

2,500 kg Narcotics seized by Navy in Indian Ocean



Officials of INS Tarkash, a frontline frigate of the Indian Navy, after an operation in which 2,500 kg of narcotics was seized in the Western Indian Ocean. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, Apr 2 (PTI)

INDIAN Navy's frontline frigate INS Tarkash has seized over 2,500 kgs of narcotics in the Western Indian Ocean, officials said on Wednesday. The operation was launched after the Navy received inputs on March 31 on suspicious movements of some vessels, they said.

After systematically interrogating all suspicious vessels in the vicinity, INS Tarkash intercepted and boarded a suspect dhow, owing to the coordinated efforts with the P8I marine surveillance aircraft and the Maritime Operations Centre in

Mumbai, a Navy spokesperson said. Additionally, the ship launched its integral helicopter to monitor the activities of the suspicious vessel and identify other vessels likely operating in the area, he said.

A specialist boarding team, along with Marine Commandos, boarded the suspect vessel and conducted a thorough search, leading to the discovery of various sealed packets, he said.

Further search and interrogation revealed over 2,500 kgs of narcotics substances stored in different cargo holds and compartments onboard the vessel, he said.

Poonam Gupta appointed RBI Deputy Governor

NEW DELHI, Apr 2 (PTI)

THE Government has approved the appointment of NCAER Director General Poonam Gupta as Deputy Governor of the Reserve Bank of India for a period of three years, according to sources.



The post of the Deputy Governor of RBI fell vacant after M D Patra

demitted office in January.

The sources said, the Appointments Committee of Cabinet (ACC) approved Gupta's appointment for the post of Deputy Governor in the RBI for three years from the date of joining.

Currently, Gupta is the Director General of National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER), India's largest economic policy think tank.

She is also a member of the Economic Advisory Council to the Prime Minister and Convener of the Advisory Council to the 16th Finance Commission. She joined NCAER in 2021 after working in senior positions for nearly two decades at the IMF and World Bank in Washington DC.

Gupta taught at the Delhi School of Economics, University of Maryland (USA) and as a visiting faculty at ISI, Delhi. She has also been the RBI Chair Professor at NIPFP and a Professor at ICRIER.

Gupta holds a Master's degree and PhD in Economics from University of Maryland, USA, and a Master's degree in Economics from Delhi School of Economics, University of Delhi.

Israel to seize parts of Gaza, set up new corridor across strip

Jerusalem/Cairo: Israel announced a major expansion of military operations in Gaza on Wednesday, saying large areas of the enclave would be seized and added to its security zones, accompanied by large-scale evacuations of the population.

PM Benjamin Netanyahu said troops were seizing an area he called the Morag Axis, a reference to a former Israeli settlement once located in an area between the cities of Rafah and Khan Younis in the south of Gaza Strip.



reference to a former Israeli settlement once located in an area between the cities of Rafah and Khan Younis in the south of Gaza Strip.

"Because we are now dividing the strip and we are increasing pressure step by step so they will give us our hostages," he said in a video message.

He said the move, which would cut off Rafah from Khan Younis, would give Israel control of a second axis in southern Gaza in addition to the 'Philadelphia Corridor', running along the border with Egypt, which Israel sees as a key line preventing the smuggling of weapons into Gaza. Separately, the Israeli military said troops had completed the encirclement of the Tel al-Sultan area near Rafah and killed dozens of militants. Earlier, defence minister Israel Katz said troops would expand their operation in Gaza to clear out militants and infrastructure "and seize large areas that will be added to the security zones of the state of Israel". His statement did not make clear how much land Israel intended to seize or whether the move represented a permanent annexation of territory.

Gaza's health ministry said at least 60 people were killed in Israeli strikes Wednesday, with 19 people killed in a strike at a UN clinic being used to house displaced people. REUTERS

IISc team's bacteria-based method may help repair cracked bricks on Moon

NEW DELHI, Apr 2 (PTI)

RESEARCHERS have developed a method using bacteria to repair bricks used to build structures on the Moon that can develop cracks due to the widely swinging temperatures on the lunar surface.

A team of researchers from the Indian Institute of Science (IISc), Bengaluru said future explorations of the Moon are no longer planned as "flyby" missions, instead involve setting up a permanent habitat -- for example, NASA's Artemis missions.

However, the lunar environment is extremely harsh. Temperatures can swing from 121 degrees Celsius to -133 degrees Celsius in a single day and the Moon is also constantly hit by solar winds and meteorites, they said.

Bricks exposed to such an environment can develop cracks,

which can weaken the structures built using them, the team said.

In a research paper, published in the journal *Frontiers in Space Technologies*, the authors described that defects were artificially created in bricks, into which a slurry made of 'Sporosarcina pasteurii' bacteria, guar gum and a lunar soil-like material was poured.

The bacteria can decompose urea in the environment to convert it into carbonate and ammonia. Calcium in the bricks can react with carbonate to form calcium carbonate -- which along with guar gum serves as "both a filler and a cementing agent", thereby repairing the cracks, the authors said.

They also found that the reinforced bricks were able to withstand temperatures ranging from 100 degrees Celsius to 175 degrees Celsius.

"Temperature changes can be

much more dramatic on the lunar surface, which can, over a period of time, have a significant effect," co-author Koushik Viswanathan, associate professor at the department of mechanical engineering, IISc.

Lead author Alope Kumar, associate professor at the department of mechanical engineering, IISc, said, "We were initially not sure if the bacteria would bind to the sintered brick. But we found that the bacteria can not only solidify the slurry but also adhere well to this other mass."

Sintering is the process of heating a compact mixture of soil-like material and a polymer called 'polyvinyl alcohol' to very high temperatures for creating much stronger bricks.

"It's one of the classical ways of making bricks. It makes bricks of very high strength, more than adequate even for regular housing," Kumar said.

Pak opens unprovoked fire, breaks truce along LoC in Poonch sector

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

Srinagar/Jammu: Pakistani soldiers violated the ceasefire with gunfire along the Line of Control in J&K's Poonch district on Tuesday, prompting an effective response from Indian troops.

"On April 1, a mine blast occurred in Krishna Ghati sector while Pakistan Army was patrolling along the LoC. This was followed by unprovoked firing and ceasefire violation," Jammu-based defence PRO Lt Col Suneel Bartwal said on Wednesday. "Our troops responded effectively. The Indian Army continues to dominate the LoC. The situation is under control."

The area has an anti-infiltration obstacle system, with landmines that get washed away by rain and triggered by cattle or human movement.

Pakistan has in the past repeatedly breached the 2003 ceasefire agreement in its attempts to push terrorists under covering fire. In 2019, over 3,200 violations were report-

ed, averaging nine a day, coinciding with Pakistan's opposition to the constitutional changes in J&K that year. It peaked in 2020 with 5,100 — the highest in two decades.

The violations reduced after the 2021 reaffirmation of the truce by the rival DGs of military operations, although sporadic cases have continued. Indian Army has stressed the importance of upholding the 2021 agreement to maintain peace along LoC.

Tuesday's violation follows an earlier breach on Feb 12, when Pakistani troops opened fire in forward areas along the LoC in Poonch. Last year, a BSF jawan was wounded in Pakistani firing in Akhnour on Sept 11, while Indian border posts in Krishna Ghati came under fire on June 29.

Security forces remain on high alert, particularly in spring when melting snow eases infiltration routes. According to sources, 70 to 80 Pakistani terrorists are currently active in J&K, with 55 to 60 operating in Jammu region.

Coal India working on acquiring lithium block in Argentina: CIL Chairman

NEW DELHI, Apr 2 (PTI)

STATE-OWNED CIL is actively working on acquiring a lithium block in Argentina and is eyeing a critical mineral block in Australia, the company's Chairman-cum-Managing Director P M Prasad on Wednesday.

"In Argentina we are actively working... The teams visited Argentina two to three times. We had Government-to-Government interaction," Prasad told reporters during the curtain-raiser of the 11th Asian Mining Congress and 11th International Mining Exhibition.

The search for lithium block is also underway in Australia, he said. Critical minerals, including lithium, play an important role in the production of clean energy technologies, from wind turbines to electric cars. They are particularly in demand for the production of batteries for electric cars.

The chairman said there will be no coal shortage at electricity generating units this year.

"There will be no shortage this time like last year. Our coal stock at pit-head at present is 106 million tonnes," he added. Coal India Ltd



(CIL), which accounts for over 80 per cent of domestic coal production, is targetting a production of 875 million tonnes (MT) in this financial year. The company's dispatch target for FY26 is 900 MT, he said.

CIL produced 781.1 MT of coal in 2024-25, about 7 per cent less than the company's target of 838 million tonnes for the fiscal year.

The chairman further said

increase in prices of coal by CIL with effect from April 16 will have a minor impact on profitability of the company. State-owned Coal India Ltd on Tuesday said its board has approved a Rs 10 per tonne increase in prices of both coking and non-coking coal with effect from April 16.

This price adjustment is aimed at contributing to the corpus of Coal Mines Pension Scheme-1998.

After marathon debate, Lok Sabha passes Waqf (Amendment) Bill

288 vote in favour, 232 against the Bill in LS

NEW DELHI, Apr 2 (PTI)

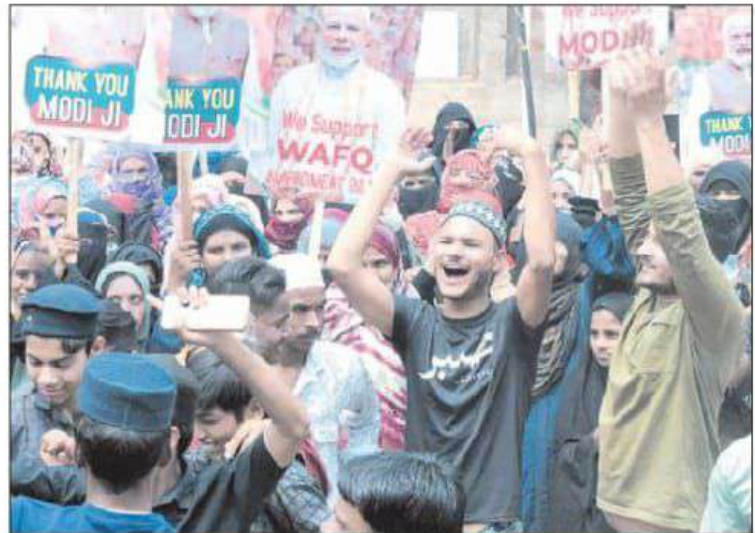
AFTER a marathon debate that lasted over 12 hours, the Lok Sabha passed the Waqf (Amendment) Bill 2025 well past midnight on Wednesday with Home Minister Amit Shah categorically assuring the Muslim community that the new Bill does not interfere with their religious practices.

The debate, which started on Wednesday afternoon, went past midnight with a division of votes, as the Bill was passed with 288 MPs voting in favour and 232 against. The National Democratic Alliance led by the Bharatiya Janata Party aced the test in the lower house backed by its own big numbers and support from its allies including the Telugu Desam Party and Janata Dal.

Before voting, the debate saw
(Contd on page 3)

Over 97.27 lakh petitions and memorandums were received by the JPC through physical and online formats and the JPC had gone through each of them before finalising its report, says Rijju

Rumours being spread that Waqf Bill is interference in religious matters of Muslims and properties donated by them, said Amit Shah



Muslim supporters in old Bhopal carrying placards thanking Prime Minister Modi for tabling Waqf (Amendment) Bill in Lok Sabha on Wednesday.

(Pic by Bhupendra Singh)

Muslim bodies express differing views on Waqf (Amendment) Bill

LUCKNOW/VARANASI/BAREILLY (UP), Apr 2 (PTI)

AS THE Bharatiya Janata Party-led Government tabled the Waqf (Amendment) Bill in Parliament on Wednesday, some Muslim bodies denounced it while some of them lauded the Bill.

All India Muslim Personal Law Board (AIMPLB) official said, it will

be detrimental rather than beneficial for Muslims, a senior.

"The AIMPLB and other Muslim organisations have conveyed their concerns over the Bill to the Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC), but they were not considered," Maulana Khalid Rashi Farangi Mahali, who is a senior executive member of the Board, told PTI.

"We have urged all MPs to con-

sider the sentiments of the Muslim community and reject the proposed amendments," he said while asserting that Waqf properties hold religious significance comparable to fundamental Islamic practices.

In Bareilly, Ittihad-e-Millat Council chief Maulana Tauqueer Raza said that the Bill would not be accepted under any circumstances.

"We cannot approve any such

Bill, nor can we support anything that goes beyond the constitutional framework. We will oppose the Waqf (Amendment) Bill through democratic means," he said while talking to reporters.

He emphasised that the resistance against the Bill has not been adequate so far.

He alleged that the Bill, which is
(Contd on page 3)