

Clinch hostage deal, end Gaza war: Kamala to Netanyahu

WASHINGTON, July 26 (AP)

VICE PRESIDENT Kamala Harris on Thursday said she urged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to reach a cease-fire deal soon with Hamas so that dozens of hostages held by the militants in Gaza since October 7 can return home.

Harris said she had a “frank and constructive” conversation with Netanyahu in which she affirmed Israel’s right to defend itself but also expressed deep concern about the high death toll in Gaza over nine months of war and the “dire” humanitarian situation there.

With all eyes on the likely Democratic nominee, Harris largely reiterated Biden’s long-standing message that it’s time find an endgame to the brutal war in Gaza, where more than 39,000 Palestinians have died. Yet, she offered a more forceful tone about the urgency of the moment just one day after Netanyahu gave a fiery speech to Congress in which he defended the war, vowed “total victory” against Hamas and made relatively scant mention of cease-fire negotiations.

“There has been hopeful movement in the talks to secure an agreement on this deal,”

Harris told reporters shortly after meeting with Netanyahu. “And as I just told Prime Minister Netanyahu, it is time to get this deal done.”

Netanyahu met separately earlier in the day with President Joe Biden, who has also been calling on Israel and Hamas to come to an agreement on a US-backed, three-phase deal to bring home remaining hostages and establish an extended cease-fire.

Harris said following her meeting with Netanyahu that Israel’s war in Gaza is more complicated than simply about people being supportive of one side or the other.

Jaishankar meets Lavrov; discusses bilateral ties

VIENTIANE, July 26 (PTI)

EXTERNAL Affairs Minister S Jaishankar on Friday met his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov and leaders from South Korea, Japan, Singapore, Laos and others and discussed various aspects of bilateral collaboration, including education and agriculture technology. Jaishankar is in the capital of the Laos People's Democratic Republic to participate in the meetings of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

He met Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov on the sidelines of the meeting.

"Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Foreign Minister of India Dr Subrahmanyam Jaishankar met on the sidelines of #ASEAN events Vientiane, July 26, 2024 #RussiaIndia #DruzhbaDosti," the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in a post on X.

Jaishankar held a bilateral meeting with his counterpart from South Korea and had a wide-ranging conversation on Special Strategic Partnership. **'ASEAN CORNERSTONE OF INDIA'S ACT EAST POLICY':** THE Association of South-East



Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov chats with Indian Foreign Minister S Jaishankar at the sideline of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Vientiane, Laos on Friday. (AP/PTI)

Asian Nations is the cornerstone of India's Act East Policy and its Indo-Pacific vision, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Friday, as he sought to expand political, economic and security cooperation with the 10-member influential regional bloc.

Jaishankar is here in the Laotian capital to participate in the meetings of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

In his remarks at the opening session of the ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers Meeting, Jaishankar said the priority that India attaches to ASEAN and EAS (East Asia Summit) platforms is evident from Prime Minister Narendra Modi visiting Jakarta last year on the very eve of the G20 Summit in New Delhi. He noted that Prime Minister Modi had announced a 12-point plan that has been largely acted upon.

Doval calls for increased BIMSTEC cooperation

NAYPYIDAW, July 26 (PTI)

NATIONAL Security Advisor Ajit Doval on Friday called on BIMSTEC nations to strengthen cooperation in counter-terrorism; combating drug trafficking, arms smuggling and organised crime.

Doval, leading the Indian delegation at the 4th annual meeting of the security chiefs of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), delivered India's national statement at the meeting here in Myanmar's capital.

"NSA delivered India's national statement at #BIMSTEC meet. He spoke on strengthening cooperation in counter-terrorism; combating drug trafficking, arms smuggling and organised crime; BIMSTEC connectivity; holding 2nd Ports Conclave; and water security of Himalayan river systems," the

NSA Ajit Doval during a meeting with Vietnam Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, in Hanoi. (PTI)



Embassy of India said. The meeting has been convened to strategise and coordinate initiatives crucial for addressing common security challenges faced by member states.

Earlier, Doval met his Myanmar counterpart Admiral Moe Aung on Thursday.

An Evening In Paris Games Begin

PARIS, July 26 (PTI)

The city of Paris turned into a colossal amphitheatre, and the iconic river Seine served as a track for the athletes' parade as France showcased its cultural diversity, spirit of revolution, impeccable craftsmanship and architectural heritage in a riveting opening ceremony for the 33rd Olympic Games here on Friday.

The spectacle started with a dreamy break from tradition as 'Parade of Nations' kicked off the proceedings in which athletes from 205 countries and one refugee team sailed down the Seine on boats despite rain threatening to play spoilsport.

French President Emmanuel Macron and International Olympic Committee head Thomas Bach were in attendance as French football legend Zinedine Zidane was shown sprinting down the streets of Paris with the Olympic flame in a pre-recorded video before action went live.

The six-kilometre parade began from Austerlitz bridge

and 85 boats carried more than 6800 athletes amid loud cheers from the gathered crowd. A good number of athletes also skipped the incredible show due to their competitions on Saturday.

The sequence of arrivals followed the march alphabetical order: The first was the Greek contingent, for being the spiritual home of the Games, followed by the Refugee team.

The Indian contingent is being led by two flag-bearers -- two-time Olympic medalist PV Sindhu and table tennis legend A Sharath Kamal.

The boats passed through the iconic landmarks of the city such as the restored Cathedral of Notre Dame, which was gutted in a fire five years ago, the iconic Louvre Museum and also a few of Games venues.

American Pop superstar Lady Gaga was among the first international artists to enthral the assembled crowd.

Amid the colourful proceedings, a mysterious torch-bearer also became a focus of attention as he darted around the city and its most famous landmarks, holding the flame,



Indian athletes attend the opening ceremony of the Paris Olympics dressed up in traditional attire. India is being represented by 117 athletes, including 47 women, in the sporting spectacle. (X)

The bridges dotting the parade route featured dance performances for the fans, who had gathered at different spots after more than two lakh free tickets were distributed

aside from the over one lakh that were sold. India is being represented by 117 athletes, including 47 women, in the sporting spectacle. Ace shuttler PV Sindhu shared her excitement of being the flag-bearer of the

country and said it is "one of the greatest honours" of her life. Taking to X, Sindhu also posted pictures of herself in a tricolour-inspired saree for the glittery ceremony. "Paris 2024, flagbearer—

Every athlete is India's pride: PM Modi

NEW DELHI, July 26 (ANI)

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi extended his best wishes to the Indian contingent as they gear up to script history at the Paris Olympics.

"As the Paris #Olympics commences, my best wishes to the Indian contingent. Every athlete is India's pride. May they all shine and embody the true spirit of sportsmanship, inspiring us with their exceptional performances. #Paris2024," PM Modi wrote on X.



American singer-songwriter and actress Lady Gaga performs during the opening ceremony.

one of the greatest honours of my life to hold our country's flag in front of millions," Sindhu wrote on X.

The duo led 78 sports persons and officials from 12 disciplines in the iconic first-ever outdoor opening ceremony in the history of the Games.

In the unique ceremony, thousands of Olympic athletes travelled on around 100 boats, cruising along the Seine and passed by some of Paris' most iconic landmarks, including the Notre Dame, Pont des Arts and Pont Neuf.

This is the third time Paris is hosting the Olympics after 1900 and 1924.

Defence reforms have been prioritised in last 10 yrs: PM

► Continued from P1

Unfortunately, such a sensitive issue related to national security has been made a subject of politics by some. They are the same people who weakened our armed forces by committing scams worth thousands of crores. They are the ones who did not want IAF to get modern fighter jets (Rafales). They had also made preparations to lock the (indigenous) Tejas fighter in a box, PM Modi said, taking a swipe at the previous UPA govt by recalling that Army lacked bulletproof jackets before he took over and the UPA govt allocated Rs 500 crore for one rank-one pension scheme.

"The very same people are spreading the canard that the govt came with Agnipath scheme to save pension mon-



PM Modi with former Army chief General VP Malik during the Kargil Vijay Diwas celebrations at Drass on Friday

ey," said Modi, stressing that the question of pension for those being recruited today would arise after 30 years.

"By then, I would be 105. Why would govt take a decision for it today & face abuse? We could have left that for the govts in the future. But we respected this decision taken by

the forces because for us, the security of the country is paramount, not party or politics."

"The truth is that the Agnipath scheme will increase the country's strength and the country will also get capable youth. Announcements have earlier been made about giving priority (in jobs) to Agniveers in the private sector and paramilitary forces."

He said those "misleading" the youth today had no regard for the armed forces in the past. In this context, he cited his govt's implementation of the "one rank, one pension (OROP)" scheme, under which ex-servicemen have been given more than Rs 1.2 lakh crore till now, and the construction of the national war memorial.

On need to upgrade military technologies amid ongoing geopolitical flux, he said

armed forces not only need latest weapons & equipment, but also "a modern working style and arrangements". "In the last 10 years, defence reforms have been prioritised, making our forces more capable and self-reliant," he said.

A major stake in defence procurements is now being given to the Indian defence industry, while 25% of the defence R&D has also been reserved for the private sector. "As a result of these efforts, India's annual defence production has crossed the Rs 1.2 lakh crore-mark," the PM said.

"In the past, India was counted only as an arms importer, but now it is making its mark as an arms exporter," he added, expressing happiness that armed forces have decided to stop importing over 5,000 defence products & items.

Agniveers will be 'very useful' for ITBP: DG

NEW DELHI, July 26 (PTI)

AGNIVEERS will prove to be "very useful" for the ITBP, which guards the Line of Actual Control between India and China, its top officer said on Friday.

All preparations have been made for the recruitment of these "well-trained and disciplined" soldiers, who will join the border force from the Army, Indo-Tibetan Border Police (ITBP) Director General (DG) Rahul Rasgotra said in a video message posted by the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) on its X handle.

As it is known, he said, the ITBP and Army personnel guard the India-China front and hence "these well-trained and disciplined Agniveers will

prove to be very useful for the force".

The DG said the force "believes that the joining of Agniveers will provide a new energy to the ITBP and the force will benefit from them".

The required amendment in the recruitment rules of the ITBP for inducting Agniveers has been issued by the MHA and they will be eligible for age and physical efficiency test relaxation, Rasgotra said.

The statement comes at a time when there is fresh spotlight on the Agnipath recruitment scheme for short-term induction of personnel in the Army, Navy and the Air Force.

The government introduced the Agnipath recruitment scheme in 2022 with an aim to

bring down the age profile of the three services.

The scheme provides for recruiting as Agniveers youngsters between the age group of 17-and-a-half and 21 for a block period of four years with a provision to retain 25 per cent of them for another 15 years.

Several opposition parties, including the Congress, have been targeting the government over the scheme, raising questions about what would happen to the remaining 75 per cent of Agniveers after the end of their four-year tenure.

The about 90,000 personnel ITBP is primarily tasked with guarding the 3,488-kilometre-long Line of Actual Control (LAC) with China, apart from rendering a variety of internal security duties.

Agniveers to get reservation in Govt jobs in U'khand: CM

DEHRADUN, July 26 (PTI)

AGNIVEERS will be granted quota in Government jobs in Uttarakhand upon their return after serving in the Armed Forces, Chief Minister Pushkar Singh Dhami announced on Friday. Addressing a programme here to pay tributes to the Armed Forces personnel who fought valiantly in extremely harsh conditions, Dhami said legislation will be brought to extend the reservation.

"We will make provisions

and bring an Act to give reservation to them in government services. We are working on this plan. We will make use of their skills and discipline in Government departments," he said. The CM also announced that the aid extended to the kin of martyrs will be increased from Rs 10 lakh to Rs 50 lakh. "No sacrifice can be bigger than the act of laying down one's life to secure the country's borders. No grant or honour can be enough for this supreme sacrifice," he added.