

'Rajapaksa brothers responsible for economic crisis in Sri Lanka'

COLOMBO, Nov 15 (ANI)

IN A landmark ruling, the Sri Lankan Supreme Court ruled on Tuesday that the Rajapaksa brothers and other senior officials were responsible for the massive economic crisis in the island nation, the 'Colombo Gazette' reported.

The apex court has ruled that the Rajapaksa brothers--former President Gotabaya Rajapaksa, former Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa and former Finance Minister Basil Rajapaksa - were among those responsible for the crisis that led the country to bankruptcy last year.

Notably, the crisis resulted in major street protests last year forcing the Rajapaksas to resign and give way to the appointment of a new administration led by current President Ranil

Wickremesinghe.

The Supreme Court also found that former Central Bank Governors Ajith Nivard Cabraal and Professor W D Lakshman, former Finance Secretary S R Attygalle, former Presidential Secretary P B Jayasundara and the Monetary Board members of the Central Bank had violated the fundamental rights of the people, 'Colombo Gazette' reported.

The ruling was delivered based on the majority view of the five-judge bench presided over by Chief Justice Jayantha Jayasuriya.

Since the petitioners approached the Court in the public interest and did not seek compensation for themselves, the Court was not inclined to order compensation other than costs incurred by the petitioners.

'Fragile security situation in South China Sea'

Poses danger to 'good order'



Vice President Jagdeep Dhankar, Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar and others during the Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue 2023 at the Manekshaw Centre in New Delhi on Wednesday. (ANI)

NEW DELHI, Nov 15 (PTI)

THE fragile security situation in the South China Sea, in addition to violations of established codes of conduct, poses a clear danger to "good order" and "discipline" at sea, Navy Chief Admiral R Hari Kumar said on Wednesday, in an oblique reference to China's military assertiveness in the region.

There have been growing global concerns over China's sweeping claims of sovereignty over all of the South China Sea, a huge source of hydrocarbons.

Several countries in the region including Vietnam, the Philippines and Brunei have

counterclaims.

"The fragile security situation in the South China Sea, in addition to the happening of violations of established Codes of Conduct or Confidence Building Measures, poses a clear and present danger to good order and discipline at sea," Admiral Kumar said.

He was speaking at the Indo-Pacific Regional Dialogue (IPRD), which is an annual apex-level international conference of the Indian Navy aimed at addressing "holistic" maritime security issues in the region. The ASEAN countries have been insisting on a binding code of conduct (COC) on the South China Sea largely.

PM LAUNCHES RS 24,000 CR SCHEME For vulnerable tribal groups' welfare

KHUNTI (Jharkhand), Nov 15 (PTI)

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday promised to work on a 'mission mode' to deliver justice to deprived tribals and said he will repay the debt he owed to them while launching Rs 24,000 crore project for vulnerable tribal groups on the birth anniversary of tribal icon Birsa Munda.

Apart from 'PM Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan', Modi also launched several schemes including 'Viksit Bharat Sankalp Yatra', a nationwide programme aimed at reaching out to citizens who are eligible for various central schemes but have not benefited so far.

He also emphasised the need to strengthen four pillars — women, farmers, youth and middle class and poor — for the development of the nation.

"I have come to the land of Birsa Munda to repay the debt that I owe to the deprived," the prime minister said while addressing a public rally at Khunti Football Ground in Jharkhand after paying homage to the tribal icon at his birthplace Ulihatu.

The PM reiterated, "True secularism comes only when all possibilities of discrimination against any citizen of the country is eliminated," adding that social justice is ensured only when the benefit of all the government schemes reaches everyone in the same measure.

Pays floral tributes to Birsa Munda



Prime Minister Narendra Modi pays floral tribute to tribal icon Birsa Munda at his ancestral home in Ulihatu, in Khunti, Jharkhand on Wednesday. (PTI)

RANCHI, Nov 15 (PTI)

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday paid homage to tribal icon Birsa Munda in Ranchi on his birth anniversary.

He paid floral tributes to the 25-foot tall statue of the icon at the Bhagwan Birsa Munda Memorial Park-cum-Freedom Fighter Museum, situated at the Old Central Jail where he had breathed his last on June 9, 1900.

Birsa Munda's birth

anniversary is celebrated across the country as the Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas.

"Respectful tribute to Bhagwan Birsa Munda on his birth anniversary. Many best wishes to my family members across the country on this special occasion of Janjatiya Gaurav Diwas," Modi posted on X. During his visit to the museum, the PM was accompanied by Chief Minister Hemant Soren, Governor CP Radhakrishnan and Union Minister Arjun Munda.

Jharkhand was formed on Munda's birth anniversary in 2000. The visit holds political significance too as the BJP aims to woo tribal voters in Jharkhand ahead of the 2024 Lok Sabha polls and assembly elections in other states having sizeable tribal population.

Jharkhand Chief Minister Hemant Soren, Governor CP Radhakrishnan and Union Ministers Arjun Munda and Annapurna Devi were present on the occasion.

The Prime Minister underlined that a major foundation of the resolve for a developed India is 'PM Janman' or 'PM Janjati Adivasi Nyaya Maha Abhiyan' and noted that the budget for tribal welfare has been increased by six times.

He said under 'PM Janman', the Government will reach out to tribal groups and primitive tribes most of whom still dwell in the forests.

"The Government has identified 75 such tribal communities and primitive tribes who reside in more than 22,000 villages in the country. Earlier, governments did the work of connecting the figures, but I want to connect the lives, not the figures. With this goal, 'PM Janman' has started today," the prime minister said.

Meanwhile, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday released Rs 18,000 crore as the 15th installment of the PM-Kisan scheme to more than 8 crore farmers across the country.

GENERAL POLLS ON JAN 7 in Bangladesh

DHAKA, Nov 15 (PTI)

BANGLADESH will hold the much-awaited general elections on January 7, the chief election commissioner announced on Wednesday, amidst violent protests by the Opposition BNP and its allies demanding a non-party interim government to conduct transparent polls.

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibul Awal announced the dates of the 12th general election during an address to the nation that was telecast live - the first such kind of announcement in the history of Bangladesh.

Awal said the last day to submit nomination papers will be November 30 while scrutiny of nomination papers will be from December 1 to December 4.

The last date for withdraw-

al of candidature is December 17. The election body will allot election symbols to candidates on December 18.

Awal also said the election campaign will run from December 18 to January 5, 2024 midnight.

Ahead of the announcement of the poll date, Bangladeshi authorities on Wednesday enforced a tight security vigil in the capital and other major cities.

The announcement of dates came amid mounting political tensions as Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) and its far-right allies like the Jamaat-e-Islami have waged a street campaign demanding the resignation of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government to allow a non-party interim government to conduct the general elections.

JAISHANKAR HOLDS 'GOOD DISCUSSION' WITH BRITISH NSA TIM BARROW

LONDON, Nov 15 (PTI)

EXTERNAL Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Wednesday met British National Security Adviser Tim Barrow and held a "good discussion" with him on regional and global challenges. Jaishankar is on a five-day official visit to the UK with an aim to review various aspects of bilateral ties and give "new impetus to the friendly ties". "Glad to meet UK NSA Tim Barrow. A good discussion on pressing regional and global challenges," Jaishankar posted on X. He also met Shadow Foreign Secretary David Lammy and held a wide ranging conversation on security and development issues, as well as bilateral cooperation.

"Pleased to meet Shadow Foreign Secretary @DavidLammy this morning. A wide ranging conversation on security and development

issues, as well as bilateral cooperation. Appreciated his perspectives and insights. Also thank Shadow Minister for Asia and the Pacific @CatherineWest1 for joining on the occasion," he said in another post on X.

Earlier this week, Jaishankar met British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, newly-appointed Foreign Secretary David Cameron, Defence Secretary Grant Shapps and Home Secretary James Cleverly.

At a special Diwali Reception organised by the High Commission of India at Westminster Central Hall near the Houses of Parliament here on Monday evening, Jaishankar said that the free trade agreement (FTA) is very much the focus of the India-UK relationship and India is hopeful of finding a "landing point" in the negotiations that works for both sides.

Trudeau faces calls to exit as party trails in polls

Sagging badly in opinion polls, with voters angry about housing and inflation, Canada PM Justin Trudeau is facing calls to leave, even from stalwarts of his own party. Trudeau may not have to face voters until 2025, thanks to a power-sharing deal with a left-leaning opposition group, which gives him some runway to try to turn things around. But that's also enough time for Trudeau to resign or be forced out of the leadership of the Liberal Party by his increasingly restless caucus of 158 members of parliament — especially as surveys find a strong desire for change among Canadians.

For months, polls have shown the Conservative Party, led by Pierre Poilievre, ahead by 10 to 15 points and gaining ground nearly everywhere.

It's the deepest funk Trudeau has endured during his eight years in power.

The Conservative leader is



In 2023, Trudeau faced allegations that he failed to respond to Chinese interference in Canadian elections. More recently, he accused India of orchestrating the assassination of a Sikh activist in Vancouver

the most formidable challenger Trudeau has faced, and has channeled Canadians' anger about the rising cost of living — dubbing it “Justinflation.” Poilievre's constant refrain is: “After eight years of Trudeau, everything costs more.”

In public and private, Trudeau and his advisers say he has no intention of resigning. His inner circle believes the government needs to weather the storm and show voters Tru-

deau can still deliver results.

Even if the polls were better, Trudeau would already be taking a risk by running again. It's been more than a century since a Canadian leader won four straight elections. The last one to try, Stephen Harper, was decisively beaten by Trudeau after governing for nine years.

Trudeau entered this year in a strong position, having secured the deal with New Democrats and quieted succession talk in his party. He rode out the political crisis caused by the trucker protests in 2022, during which he invoked rarely-used emergency powers to clear blockades on Ottawa's streets and at US border crossings.

But 2023 has been brutal for Trudeau. He became embroiled in foreign controversies, including allegations he failed to respond to Chinese interference in Canadian elections. More recently, he touched off a furor after accusing India's go-

vernment of orchestrating the assassination of a Sikh activist in Vancouver. His annus horribilis even extended to his personal life. In August, he and Sophie Gregoire Trudeau announced they were separating after 18 years of marriage.

Throughout it all, whispers about Trudeau's future have grown louder. Senator Percy Downe, who once served as chief of staff to Liberal PM Jean Chretien, penned an opinion piece blaming the slide in the polls on Trudeau's lack of fiscal responsibility and arguing that a new leader would give the party “a chance” of reelection. In subsequent interviews, he said many Liberal MPs shared his view. But no currently elected MP has openly called for Trudeau to go.

John Manley, a former Liberal deputy prime minister, said the mood for a change is so strong, Trudeau's choices are to quit or lose. **BLOOMBERG**

ASEAN defence chiefs call for end to Gaza war; try to address Myanmar's civil strife

JAKARTA, Nov 15 (AP)

SOUTHEAST Asian Defence Ministers called Wednesday for the fighting in Gaza to cease immediately and for the world to collaborate on setting up humanitarian aid corridors in Gaza, but they struggled on how to address the prolonged civil strife in Myanmar.

The Myanmar crisis was high on the agenda when defence chiefs from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations met in Indonesia's capital, Jakarta. The 10-nation bloc includes Myanmar, but its Defense Minister was again barred from

attending this week's meetings due to the military Government's failure to comply with a five-point emergency plan drafted to ease the violence. "We are saddened with a deteriorating situation in Myanmar," Indonesia's Defence Minister Prabowo Subianto said in an opening speech. "Indonesia encourages other ASEAN member States to support Myanmar to find a peaceful and durable solution to the current situation."

ASEAN has been trying to enforce the plan it forged with Myanmar's top general in 2021, which calls for an immediate

end to the violence, the start of talks brokered by a special envoy among contending parties, and the delivery of aid to displaced people. But Myanmar's military Government has done little to enforce the plan.

The defence ministers on Thursday will be meeting with ASEAN's eight dialogue partners, with the territorial disputes over the South China Sea expected to be raised.

Subianto in his speech also touched on Israel's war with Hamas. "Indonesia is deeply saddened by the deteriorating situation in Gaza, particularly

the horrid humanitarian conditions," he said, adding violence against civilians "must stop." "Conversely, efforts to achieve a cease-fire must continue and the safe passage of humanitarian aid must be wide and accelerated," he said.

ASEAN has not made a formal statement about the Israel-Hamas war.

Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei — the three ASEAN members with Muslim-majority populations where religion is significant in domestic politics — have long been strong supporters of the Palestinians' struggles.

Myanmar Army battalion surrenders to alliance of ethnic armed groups

BANGKOK, Nov 15 (AP)

A MYANMAR Army battalion based near the Chinese border surrendered to an alliance of ethnic armed groups that launched a surprise offensive last month against the military, a spokesperson for one of the groups said Wednesday.

The surrender of 261 people — 127 soldiers and 134 family members — from the infantry battalion in northeastern Shan state appears to be the biggest by regular army forces since widespread armed conflict in Myanmar broke out in 2021 following the military's seizure of power from the elected

Government of Aung San Suu Kyi in February that year.

The alliance expects to soon capture Laukkaing, the area's major city, the spokesperson said. The surrender — which has not been announced by the military Government and could not be independently confirmed by 'The Associated Press' — came two weeks after the Arakan Army, the Myanmar National Democratic Alliance Army and the Ta'ang National Liberation Army, calling themselves the Three Brotherhood Alliance, launched a coordinated offensive on October 27.

The alliance has claimed widespread victories, and the

military Government made a rare acknowledgement on November 2 that it had lost control of three towns. One is a major border crossing for trade with China.

The offensive in the northern part of Shan state was seen as a significant challenge for the army, which has struggled to contain a nationwide uprising by members of the Peoples' Defence Force, a pro-democracy armed group established after the 2021 Army takeover.

The various PDF groups that operate around the country have joined forces with well-organised, battle-hardened ethnic armed groups.