

Baltimore bridge collapse: FBI opens criminal probe, focus on crew's role

New York: FBI has opened a criminal investigation into the Baltimore bridge collapse incident that will also look into whether the ship, mostly manned by Indians, left the key US port "knowing the vessel had serious systems problems", authorities said on Monday.

The 2.6-km-long, four-lane Francis Scott Key Bridge over the Patapsco River collapsed on March 26 after the 984-foot ship 'Dali' collided against it. The crew of the ship, which apparently lost power, included 20 Indians and one Sri Lankan. Six construction workers who were repairing potholes on the bridge fell into the river and died.

Washington Post reported on Monday that the FBI has opened a criminal investiga-

via Reuters



FBI investigation will reportedly focus in part on whether the mostly Indian crew of the cargo vessel Dali left the port knowing the freighter had serious systems problems

tion "focusing on the massive container ship that brought down the Francis Scott Key Bridge in Baltimore last month

— a probe that will look at least in part at whether the crew left the port knowing the vessel had serious systems problems."

FBI was aboard Dali conducting court-authorized law enforcement activity, the agency said. It didn't elaborate and said it wouldn't comment further on the probe. The National Transportation Safety Board has been investigating why the 213-million-pound ship lost power and crashed into the 47-year-old bridge. The probe has been focused on engine room equipment, the NTSB said last week.

Meanwhile, Baltimore mayor announced a partnership with two law firms to "launch legal action to hold the wrongdoers responsible" and mitigate harm to city residents. PTI & AP

Monsoon likely to be 'above normal': IMD

Season's Rainfall Pegged At 6% Higher Than Avg

Vishwa.Mohan
@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: India will likely experience 'above normal' monsoon (June-Sep) rainfall with fairly good distribution in most parts of the country, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said on Monday. If the forecast comes true, good rainfall is expected to positively impact agriculture, boosting farm operations and eventually driving the economy with higher rural demand.

Though in certain areas — including Odisha, northeastern states and parts of Jharkhand, Chhattisgarh and southern West Bengal — monsoon may be below par, 'above normal' rainfall is likely in Punjab, Haryana and

FACTORS GOING FOR GOOD RAINS

1 El Niño Likely To Transition To La Niña | La Niña conditions, likely to develop by July-Aug, generally favour good monsoon. In 22 La Niña years since 1951, only 3 led to below normal or deficient monsoon. 2024 is likely to be the 4th La Niña year since 2019



2 Positive Indian Ocean Conditions | Indian Ocean

Dipole (IOD) expected to turn positive, which usually favours good rains, by July this year

3 Snow Cover In Northern Hemisphere | Area under snow cover in northern hemisphere, including Eurasia, has been below normal this winter (Dec-March). Low snow cover is a positive indicator for monsoon rainfall later in the year

IMD Forecast | Countrywide rains likely to be **106%** of long period average during monsoon season (July-Sept), with **61%** probability of above normal or excess rainfall

the monsoon core zone (large areas of central India where agriculture in many areas continues to depend on monsoon rains).

"Quantitatively, the seasonal rainfall over the country as a whole is likely to be 106% of long period average (LPA) with a model error of +/-5%," said M Ravichandran, secretary in the ministry of earth sciences, while jointly releasing the monso-

on forecast with IMD chief Mrutyunjay Mohapatra.

Monsoon rainfall between 104-110% of LPA (4% to 10% above average rainfall of 87cm) is categorised as 'above normal'. IMD's forecast probability shows there is 31% chance of 'above normal' rainfall and 30% chance of 'excess' rains (above 110%) this year.

► **Related report, P 10**

Iran assures India access to its crew, calls for efforts to end war in Gaza

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Iranian foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian assured his counterpart **S Jaishankar** in their phone conversation Sunday that Indian officials will be allowed access to 17 Indian crew members who were detained after Iran's Revolutionary Guards seized a cargo vessel for its links with Israel.

Jaishankar had spoken to the Iranian minister to discuss the need for immediate de-escalation in the Iran-Israel conflict. He also sought an early release of the Indian crew members.

"We are monitoring the situation concerning the

seized ship, & arrangements will be made for representatives of Indian govt to meet with the crew members of the vessel in question," said the Iranian minister to Jaishankar, according to a readout released by Iran on Monday.

"Took up the release of 17 Indian crew members of MSC Aries. Discussed the current situation in the region. Stressed the importance of avoiding escalation, exercising restraint and returning to diplomacy. Agreed to remain in touch," Jaishankar had said in a post on X. He had also spoken to his Israeli counterpart Israel Katz.

According to Iran, Amirabdollahian conveyed to

Jaishankar details of Iran's "legitimate defence and punitive measures against the Israeli regime", while urging India to play an active role in ending the war in Gaza.

"Amirabdollahian urged India to maintain its role through UNSC to halt the war in Gaza, which lies at the core of current crisis," said Iran.

On Monday in Bengaluru, Jaishankar said he had asked his Israeli and Iranian counterparts to "calm down" and not escalate further. "A large part of our shipping passes through this region and also, oil comes from there. So we are concerned when there is this kind of escalation. Hence, our effort has been to tell both of them to calm down," the EAM said.



WHY IT'S HARD TO HIT ISRAEL WITH DRONES AND MISSILES

As more than 300 enemy drones, cruise missiles and rockets flew towards Israel on the night of April 13, Israelis sought refuge in bunkers, but they might as well have stayed put at home because "99% of the missiles" were neutralised outside Israeli airspace. In fact, the Iranian attack gave Israel a chance to demonstrate the efficacy of its high-tech air defences developed since the 1980s.

3-LEVEL SHIELD

Israel uses three broad types of missile interceptors to counter the threat from Iran's ballistic missiles, and rockets and mortars fired by Hamas, Hezbollah and other Iranian proxies

A Iron Dome B David's Sling C Arrow 2 and 3

IRON DOME

Implemented in 2011, the Dome has saved hundreds of lives in Israel by destroying rockets launched not directly from Iran but the surrounding territories of Gaza, southern Lebanon and Syria. The system uses radar to detect incoming rockets, shells, planes, choppers, etc, but is intelligent enough to disregard attacks that don't pose a threat to life and property. Each interception attempt costs roughly \$40,000. There are 10 Iron Dome batteries around the country with a long-term success rate of at least 90% against short-range missiles.

TOI Explains



DAVID'S SLING

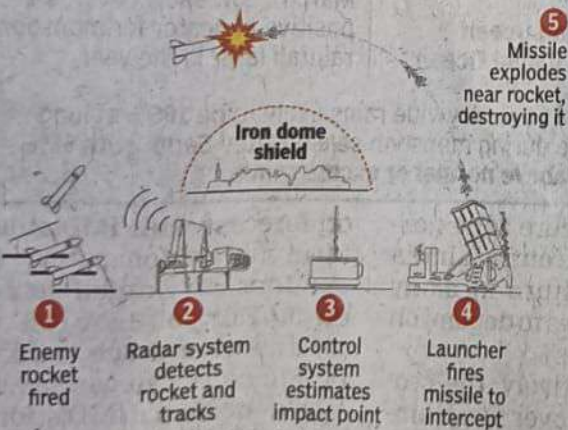
Like the Dome, this medium-range interception system was developed by Israeli firm Rafael (not to be confused with Rafale jets made by French firm Dassault) and made operational in 2017. It can intercept heavy missiles like Zelzal-2, Fateh-110 and M-600. In 2023, it neutralised a rocket fired from the Gaza Strip.

ARROW 2: This system is relatively old, developed over a decade after Iraq fired 42 Scud missiles at Tel Aviv and Haifa in the Gulf war of 1991. Arrow 2 was operationalised in 2000 and aims to destroy long-range ballistic missiles, such as Scud and Iran's Shahab, before they re-enter the atmosphere on their downward path. It can destroy a missile while it's about 200km away from Israeli airspace, but is expensive, with each interceptor missile costing \$3 million. Israel used Arrow 2 to destroy a surface-to-surface ballistic missile fired by Iran-backed Houthis from Yemen last Oct.

ARROW 3: Like Arrow 2, the Arrow 3 defence system targets long-range ballistic missiles while they are still flying through space. However, it uses faster 'hypersonic' missiles to hit targets. It was implemented in 2017, and demonstrated its efficacy last Nov when it downed a missile fired by the Houthis.



How Israel's Iron Dome Defence system works



Source: Rafael-Advanced Defence Systems



A battery of Israel's Iron Dome defence missile system, deployed to intercept rockets, sits in Ashkelon

Wholesale inflation hits 3-month high of 0.53 per cent in March

NEW DELHI, Apr 15
(PTI)



WHOLESALE inflation in the country rose marginally to three-month high of 0.53 per cent in March compared to 0.20 per cent in the preceding month due to increase in prices of vegetables, potato, onion and crude oil.

The Wholesale Price Index (WPI)-based inflation was in the negative zone from April to

October and had turned positive in November at 0.26 per cent. The inflation in March 2023 was 1.41 per cent.

“The annual rate of inflation
(Contd on page 5)

Army chief on 4-day Uzbekistan visit in bid to boost defence ties

New Delhi: Army Chief Gen Manoj Pande is on a four-day visit to Uzbekistan to bolster defence ties as well as explore new avenues for military collaboration, even as an Army-IAF contingent is also in the Central Asian country for a joint combat exercise.

Gen Pande will hold talks with Uzbekistan defence minister Lt-Gen Bakhodir Kurbanov and deputy defence minister Maj Gen Khalmukhamedov Shukhrat Gayratjanov-

ich, among others, as well as visit different military establishments during his visit from April 15 to 18. "These dialogues are pivotal in fostering stronger military cooperation," Army spokesperson Colonel Sudhir Chamoli said.

Gen Pande will also visit Termez in southern Uzbekistan on April 18 to witness 5th edition of bilateral combat exercise 'Dustlik' to expand military interoperability between the two armed forces. TNN

India, France discuss ways to boost anti-terror cooperation

NEW DELHI, Apr 15 (PTI)

INDIA and France on Monday explored ways to bolster counter-terror cooperation, especially in checking use of new and emerging technologies by terrorists and containing terror financing.

The issues figured at the 16th meeting of the India-France joint working group on counter-terrorism that took place in Delhi.

"The two sides assessed counter terrorism challenges, including the use of new and emerging technologies by terrorists, misuse of Internet for terrorist purposes, radicalisation and terror financing," the

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

It said both sides exchanged views on the terrorist threats in their respective regions, including state-sponsored and cross-border terrorism in South Asia, Africa and Middle East, besides terror activities in the Af-Pak region.

"Anti-India separatist activities, and countering terror financing, organised crime and narco-terror network also featured in the discussions," the MEA said in a statement.

It said the Indian side presented its viewpoints on NMFT (No Money for Terror) and FATF (Financial Action Task Force),

which led to an exchange of respective positions by the two sides.

"Both sides emphasised the importance of strengthening counter-terrorism cooperation through exchange of information, capacity building, training programmes and exercises, and cooperation at the multilateral fora, such as the UN, FATF and NMFT," the MEA said.

The Indian delegation at the meeting was led by Joint Secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs, K D Dewal.

The French delegation was headed by Ambassador Olivier Caron, Special Envoy for Counter-Terrorism and Organised Crime.