

# Rs 1,070 cr deal for procuring 14 fast patrol vessels

NEW DELHI, Jan 24 (PTI)

THE Defence Ministry on Wednesday sealed a Rs 1,070 crore deal with Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Ltd (MDL) for pro-



cursement of 14 fast patrol vessels for the Indian Coast Guard.

The multi-role fast patrol vessels will be indigenously designed, developed and manufactured by MDL and will be

delivered in 63 months. "The Ministry of Defence has signed a contract with MDL Mumbai on January 24 for acquisition of 14 Fast Patrol Vessels (FPVs) for the Indian Coast Guard. The value

of the contract is Rs 1,070 crore," the ministry said. "These FPVs will be equipped with multipurpose drones, wirelessly-controlled remote water rescue craft lifebuoy and AI capability," it said.

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# A third World War is not beyond realm of possibility: UN General Assembly President

NEW DELHI, Jan 24 (PTI)

THE situation in the Red Sea is “extremely disturbing” and it has the potential to escalate further, President of UN General Assembly Dennis Francis said on Wednesday.

At a media interaction, Francis cautioned against “regionalisation” of the conflict, adding a “third World War is not beyond the realm of possibility.”

The president of the UN General Assembly, who is on a five-day visit to India, also strongly pitched for reform of the UN Security Council, saying its present composition does not reflect contemporary geopolitical realities.

Francis complimented India’s call for a two-State solution to the conflict in Gaza, describing New Delhi’s position as “highly responsible, pragmatic, sensible and necessary”.

On the situation in the Red Sea, Francis said it is “extremely disturbing.

“That is an extremely disturbing situation. It

would appear that third parties are facilitating this action being taken by the Houthis in the Red Sea -- very damaging and very dangerous,” he said.

“Because the last thing you really want is the regionalisation of that war. You do not want that because that would mean escalation and escalation breeds further escalation. So, a Third World War is not beyond the realm of possibility,” he said.

The top UN diplomat held “comprehensive talks” with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar covering a wide-range of issues including the situation in Gaza, the conflict in Ukraine, India’s engagement with the UN and UN Security Council reform.

“So glad to welcome @un\_pga Dennis Francis this afternoon in New Delhi. His positive sentiments for our G20 Presidency and Voice of Global South Summits were notable. They have strengthened multilateralism,” Jaishankar said on ‘X’.

# 'Israel's rejection of two-State solution, a threat to global peace'

UNITED NATIONS, Jan 24 (AP)

THE United Nations chief warned Israel on Tuesday that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's rejection of a two-State solution will indefinitely prolong a conflict that is threatening global peace and emboldening extremists everywhere.

In his toughest language yet on the Israeli-Hamas war, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told a ministerial meeting of the UN Security Council that "the right of the Palestinian people to build their own fully independent State must be recognised by all, and a refusal to accept the two-State solution by any party must be firmly rejected."



Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, speaks on Tuesday at United Nations Headquarters. (AP/PTI)

The alternative of a one-State solution "with such a large number of Palestinians inside without any real sense of freedom, rights and dignity ... will be inconceivable," he said.

Guterres also warned that the risks of regional escalation of the conflict "are now becoming a reality," pointing to Lebanon, Yemen, Syria, Iraq and Pakistan. He urged all parties "to step back from the brink and to consider the horrendous costs" of a wider war.

Netanyahu's rejection of a Palestinian State in any post-war scenario opened a wide rift with Israel's closest ally, the United States, which says the war must lead to negotiations for a two-State solution where Israel and the Palestinians can

live side-by-side in peace. That goal is supported by countries around the world, as Ministers and ambassadors reiterated.

The UN Secretary-General also repeated his long-standing call for a humanitarian cease-fire - an appeal supported by almost all nations.

But Israel's UN Ambassador Gilad Erdan again rejected a cease-fire, saying Hamas, which carried out a brutal attack on southern Israel on October 7, is committed to attacking again and destroying Israel, and a halt to fighting will only allow the militants "to regroup and rearm."

He urged the Security Council to "eliminate the root" of the conflict, which he said was Iran.



# Calls for holding elections in Israel as Gaza war drags on

TEL AVIV, Jan 24 (AP)

EVER since Israel was attacked on October 7, a main Israeli highway has been flanked by billboards preaching national unity and a ubiquitous wartime slogan: "Together we will win."

But lately those billboards have been replaced with a starkly different message: A call for immediate elections.

The mood of the Israeli public is shifting after more than 100 days of war in Gaza – and the catalyst is a rift over the polarising leadership of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Israelis stunned by the brutal Hamas attack initially put aside their differences and rallied behind the war effort. Now old divisions that could alter the course of the war are reemerging.

As the death toll among Israeli soldiers keeps rising, and with dozens of hostages still in Gaza and Hamas still standing, more Israelis are vocally pushing back against Netanyahu and his Government. The public is also increasingly divided over whether the military can simultaneously achieve Netanyahu's

stated goals of destroying Hamas and freeing all the hostages.

"The Israeli public is rediscovering its political tribalism," said Nadav Eyal, a commentator for the 'Yedioth Ahronot' newspaper. "It inherently limits the decision-making process when you don't enjoy the public's trust."

Netanyahu, the country's longest-serving leader, still heads a coalition that is clinging to power despite the criticism. But opponents say he lacks a clear vision for how to get Israel out of Gaza. They

believe political and personal motivations are clouding his decision-making.

The Prime Minister's opponents say he is beholden to ultranationalist supporters in Parliament, many of whom have called for the expulsion of Palestinians from Gaza or for Israel to resettle the area. And they point to corruption charges hanging over him as evidence that it is in his self-interest to drag out the war.

Netanyahu says he has the country's best interests in mind and that he will answer tough questions about October 7.



# Turkiye Backs Sweden's Nato Bid

## Stoltenberg Hails Move, Urges Hungary To Follow Suit

**Istanbul:** Turkiye's parliament voted Tuesday to allow Sweden to join Nato, putting the Nordic country one step closer to entering the military alliance and easing a diplomatic stalemate that has clouded Turkiye's relations with the US and hampered Western efforts to isolate Russia over its war in Ukraine.

The measure passed after a vote of 287-55, with four abstentions in the 600-member body. It will go into effect once it is published in the country's official gazette, usually a swift formality. That would make Hungary the only Nato member that has not approved Sweden's accession, depriving the alliance of the unanimity required to add a new member.

The bill's passage is a big moment for Nato, paving the way for expanding its deterrence against Russia at a time when some of its members are struggling to provide Ukraine with enough arms to roll back Russia's invasion. Sweden's accession would open a vast

stretch of Nordic land to potential military operations by the alliance and extend to Sweden the other members' automatic protection should it come under attack.

Nato secretary-general **Jens Stoltenberg** said in a statement late Tuesday that he welcomed the news from Turkiye, according to Reuters. But, he said, "I also count on Hungary to complete its national ratification as soon as possible."

He continued: "Sweden has fulfilled its commitments. Sweden's membership makes Nato stronger and all of us safer."

"Being a full-fledged ally means that if Sweden is under pressure or attack, there is no debate over whether Nato would defend it," said Camille Grand, a former Nato assistant secretary-general. "As we see very clearly with Ukraine, you can be the closest Nato partner, but if you're not an ally, the debate is different."

Despite Tuesday's vote, Sweden's swift accession is not

guaranteed. Turkiye could delay filing its formal approval with the alliance, and it remains unclear when Hungary, whose parliament is in recess until Feb 15, might provide its assent.

Still, Sweden's PM, Ulf Kristersson, praised the "positive" developments in Turkiye, writing on the social media platform X, "Today we are one step closer to becoming a full member of Nato."

On Tuesday, PM Viktor Orban of Hungary invited Sweden's PM to Hungary to "negotiate" Sweden's accession, suggesting that Hungary may seek concessions in exchange for its support. "I am convinced that strong mutual trust must be the foundation of any political and security arrangements between Sweden and Hungary," Orban wrote in a letter to the PM. Foreign minister Tobias Billstrom of Sweden responded that he did not see "any reason to negotiate" but that the two countries could "have a dialogue and continue to discuss questions," according to Swedish news agency TT. NYT





# After attack on base, US strikes three sites in Iraq linked to Iran-tied militias

The US on Tuesday carried out military strikes against three facilities in western Iraq associated with Iran-linked militias that American officials say attacked a major base in Iraq on Saturday, according to the Pentagon's Central Command, injuring at least four US service members.

The American strikes near Iraq's border with Syria on Tuesday hit headquarters, training locations and storage areas for rockets, missiles and drones belonging to the Kataib Hezbollah militia and other Iran-affiliated groups in Iraq, according to Central Command. "These precision strikes are in direct response to a series of escalatory attacks against US and coalition personnel in Iraq and Syria by Iranian-sponsored militias," defence secretary Lloyd Austin said in a statement.

The attack against Al Asad Air Base in Iraq on Saturday was the latest and the most serious of about 151 such rocket and missile strikes directed at

## Attack irresponsible escalation, says Iraq

Overnight US strikes on Iraqi militant groups that are part of the country's formal security forces showed "clear determination to harm security and stability in Iraq", a spokesperson for Iraq's PM Mohammed Shia al-Sudani said on Wednesday. Iraq is a rare ally of both Tehran and Washington. "This unacceptable act undermines years of cooperation, blatantly violates Iraq's sovereignty, and contributes to an irresponsible escalation," the spokesperson said, in some of the harshest criticism yet of the US by Iraq's prime minister. REUTERS

US troops based in Iraq and Syria since Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza started. At least four US service members have been treated for traumatic brain injuries, but all have since returned to duty, the Pentagon said on Tuesday. NYT

## Israel rejects ceasefire

Israel ruled out a Gaza ceasefire on Wednesday, with a government spokesperson appearing to push back against reports of a possible new mediated deal with Hamas. "Commenting on reported ceasefire agreements, Israel will not give up on the destruction of Hamas, the return of all the hostages, and there will be no security threat from Gaza towards Israel," the spokesperson, Ilana Stein, said, adding. "There will be no ceasefire." REUTERS



**UN COMPLEX HIT:** Tank shells hit a UN training centre sheltering tens of thousands of displaced people in Gaza's Khan Younis on Wednesday, killing at least nine people and injuring 75, a UN relief official said

AFP



# 2 ships with US def cargo attacked off Yemen; Qatar says gas shipping affected

**Jerusalem:** Two American-flagged ships carrying cargo for the US defence and state departments came under attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels on Wednesday, officials said, with the US navy intercepting some of the incoming fire.

The attacks on the container ships Maersk Detroit and Maersk Chesapeake further raise the stakes of the group's attacks on shipping through the vital Bab el-Mandeb Strait. The US and the UK have launched multiple rounds of air strikes seeking to stop the attacks. On Tuesday, the US, in its ninth strike in two weeks, hit two Houthi anti-ship missiles in Yemen.

Danish shipper Maersk identified two of its vessels affected by the attacks as the US-flagged container ships Maersk Detroit and Maersk Chesapeake. "While en route, both ships reported seeing explosions close by and the US navy accompaniment also intercepted multiple projectiles," Maersk said. "The crew, ship, and cargo are safe and unharmed. The US Navy has turned both ships around and is escorting them back to the Gulf of Aden." Maersk said both vessels carried cargo belonging to the US defence and state departments, as well as other government agencies, meaning they were "afforded the protection of the US navy."

The US military's Central Command in a statement blamed the Houthis for the attack, saying they fired "three anti-ship ballistic missiles." "One missile impacted in the sea," it said. "The two other missiles



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## Leave Yemen, Houthis tell US & UK nationals

Yemen's Houthis have ordered US and UK staff of the UN and Sanaa-based humanitarian groups to leave the country within a month. The decision follows strikes by the US and Britain against targets of the Iran-aligned group, which has been launching attacks on ships in the Red Sea. The US last week also returned the Houthis to a list of terrorist groups. The letter also ordered foreign organisations to not hire American and British citizens for Yemen's operations. REUTERS

were successfully engaged and shot down by the USS Gravelly".

Meanwhile, Qatar, one of the world's top exporters of liquefied natural gas, said its shipments had been affected by the Houthi attacks. Qatar, a key mediator between Hamas and Israel, has yet to see any of its ships attacked, however. A statement from its state-owned QatarEnergy suggested that cargos now are travelling around Africa's Cape of Good Hope, likely adding time to their trips. AP

# Cabinet OKs ₹8,500 cr scheme for coal projects

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

**New Delhi:** Government on Thursday approved Rs 8,500 crore as 'viability gap funding' to make coal-to-gas projects viable, a move that will provide an alternative method to exploit the country's vast coal reserves for fuelling economic growth with a lower carbon footprint.

Announcing the decision taken by the Cabinet, Union coal minister Pralhad Joshi said adoption of coal-to-gas technology will help reduce the country's

**Coal minister Pralhad Joshi said adoption of coal-to-gas technology will help reduce the country's dependence on imported natural gas, methanol, ammonia. He said a project planned by Coal India Ltd and GAIL will become operational in the next five years**

dependence on imported natural gas, methanol, ammonia and other essential industrial products.

He said a project planned by Coal India Ltd and GAIL will become operational in the next five years. "The country's pro-

ven coal reserve is good enough for more than 100 years and more areas being explored. Syngas (coal gas) is far less polluting

than burning coal and can be used for making other products," Joshi said adding government is targeting to gasify 100 million tonnes of coal by 2030.

Syngas comes in liquid form and is obtained by partially oxidising coal with air, oxygen, steam, or carbon dioxide under controlled conditions. It can be used as fuel in gas-fired power stations or make methanol for various industrial applications.

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