

# US def secy in hospital, scraps plans to attend Nato meet

**Washington:** US defence secretary Lloyd Austin has cancelled a trip to Brussels where he was set to take part in meetings with Nato defence ministers, a US official said Monday, after the Pentagon chief was admitted to a critical care unit and had to transfer his duties to his deputy.

Austin, 70, was taken to Walter Reed Military Medical Center on Sunday for "symptoms suggesting an emergent bladder issue". Austin had failed to disclose a prostate cancer surgery in Dec and a subsequent hospitalisation in Jan to deal with its complications. Austin was set to depart for the Nato meeting of defence ministers in Brussels taking place on Thursday.

It was unclear how long Austin would remain in the hospital, but he has transferred his duties to deputy secretary of defence Kathleen Hicks. Austin's secrecy during his hospitalisations in Dec and Jan had triggered a political uproar. Republicans accused him of dereliction of duty. President Biden, a Democrat, has said he has confidence in Austin despite what the president agreed was a lapse in judgment. REUTERS

# Farmers' Delhi Chalo March

# Union Ministers hold talks with farmer leaders



Barricades put up near Singhu border in view of farmers' 'Delhi Chalo March' in Sonapat district on Monday. A large number of farmers from Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Punjab are expected to march towards the national capital on Tuesday. (PTI)

CHANDIGARH, Feb 12 (PTI)

**A TEAM** of Union Ministers on Monday evening held talks here with farmer leaders in a bid to dissuade them from their 'Delhi Chalo' march, and the Centre is learnt to have agreed to withdraw the cases against the farmers registered during the 2020-21 agitation.

However, sources said farmer leaders were adamant on a legal guarantee to minimum support price for crops, which is one of their key demands.

Farmers to go ahead with 'Delhi Chalo' march on Tuesday, said farm leader Sarwan Singh Pandher after meet with Union Ministers over their demands.

The Ministers -- Food and Consumer Affairs Minister Piyush Goyal and Agriculture Minister Arjun Munda -- held the second round of talks with the farmer leaders at the

Mahatma Gandhi State Institute of Public Administration in Sector 26.

Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) leader Jagjit Singh Dallewal and Kisan Mazdoor Sangharsh Committee general secretary Sarwan Singh Pandher, among others, were part of the meeting, which began at around 6:30 pm and ended just before midnight.

During the meeting, the delegation of the Centre is learnt to have agreed to withdraw the cases against the farmers registered during the 2020-21 agitation against the now-repealed farm laws, said sources.

The Union Ministers are also believed to have agreed to give compensation to any left out families of farmers who died during the previous agitation.

The sources further said the Central Ministers also discussed various other

demands of the farmers during the meeting.

Punjab Cabinet Minister Kuldeep Singh Dhaliwal, who also attended the meeting, said the State Government stands with the farmers. The SKM (Non-Political) and the Kisan Mazdoor Morcha have announced that farmers would head to Delhi on Tuesday to press the Centre to accept their demands. Besides farmer leaders, Punjab Government's senior officers including Chief Secretary Anurag Verma and Director General of Police Gaurav Yadav were also present in the meeting.

Earlier, in Delhi, massive deployment of police and paramilitary personnel besides multi-layered barricading have been made to seal the national capital borders at Singhu, Tikri and Ghazipur to prevent the protesting farmers from entering the city on Tuesday.

# RBI RULES OUT REVIEW OF ACTION AGAINST PAYTM PAYMENTS BANK

NEW DELHI, Feb 12 (PTI)

RESERVE Bank of India Governor Shaktikanta Das on



Monday ruled out any review of the central bank's action against Paytm Payments Bank (PPBL), saying the decision was taken after a comprehensive assessment of the functioning of the lender.

In a major action against Paytm Payments Bank (PPBL), RBI, on January 31, directed it

to stop accepting deposits or top-ups in any customer accounts, wallets, FASTTags and other instruments after February 29. "At the moment let me say very clearly there is no review of this (PPBL) decision. If you are expecting a review of the decision, let me very clearly say there is (going to be) no review of the decision," Das said at a press conference after the 606th meeting of the Central Board of Directors of the RBI. The meeting was addressed by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. The Governor said any decision against entities regulated by the RBI is taken after a comprehensive assessment. While emphasising that RBI is supportive of the fintech sector, Das said it is also committed to protect the interest of customers as well as ensure financial stability. The central bank is expected to soon issue a set of FAQs on the Paytm matter this week.

While announcing the action against PPBL, the RBI had said the direction follows persistent non-compliances and continued material supervisory concerns.

# Nearly half of world's migratory species in decline: UN report

WASHINGTON, Feb 12 (AP)

NEARLY half of the world's migratory species are in decline, according to a new United Nations report released on Monday.

Many songbirds, sea turtles, whales, sharks and other migratory animals move to different environments with changing seasons and are imperilled by habitat loss, illegal hunting and fishing, pollution and climate change.

About 44% of migratory species worldwide are declining in population, the report found. More than a fifth of the nearly 1,200 species monitored by the U.N. are threatened with extinction. "These are species that move around the globe. They move to feed and breed and also need stopover sites along the way," said Kelly Malsch, lead author of the report released at a UN Wildlife conference in Uzbekistan.

Habitat loss in their journey can lead to dwindling populations. "Migration is essential for some species. If you cut the

migration, you're going to kill the species," said Duke University ecologist Stuart Pimm. The report relied on existing data, including information from the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Red List, which tracks whether a species is endangered. Participants of the UN meeting plan to evaluate proposals for conservation measures and also whether to formally list several new species of concern. "One country alone cannot save any of these species," said Susan Lieberman, V-P for international policy at the nonprofit Wildlife Conservation Society.

At the meeting, eight Governments from South America are expected to jointly propose adding two species of declining Amazon catfish to the UN treaty's list of migratory species of concern, she said.

The Amazon River basin is world's largest freshwater system. "If the Amazon is intact, the catfish will thrive — it's about protecting the habitat," Lieberman said.

# 4 days on, no clarity on next Pak PM

Omer Farooq Khan | TNN

**TOI** LINE OF NO CONTROL

SANDEEP ADHWARYU

## 'Nawaz, Bilawal in power-sharing talks'

**Islamabad:** Pakistan's key political players have not finalised the name of the country's new PM even as consultations between them have been on for four days following the controversial national and provincial elections, considered the most rigged in Pakistan's history.

The names of former three-time PM Nawaz Sharif (74), his brother, ex-PM Shehbaz Sharif (72), and former foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari (35) have so far surfaced. Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf followers, however, want to see their jailed party chief, Imran Khan, back in office, a wish that may not get fulfilled in the given situation.

PTI-backed Independent candidates have so far won 93 National Assembly seats, the highest by any party, but it falls short of the 169-seat simple majority needed to form a federal govt. With 75 seats, the Nawaz Sharif-led PML-N finished second, despite having strong support from the powerful military establishment. Pakistan People's Party (PPP), led by ex-foreign minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, came in third with 54 seats. Another important stakeholder is Karachi-based Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) with 17 seats. Remaining lawmakers are from small-



er parties with one or two votes.

To form a govt at the centre, one likely scenario can be that PML-N allies with PPP and some smaller parties. The two parties have a working relationship since they jointly governed the country for 18 months after ousting Imran Khan's govt in April 2022. To win the PM's slot, PML-N, reports suggest, has offered the slots of president, NA speaker and Senate chairman

to PPP. PPP seems to be taking its time while considering its options, besides demanding the job of PM for Bilawal.

With the existing number of seats, PTI can only form govt by allying with either PML-N or PPP, but this seems unlikely. PPP has said that its doors for consultations are open to all. Imran's media adviser, Zulfi Bukhari, has said it is quite likely that PTI will sit in opposi-

The top leaders of PML-N and PPP have discussed a new power-sharing formula for dividing the five-year tenure between them, as efforts to form a coalition govt gathered pace on Monday. "It has been proposed that a PML-N candidate will serve as PM for three years and PPP's leader for two years," a source said after a meeting between the leaders of the two parties on Sunday, adding it wasn't yet decided who will get the first term. PML-N supremo Nawaz Sharif is still in the race for the PM slot despite his party not securing a simple majority. The party is also considering Nawaz's brother Shehbaz for the post. A PPP leader said the party has not withdrawn from its demand that Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari should be the PM. **PTI**

on instead of forming a coalition if it fails to muster a majority. Unsuccessful PTI candidates have filled the courts with claims of vote-rigging. PTI backers have also held demonstrations outside election commission offices across the nation.

The National Assembly must be called by the president within three weeks of polls. Becoming PM requires a simple majority — 169 of the 336 seats.

# From death to jail to freedom: Qatar releases 8 Navy veterans

## Returning Men Thank PM For His Intervention

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** Qatar has released former Indian Navy personnel who were sentenced to death, which was later commuted to imprisonment after

► **EDIT: Escape From Doha**  
► **PM launches UPI service in Lanka, Mauritius, P 17**

an intervention by the country's ruler, Emir Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani.

Seven out of the eight men, who were accused of allegedly spying for Israel, returned to India Monday morning. Com-

### ARRESTED IN AUG 2022

Photo: ANI



3 of the 7 ex-Navymen who returned Monday at Delhi airport

**Aug 30, 2022:** 8 ex-Navymen working for a pvt firm arrested in Qatar. Media reports say

they were arrested for spying

**Oct 26, 2023:** All 8 given death sentences by Qatar's court of first instance

**Dec 1:** PM Modi meets Qatar Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani on COP28 sidelines in Dubai

**Dec 28:** Court of appeal commutes death and sentences them to varying jail terms of 3-25 years

**Feb 12, 2024:** Vets return to India after Qatar frees them

mander Purnendu Tiwari, who had his death sentence reduced to life imprisonment, was the only individual to have not arrived. Official sources said he, too, had been released and his return had been delay-

ed because some legal formalities were yet to be completed. He also has family in Qatar.

Thanking the emir and Qatar govt, foreign secretary Vinay Kwatra said PM Modi had personally supervised

developments in the case and never shied away from any initiative that could have led to the release of the veterans.

The seven who returned are Captains Navtej Gill and Saurabh Vasisht, Amit Nagpal, SK Gupta, B K Verma and Sugunakar Pakala, and sailor Ragesh. "I feel delighted to finally be back in India safe and sound. I wish to thank PM Modi because this would not have been possible had it not been for his personal intervention. I also wish to express my gratitude to the emir of Qatar," Gill said.

Modi will travel to Doha on his way back from UAE later this week, though it was denied that the visit was scheduled after the release of the men.

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