

Ecuador declares 2nd state of emergency over energy crisis

QUITO, Apr 20 (ANI)

ECUADOR'S President Daniel Noboa declared a second state of emergency on Friday over an energy crisis that has already led to rationing in the South American country.

Noboa, who took office in November, had declared an energy emergency and instituted power cuts earlier this week. His first emergency declaration, in January, sought to tame surging crime by allowing more coordination between

the military and police.

In Saturday's 60-day state of emergency, Noboa deployed the military and police to guard energy infrastructure, according to a decree published on his office's website. The latest state of emergency is meant to "guarantee the continuity of the public service of electricity", according to the decree. A drought caused in part by the climate phenomenon known as El Niño has hit levels at hydroelectric dams, which produce most of Ecuador's power.

Japan, China spar over Beijing's actions in Indo-Pacific

Beijing dismisses accusation saying hyped-up threat and a false

BEIJING, Apr 20 (ANI)

CHINA is challenging Japan's recent evaluation of the threat posed to the Indo-Pacific region by Beijing, dismissing it as a hyped-up threat and a false accusation, 'Voice of America' reported.

According to Japanese media reports and the Japanese Foreign Ministry's annual Diplomatic Bluebook (an annual report on Japan's foreign policy and international diplomacy published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Japan), released on Tuesday,

China's military activities are described as the "greatest strategic challenge." However, an official English version of the report has not been made public, as per 'Voice of America'.

The Bluebook reportedly criticises China's actions in the South China Sea and its efforts to alter the status quo in the East and South China Sea.

Following this, Japanese media says that for the first time since 2019, Japan seeks to build "a mutually beneficial relationship" with China "based on common strategic interests."

According to Voice of America, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian rebuffed Japan's criticisms during a news briefing on Tuesday. Lin stated, "Japan has resorted to the same old false accusations against China and hype of the 'China threat' in its 2024 Diplomatic Bluebook."

Further, he affirmed, "We urge Japan to change its wrong course of action, stop stoking bloc confrontation, truly commit itself to advancing a strategic relationship of mutual benefit."

G20 PRESIDENCY

Role played by India appreciated at IMF, World Bank meet: Seth

■ By Lalit K Jha

WASHINGTON, Apr 20 (PTI)

DURING the annual Spring meetings of the IMF and the World Bank there was a widespread appreciation of the role played by India during its G-20 presidency in building consensus on a range of key global issues, a top Indian official has said.

India hosted the G20 Summit in New Delhi from September 9-10. The summit adopted a 37-page consensus declaration overcoming major differences on the Russia-Ukraine war and took several steps to ensure the

stability of the global economy.

"There is a widespread appreciation of Indian presidency of the G-20 in building consensus on several issues, relevant for global development, conducted at various meetings during the presidency as well as the leaders' summit," Ajay Seth, Economic Affairs Secretary told PTI on Friday on the sidelines of the annual sprint meetings of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank.

Due to the ongoing Lok Sabha election, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman is not attending the annual IMF

and World Bank meetings.

Instead, the Indian delegation this time is being represented by senior Government officials, including RBI Governor Shaktikanta Das, and the Economic Affairs Secretary Ajay Seth.

There is the recognition that India provides practical examples of following successful development paths.

"There was also an appreciation that the very effective conduct of monetary policies and responsive and responsible fiscal policies is leading to maintaining its financial stability in emerging economies,



including India amid global conditions," Seth said. "There are a few ideas given on sustainable finance about how the financing for climate action should be happening," he said in response to a question.

India must continue reforms for sustained growth and investments, says Srinivasan

■ By Reena Bhardwaj

WASHINGTON, DC, Apr 20 (ANI)

INDIA is on a sustained growth path driven by consumption and public investments, India's economic performance stands out against the backdrop of global uncertainties said Krishna Srinivasan IMF Director, Asia and Pacific Department in an Exclusive interview to ANI.

"Growth at 6.8% in 2024-25 is an impressive number. And this is largely led by private consumption

and public investment" said Srinivasan.

Srinivasan says India has successfully navigated from the multiple shocks in the past starting from pandemic to recent tensions in gulf. While acknowledging India's growth potential, he also underscored the need for reforms in India to fully capitalise on demographic advantages.



Cash-strapped Pakistan makes formal request to IMF for another bailout

WASHINGTON/ISLAMABAD, Apr 20 (PTI)

PAKISTAN has made a formal request to IMF for seeking the next bailout package in the range of USD 6 to USD 8 billion with the possibility of augmentation through climate financing, a media report said on Saturday. Cash-strapped Pakistan also requested to dispatch the International Monetary Fund (IMF) review mission next month to firm up details of the next bailout

package for three years under the Extended Fund Facility (EFF).

However, the exact size and timeframe of the new package will only be determined after evolving consensus on the major contours of the next programme in May 2024, Geo News reported from Washington.

A high-level Pakistani delegation led by Finance Minister Muhammad Aurangzeb is currently visiting Washington to attend annual spring meetings of the IMF/World Bank.

MISSILE DEAL

THE delivery of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles by India to the Philippines marks an extremely significant change in Southeast Asian politics. The delivery of the missile system has come at a time when Philippines is locked in a territorial battle with China in the South China Sea. The BrahMos system carries the capacity to act as a massive deterrent to Beijing's aggression in the maritime domain. At the same time, the delivery fulfills India's promise of being a responsible neighbour who believes in equipping its good allies for a rules-based order in the region.

The BrahMos missiles are a proven product deployed by India at several strategic locations in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh. The Indian Army has already integrated multiple BrahMos regiments into its arsenal since 2007. India has delivered three batteries of the BrahMos missile to the archipelagic country which is set to deploy the system in its coastal areas to thwart frequent clashes in the South China Sea. The missile is one of the most successful missile programmes in the world and has been acknowledged as the foremost and swiftest precision-guided weapon on a global scale. Now, the first delivery of the missile system to an overseas friend has laid groundwork for sale of Indian defence systems in the extended neighbourhood countries which are locked in some or other territorial conflicts, especially with China.

The BrahMos deal with Philippines should now pitch India as a hub of quality defence exports in the middle-range countries in the Southeast Asian neighbourhood which are sprucing up their military preparedness in wake of the rapidly changing geopolitical realities. Apart from Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia, the United Arab Emirates, Argentina, Brazil, and South Africa have also shown liking for the system. Given India's ability to deliver affordable defence products, the BrahMos delivery can easily act as a catalyst for its strategic heft in the international playfield.

US sanctions 4 firms for providing ballistic missile components to Pak

WASHINGTON, Apr 20 (PTI)

THE US has slapped sanctions on three Chinese companies and one from Belarus for supplying missile-applicable items for Pakistan's ballistic missile programmes, including its long-range missile programme, the State Department has announced.

The names of the companies are Xi'an Longde Technology Development, Tianjin Creative Source International Trade and Granpect Co Ltd from China and Minsk Wheel Tractor Plant from Belarus.

These entities "have engaged in activities or transactions that have materially contributed to, or pose a risk of materially contributing to, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or their means of delivery, including any efforts to manufacture, acquire, possess, develop, transport, transfer or use such items, by Pakistan," State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Friday.

Miller said the US is committed to strengthening the

global non-proliferation regime by taking action to disrupt procurement networks supporting proliferation activities of concern.

China, an all-weather ally of Pakistan, has been the main supplier of arms and defence equipment to Islamabad's ambitious military modernisation programme.

The Minsk Wheel Tractor Plant in Belarus supplied special vehicle chassis to Pakistan's long-range ballistic missile programme. Such chassis are used as launch support equipment for ballistic missiles by Pakistan's National Development Complex (NDC), which is responsible for the development of Missile Technology Control Regime Category (MTCR) I ballistic missiles, according to a State Department Factsheet.

China's Xi'an Longde Technology Development Company Limited, supplied missile-related equipment, including a filament winding machine, to Pakistan's long-range ballistic missile programme that the US said was destined for Pakistan's NDC.

Filament winding machines can be used to produce rocket motor cases.

Tianjin Creative Source International Trade Co Ltd supplied missile-related equipment to Pakistan's long-range ballistic missile programme, including stir welding equipment (which the United States assesses can be used to manufacture propellant tanks used in space launch vehicles), and a linear accelerator system (which the United States assesses can be used in the inspection of solid rocket motors). Tianjin Creative's procurements were likely destined for Pakistan's Space and Upper Atmosphere Research Commission (SUPARCO), which develops and produces Pakistan's MTCR Category I ballistic missiles, the US State Department said.

Granpect Company worked with Pakistan's SUPARCO to supply equipment for testing large-diameter rocket motors.

In addition, Granpect Co Ltd also worked to supply equipment for testing large-diameter rocket motors to Pakistan's NDC.

Intense heatwave grips parts of India

NEW DELHI, Apr 20 (PTI)

A SEARING heatwave gripped parts of India on Saturday, with maximum temperatures ranging from 40 degrees Celsius to 46 degrees Celsius in many areas.

According to the India Meteorological Department (IMD), heatwave to severe heatwave conditions prevailed in Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, and Gangetic West Bengal during the day.

This ongoing heatwave affecting parts of Odisha, Jharkhand, and Gangetic West Bengal is the second heatwave spell this month. The first spell scorched parts of Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Gujarat.

On Saturday, maximum temperatures at some places were recorded seven to eight degrees above normal.

Baripada and Boudh in Odisha recorded a maximum temperature of 45.2 degrees Celsius, Midnapore and Bankura in West Bengal record-

ed 44.5 degrees Celsius and 44.6 degrees Celsius, respectively. Daltonganj and Jamshedpur in Jharkhand registered 43.6 degrees Celsius and 43.5 degrees Celsius, respectively, while Rajnandgaon in Chhattisgarh reported 43 degrees Celsius.

The threshold for a heatwave is met when the maximum temperature of a weather station reaches at least 40 degrees Celsius in the plains, 37 degrees in the coastal areas, and 30 degrees in the hilly regions, and the departure from normal is at least 4.5 notches. A severe heatwave is declared if the departure from normal temperature exceeds 6.4 notches.

Amid the prevailing but weakening El Nino conditions, the IMD had earlier warned of extreme heat during the April-June period when around a billion people are expected to exercise their franchise during the seven-phase general elections, heightening concerns about vulnerability to heatwaves.

Elon Musk delays India visit

■ Elon Musk said his proposed visit to India has been postponed due to “very heavy Tesla obligations”

NEW DELHI, Apr 20 (PTI)

AMERICAN tech billionaire Elon Musk on Saturday said his proposed visit to India has been postponed due to “very heavy Tesla obligations”. The electric carmaker Tesla CEO -- who was expected to be in India on April 21 and 22 and scheduled to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi -- wrote on X that



he is looking forward to coming to India later this year.

“Unfortunately, very heavy Tesla obligations require that the visit to India be delayed, but I do very much look forward to visiting later this year,” Musk wrote on X in

response to a post, which stated that his India visit planned for April 21-22 has been postponed as the reason could be that he needs to attend Tesla’s earnings call on April 23. Earlier this month, he had confirmed

his visit to India with a post on X saying, “Looking forward to meeting with Prime Minister @NarendraModi in India”.

Record 82 pc voter turnout in first phase of polling for 3 LS seats in W Bengal

KOLKATA, Apr 20 (PTI)

WEST Bengal recorded a voter turnout of nearly 82 per cent in the first phase of polling for three Lok Sabha seats in the State, an official said on Saturday. Amid sporadic incidents of violence, voting was held in Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri and Alipurduars parliamentary constituencies on Friday.

"The voter turnout was 81.91 per cent. We are not sure whether West Bengal's poll percentage is the highest in the country in the first phase of elections as the final figures are yet to be announced in many States. It might be one of the highest poll percentages recorded in the country," an ECI official told PTI.

Till 6 pm on Friday, the voter turnout was 82.17 per cent in Cooch Behar, 83.66 per cent in Jalpaiguri and 79.76 per cent in Alipurduars, he said.

In the 2019 Lok Sabha polls, the



People stand in queues to cast their vote at a polling station during voting for the LS elections 2024, at Dinhata in Cooch Behar on Friday. (ANI)

turnout in Cooch Behar, Jalpaiguri, and Alipurduars was 84, 86, and 83 per cent respectively. Altogether 56.26 lakh voters were eligible to exercise their franchise in the three Lok Sabha constituencies.

After Iran-Israel strikes,

blast at pro-Iran military base in Iraq rings alarm bells

One person was killed, 8 were injured in the blast.
US denies involvement, says 'no' airstrikes in Iraq.

BAGHDAD, Apr 20 (AP)

IRAQI authorities said on Saturday that they were investigating an explosion that struck a base belonging to the Popular Mobilisation Forces, a coalition of Iran-allied militias, killing one person and injuring eight.

Militia officials had initially described the explosion at the Kalsu military base north of Babylon — a former US base that was handed over to the Iraqi military in 2011 — as an airstrike, blaming it on US forces. The US Central Command denied in a statement that it had carried out any airstrikes in Iraq.

The PMF in a statement Saturday afternoon described the blast as an “attack” but did not blame any specific party.

Iraq's Security Media Cell said the country's air defence command had not detected any drones or fighter plane in the airspace of Babylon



A image grab from a video shows damage following an alleged bombing overnight on an Iraqi military base in the central province of Babylon housing a coalition of pro-Iranian armed groups. (AFP)

before or during the explosion. It said one PMF member died and eight people were injured, including an Iraqi army soldier. The PMF is a coalition of primarily Shiite, Iran-backed armed groups designated as an “independent military formation” within

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