

GOVT MAY INCREASE AGRI-CREDIT TARGET TO RS 22-25 LAKH CRORE

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NEW DELHI, Jan 22 (PTI)

THE Government is likely to announce in the upcoming interim Budget a substantial increase in the agricultural credit target to Rs 22-25 lakh crore for the next fiscal and ensure every eligible farmer has access to institutional credit, according to sources.

The Government's agri-credit target is Rs 20 lakh crore for the current fiscal.

Currently, the Government provides interest subvention of two per cent on short term agri-loans of up to Rs 3 lakh for all financial institutions. This

means farmers are getting a farm loan of up to Rs 3 lakh at a concessional rate of 7 per cent per annum.

An additional interest subvention of 3 per cent per annum is also being provided to farmers who repay on time. Farmers can also avail long term loans but interest rate is as per the market rate.

For the 2024-25 fiscal, there could be a sharp increase in the agri-credit target to Rs 22-25 lakh crore, sources said.

According to the sources, there is more focus on agri-credit and the Government is implementing several campaigns to identify the left out eligible farmers and bring them in the credit network.

The Agriculture Ministry has also created a separate division on 'credit' in order to give

a focused approach, the sources added. Further, the sources mentioned that the credit disbursal for various agricultural and allied activities has been exceeding the target in the last 10 years.

In the current fiscal, about 82 per cent of the agri-credit target of Rs 20 lakh crore has been achieved till December 2023. About Rs 16.37 lakh crore credit has been disbursed by both private and public banks in the said period, the official data showed.

"The agri-credit disbursal is likely to exceed the target this fiscal as well," the sources added. During the 2022-23 fiscal, the total farm credit disbursal was at Rs 21.55 lakh crore, surpassing the target of Rs 18.50 lakh crore kept for the same period.

First since 2018: Russia is top oil supplier for China

Russia blew past Saudi Arabia to become the biggest source of Chinese oil imports last year, highlighting the ineffectiveness of Western efforts to deprive the Kremlin of funds for its war in Ukraine. The world's biggest oil importer bought a record 107 million tonnes of crude from Russia in 2023, according to customs data released Monday. That compared with just under 86 million tonnes from Saudi Arabia. It's the first time Russia has been China's No. 1 supplier since 2018, and translates to around 2.15 million barrels a day.

Chinese refiners have been snapping up cut-price Russian crude, despite it being sold at levels above a \$60 a barrel Western-imposed price cap. ESPO cargoes from Russian Far East continue to be popular in China due to the relatively short shipping route.

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Higher official selling prices have seen processors take fewer Saudi term cargoes, while a recent disagreement with Iranian exporters is further boosting demand for Russian crude. China's oil imports from Russia last year were worth \$60.6 billion, which equates to an average price of about \$77 a barrel, according to customs data. Russia was also top supplier of fuel oil to China last year, shipping 9.6 million tonnes. Malaysia being the next-biggest exporter, supplying 6.93 million tonnes. BLOOMBERG

SC frames questions on BSF's area jurisdiction

Hearing Punjab Plea Against Extension Of Ambit

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New Delhi: The Supreme Court on Monday framed six questions to address the challenge mounted by Punjab government to the Centre's 2021 decision to extend Border Security Force's local area jurisdiction to 50 km, from the earlier 15 km, from the international border with Pakistan.

The AAP government has raised a Centre-state dispute by resorting to Article 131 of the Constitution, under which SC alone has the original jurisdiction to adjudicate disputes between the Centre and states and between two or more states, while alleging that the Oct 11, 2021, notification extending BSF's local area control from 15 km to 50 km.

A bench of Chief Justice D Y Chandrachud and Justices J B Pardiwala and Manoj Misra, after hearing solicitor general Tushar Mehta, who defended the necessity of the 2021 notification, and Punjab advocate general Gurminder Singh, agreed to address six questions which lay at the core of the dispute.

The questions include: whether extending BSF's local area jurisdiction was arbitrary; whether such extension interfered with the local area



The questions include whether extending BSF's local area jurisdiction was arbitrary and whether it interfered with police's jurisdiction

jurisdiction of the state police; whether all states are treated alike for determining BSF's local area jurisdiction; what are the factors taken into consideration in fixing such area jurisdiction of BSF; and whether validity of the notification could be challenged by invoking Article 131.

Mehta said under the BSF Act, this armed force was given powers since 1969 to arrest persons acting in contravention of laws relating to the border in an area, which varied from 80 km in Gujarat, to 50 km for Rajasthan, 15 km for Punjab, West Bengal and Assam and extended to the entire state of Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, and J&K.

In 2021, a uniformity in BSF's area of jurisdiction was brought in by which it was allowed to exercise powers under the Criminal Pro-

cedure Code for areas falling within 50 km of the border, Mehta said. The AAP government alleged that the increase in jurisdiction of BSF to 50 km seriously impaired the functions of police, which is the exclusive domain of the state government.

The SG said none of the states ever challenged BSF's jurisdictional area since 1969, including Punjab, which now has contested the increase.

The SG drew the court's attention to the Oct 2021 notification, which said BSF would deal with cognizable offences relating to border issues and hence it would not impede the investigating powers of the police. "The local police are not deprived of their powers. A concurrent jurisdiction is conferred on BSF, with primacy to the latter," he said.

Global South is about mindset, solidarity, self-reliance: EAM

LAGOS (Nigeria), Jan 22 (PTI)

EXTERNAL Affairs Minister S

Jaishankar on Monday said Global South is about a “mindset, a solidarity and a self-reliance”.

Addressing the Nigerian Institute Of International Affairs (NIIA) here on India and the Global South, he said the global

agenda today is on promoting rebalancing and multipolarity, thereby restoring the world to its natural diversity.

“Contemporary challenges emanate from old forms of domination as well as new economic concentration... Global South is about a mindset, a sol-

idarity and a self-reliance,” Jaishankar said.

The transformation over the last decade, the minister said, has “enabled India to be an example, a partner and a contributor”.

Jaishankar arrived in Nigeria in the concluding leg of his two-nation tour to Uganda and Nigeria. He arrived in the Nigerian

capital Abuja on Sunday after attending the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) Summit in Uganda.

The External Affairs Minister said that the number of cashless transactions the United States does in three years, India does in a month.



US navy's Mideast chief: Iran directly involved in Houthi rebel ship attacks

Jerusalem: Iran is "very directly involved" in ship attacks that Yemen's Houthi rebels have carried out during Israel's war against Hamas, the US navy's top Mideast commander said Monday.



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Vice Adm.

Brad Cooper, the head of the navy's 5th Fleet,

stopped short of saying Tehran directed individual attacks by the Houthis in the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden. However, Cooper acknowledged that attacks associated with Iran have expanded from previously three-

Houthis: Attacked US military cargo ship

Yemen's Houthi movement said on Monday its forces had carried out an attack against American military cargo ship *Ocean Jazz* in the Gulf of Aden. "The Yemeni armed forces continue to retaliate to any American or British aggression against our country by targeting all sources of threat in the Red and Arab Sea," the Houthi military spokesperson Yahya Sarea said in a statement.

atening just the Persian Gulf and its Strait of Hormuz into waters across the wider West Asia. "Iran is clearly funding, they're resourcing, they are supplying and they're providing training," he said. "They're obviously very directly involved. There's no secret there."

"Clearly, the Houthi actions, probably in terms of their attacks on merchant shipping, are the most significant that we've seen in two generations," he told the AP in a telephone interview. "The facts simply are that they're attacking the international community; thus, the international response I think you've seen." Iran's mission to the UN did not respond to a request for comment on Cooper's remarks. Houthi leadership in Yemen's capital, Sanaa, could not be immediately reached. AP

UNGA president arrives in India on 5-day visit, to meet EAM today

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: The president of the 78th Session of United Nations General Assembly (PGA), Dennis Francis, arrived in India for a five-day visit, presenting an opportunity to strengthen India-UN ties, especially with the general assembly, which is the most representative organ of United Nations.

Francis will meet foreign minister S Jaishankar on Tuesday. According to the government, discussions during the visit would include India's call for reforms of the United Nations, particularly the security council, to make it more equitable and representative with a view to enhancing representation of developing countries.

"The visit will also be an opportunity to enhance India's collaboration with the United Nations on Indian priorities as well as the global challenges being faced by the Global South," the government said earlier, announcing his visit.

The PGA will also travel to Jaipur and Mumbai. In Mumbai, he will pay floral tributes at the 26/11 memorial. On Jan 26, on the occasion of Republic Day, PGA will participate as a State guest in the Republic Day Parade of Maharashtra.

Chandrayaan-3

NASA spacecraft 'pings' ISRO lander on Moon

NEW DELHI, Jan 22 (PTI)

LASER instrument onboard a NASA spacecraft orbiting the Moon has successfully pinged the Vikram lander of India's Chandrayaan-3 mission, the US space agency said.

The laser beam was transmitted and reflected between the Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO) and an Ore-sized device on Vikram lander, opening the door to a new style of precisely locating targets on the Moon's surface, NASA said.

The lander was 100 kilometers away from LRO, near Manzinus crater in the Moon's south pole region, when LRO transmitted laser pulses toward it on December 12 last year.

After the orbiter registered light that had bounced back

from a tiny NASA retroreflector aboard Vikram, NASA scientists knew their technique had finally worked.

Sending laser pulses towards an object and measuring how long it takes the light to bounce back is a commonly used way to track the locations of Earth-orbiting satellites from the ground.

However, using the technique in reverse—to send laser pulses from a moving spacecraft to a stationary one to determine its precise location—has many applications at the Moon, scientists said.

"We've showed that we can locate our retroreflector on the surface from the Moon's orbit," said Xiaoli Sun, who led the team at NASA's Goddard Space Flight Center, that developed



the retroreflector on Vikram as part of a partnership between NASA and Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO).

"The next step is to improve the technique so that it can become routine for missions that want to use these retroreflectors in the future," Sun said in a NASA statement.

Only 2 inches, or 5 centimeters, wide, NASA's tiny but mighty retroreflector, called a

Laser Retroreflector Array, has eight quartz-corner-cube prisms set into a dome-shaped aluminum frame.

The device is simple and durable, scientists say, requiring neither power nor maintenance, and can last for decades. Its configuration allows the retroreflector to reflect light coming in from any direction back to its source, NASA said.

Retroreflectors can be used

for many applications in science and exploration and have been in use at the Moon since the Apollo era.

By reflecting light back to Earth, the suitcase-size retroreflectors revealed that the Moon is moving away from our planet at a rate of 3.8 centimeters per year, the US space agency added. Reacting to the development, ISRO said the Laser Retroreflector Array (LRA) on the Chandrayaan-3 lander has begun serving as a fiducial point (precisely located markers for reference) on the Moon.

"NASA's Lunar Reconnaissance Orbiter (LRO) achieved a laser range measurement using the LRA by successfully detecting signals reflected by it on December 12, 2023."