000 in energy bill for each beneficiary household.

"From substantive subsi-

dies, which will be given directly to people's bank accounts, to heavily concessional bank loans, the central govt will ensure that there is no cost burden on the people. All stakeholders will be integrated to a National Online Portal, which will further convenience," the PM said.

"In order to popularise this scheme at the grass-roots, urban local bodies and panchayats shall be incentivised to promote rooftop solar systems in their jurisdictions. At the same time, the scheme will lead to more income, lesser power bills and employment generation for people," he said.

"Let's boost solar power and sustainable progress. I urge all residential consumers, especially youngsters, to strengthen PM Surya Ghar: Muft Bijli Yojana by applying at — pmsuryaghar.gov.in," the PM said.

PML-N set to lead coalition in Pak, names Shehbaz for PM

Pakistan's leading parties, minus jailed former PM Imran Khan's party, on Tuesday announced that they will try to form a coalition govt led by Pakistan



Muslim League-Nawaz.

Taking to X, PML-N spokesperson Marriyum Aurangzeb sa-

id party supremo Nawaz Sharif, 74, had nominated his younger brother Shehbaz Sharif, 72, as candidate for the slot of prime minister and his daughter Maryam Nawaz, 50, for chief minister of Punjab province.

Earlier, Pakistan Peoples Party chief Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari withdrew from the race for PM, saying his party would support a coalition govt led by Sharif's PML-N, without being a part of it. **P 28**

Legal guarantee for MSP could spell fiscal disaster, caution govt officials

'Such A Regime Would Leave Little Money To Pursue Devtpt Goals'

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New Delhi: Providing legal guarantee for procurement of all crops at minimum support price could result in a fiscal disaster, govt sources said on Tuesday, while indicating their willingness to engage in dialogue with farmers groups.

Pointing out how a legislation offering a guarantee was not feasible, officials argued that value of agricultural produce in the country during FY20 was pegged at Rs 40 lakh crore, while the market value of the 24 crops that are part of MSP regime was estimated at Rs 10 lakh crore.

Procuring this value of produce from the Centre's total expenditure of Rs 45 lakh crore (for 2023-24) would mean that there would be very little money left to pursue other development and social goals, which were critical for the progress of an economy such as India.

Officials said for next fiscal, govt has budgeted to spend Rs 11,11,111 crore on capex, largely to build roads and railways. "It (Rs 10 lakh crore) is more than the annual average expenditure on infrastructure in the last seven fiscal years (Rs 67 lakh crore, between 2016 and 2023). Clearly, a universal MSP demand does not make any economic or fiscal sense," a source said.

The argument, however,

FARMERS' DEMAND C2+50% FORMULA

What is C2+50%?

- ▶ It's a formula to arrive at MSP at which farmers' produce could be procured by government agencies
- ▶ **C2+50%** | Comprehensive cost including imputed cost of capital and the rent on the farmers' own land



What is being currently used?

- ▶ Govt uses A2+FL formula to arrive at MSP
- ▶ **A2+FL** | All paid-out costs incurred by farmers and the value of family labour
- ▶ **MSP are fixed at a level of at least 1.5 times of the all paid-out costs** | All-India weighted average cost of production

(All paid-out costs: Those incurred on account of hired human labour, bullock labour/machine labour, rent paid for leased in land, expenses incurred on use of material inputs like seeds, fertilizers, manures, irrigation charges, depreciation on implements and farm buildings, interest on working capital, diesel/electricity for operation of pump sets etc., miscellaneous expenses and imputed value of family labour)

Condemn brutal assault on farmers: Mamata

West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday condemned the firing of teargas shells at protesting farmers in Haryana, dubbing it "BJP's brutal assault" on cultivators. "How can our country progress when farmers are attacked with teargas shells for fighting for their basic rights?" she posted on X. TNN

does not deter the Centre from any discussion around the demand provided farm groups participate in talks unlike their previous stand of not even sending their representatives to central committee discussing the issue, govt sources said.

On Tuesday, agriculture minister Arjun Munda pointed to the absence of farmers' representatives in the discussions of a committee headed

by former agriculture secretary Sanjay Agrawal. During the discussions, farmers were requested to be either part of the panel looking at strengthening the MSP system or join a new committee.

Officials said other demands, such as free power, would push the country towards unsustainable farming practices, resulting in excessive use of underground water for water-guzzling crops.

Will give MSP guarantee if we form govt, says Kharge

Raipur: Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge announced at Bharat Jodo Nyay Yatra that his party will bring MSP under purview of legal guarantee if it forms govt at Centre. "I am announcing this for first time from the soil of Chhattisgarh.

It is guarantee of Congress party,"

Kharge said in Ambikapur.



Kharge accused BJP-led govt at Centre of "committing inhuman acts" by using concrete walls and nails to prevent farmers from reaching Delhi. "The way farmers are being suppressed shows state of democracy in country," he said.

Kharge lashed out at Modi, accusing him of copying 'Congress's guarantee' and turning it into 'Modi Guarantee'. "It was Congress that brought Green Revolution to country with support of M S Swaminathan but Modi ji grabs credit for it for doing nothing," he said. Kharge appealed to the public not to believe in Modi as he is "jhooton ka sardar, who peddles lies to take people on wrong path". TNN