

Balochistan shuts down illegal Iranian fuel pumps

Karachi: The caretaker government in Pakistan's Balochistan province has shut down around 500 petrol pumps illegally supplying cheap Iranian fuel to the people, adversely impacting local refineries amid the weakening economy and high inflation in the cash-strapped nation. Iranian fuel is considerably cheaper compared to the fuel products supplied by Pakistani refineries.

Balochistan's caretaker information minister Jan Achakzai said that these pumps were selling smuggled Iranian petrol and diesel to the people. "A nationwide crackdown is being carried out on the supply of Iranian fuel products in the country," he said.

The crackdown comes as Pakistan's caretaker government announced yet another hike in the prices of petrol and diesel, taking them to a historic high — over Rs



The move comes as Pak announced another hike in the prices of petrol and diesel — over Rs 330/L. Iranian fuel is sold illegally at Rs 220-230/L

330 per litre — amidst double-digit inflation in the cash-strapped country. The hike in prices was dictated to by the IMF which bailed out Pakistan's weak economy this year with a support package of \$3 billion.

Iranian fuel, however, is sold illegally in the country at approximately 220-230 rupees per litre. Smugglers move the Iranian fuel in containers via the land border crossings in Balochistan with Iran and the fuel then travels to other big cities like Karachi. PTI

First cargo ships reach Ukraine since Russia ended grain deal

Docking of 2 Vessels Signals Alternative Route For Critical Food Shipments

The first cargo vessels to arrive at a Ukrainian port since Russia terminated a deal under which Kyiv was able to export food crops across the Black Sea were moored on Sunday in Chornomorsk, offering early signs of hope that Ukraine could open an alternative route for grain shipments. Ukraine's grain exports provide a vital source of foreign exchange and are also important for global food markets, particularly for countries in Africa and West Asia that are facing hunger.



Bulk carrier Aroyat (in pic) and cargo vessel Resilient Africa arrived at the port of Chornomorsk near Odesa on Sunday. The two ships will be loaded with about 22,000 tonnes of wheat destined for nations in Africa and Asia

Kyiv drones targeted Crimea, Moscow, oil depot, says Russia

Russia said it had thwarted a coordinated Ukrainian attack on Crimea early on Sunday, while drones also targeted Moscow, disrupting air traffic in the capital, and caused a fire at an oil depot in the southwest of the country that was later extinguished. Russian air defence systems destroyed at least 6 drones targeting Crimea, the defence ministry said. In the Moscow region, two drones were destroyed. At least 30 flights were delayed and 6 cancelled at Moscow's major airports. REUTERS

consequential local grain prices, and the Danube ports can't handle the same volume as seaports. The interim corridor in the Black Sea, which Kyiv has asked the International Maritime Organisation to ratify, was opened on Aug. 10 as US and Ukrainian officials warned of possible Russian attacks on civilian vessels. Sea mines

Russia's ally Armenia leans West, eyes ICC despite Putin warrant

Armenia discussed with Russia its plans to come under the International Criminal Court's jurisdiction, Russian media said on Sunday, a move strongly opposed by Moscow after the court issued an arrest warrant for President Putin. Relations between the traditional allies have frayed badly since Putin launched an invasion of Ukraine. Yerevan has said it was moving to come under the court's jurisdiction, prompting Moscow to warn of "serious consequences" if it did. REUTERS

also make the voyage risky, and ship insurance costs are likely to be high for operators. Ukrainian officials said the corridor will be primarily used to evacuate ships stuck in the Ukrainian ports of Chornomorsk, Odesa and Pivdennyi since war broke out, but Ukraine also wants to use the corridor for its food exports. Five vessels have

Kim wraps up Russia trip, gets drones as gift

North leader Kim Jong-un left Russia on Sunday after a rare six-day visit that appeared to solidify his country's ties with President Putin — fanning Western fears that Pyongyang could provide Moscow with weapons for its assault on Ukraine. Kim's tour of Russia's far eastern region, which began Tuesday, has focused intensely on military cooperation, including a symbolic exchange of rifles with Putin and an inspection of state-of-the-art Russian weapons. Kim's first official visit abroad since the pandemic has sparked concerns that Moscow and Pyongyang will defy Western sanctions to secure an arms deal that could help the Kremlin continue its assault on Ukraine. Before departing the Russian city of Vladivostok, just over the border with North Korea, Kim was presented with five explosive drones, a reconnaissance drone and a bulletproof vest as gifts from the governor of the Primorye region. AFP



since used the corridor, which hugs the western Black Sea coast near Romania and Bulgaria, to leave Ukrainian ports.

The loadings are a test of Ukraine's ability to reopen shipping lanes at a time when Russia is trying to re-impose its de facto blockade. Moscow has launched frequent drone and missile attacks. NYT & AGENCIES

The bulk carrier Aroyat and the cargo vessel Resilient Africa are expected to be loaded with about 22,000 tonnes of wheat destined for countries in Africa and Asia, Ukraine's infrastructure minister, Oleksandr Kubrakov, said Saturday. Data from the Marine Traffic site showed the vessels moored in Chornomorsk on Sunday.

For months, Ukraine was able to safely export its grain from Black Sea ports under a deal brokered by the UN and Türkiye to ensure safe shipments. But Russia withdrew from the deal on July 17, with Kremlin officials arguing their demands for the facilitation of Russian food and fertiliser shipments had not been met. Following the withdrawal, the Russian defence ministry said it would regard any vessels in the Black Sea headed to Ukrainian ports as military targets.

Since then, Kyiv has sought to reroute transport through the Danube River, and road and rail links into Europe. But transport costs that way are much higher. Some European countries have balked at the

India, Brazil begin talks to resolve sugar dispute at WTO

New Delhi: India and Brazil have started talks to mutually resolve a sugar-related trade dispute at the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

As part of the solution, Brazil may share ethanol production technology with New Delhi, an official said. Brazil, who is the largest producer of sugarcane and ethanol in the world, is also a leader in the technology used for ethanol production.

"A few rounds of talks have been held as part of our efforts to resolve the dispute. Brazil is saying that they will share with us technology for ethanol (production). It is a positive thing," an official said.

Ethanol is used to blend with oil to power vehicles. The use of ethanol — extracted from sugarcane, broken rice and other agricultural produce — will help India in cutting its reliance on overseas shipments for meeting its oil needs, which currently stand at 85 percent of imports. It also cuts carbon emissions, and there is a target of 20 percent ethanol blended petrol by 2025.

India would also have to offer something as part of the mutually agreed solution to resolve the dispute at the Geneva-based multi-lateral body. Brazil is the largest producer and exporter of sugar in the world. India is the world's second-largest producer. AGENCIES

At G77, India reinforces its G20 Global South focus

Sachin.Parashar
@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: Following its successful hosting of the G20 summit, the government sought to reinforce India's commitment to the Global South by participating in the 'G77 Plus China' summit in Cuba over the weekend and called upon the Group to speak in one voice at the UN on economic and developmental challenges.

While foreign minister S Jaishankar could not travel to Havana because of the special parliamentary session beginning Monday, India was represented by Sanjay Verma, secretary (west), ministry of external affairs, who used the occasion to highlight India's G20 initiative to mainstream Global South issues.

With as many as 134 members, including India, the G77 is the largest inter-governmental group of developing nations that focuses on inequality, sustainable development and poverty eradication. It's called G77 Plus China because while China works closely with the group, it does not officially consider itself a full member. Beijing was rep-



India was represented by MEA secretary (west) Sanjay Verma as foreign minister S Jaishankar (above) had to stay back for the upcoming special session

resented by senior Communist Party official Li Xi at the summit that was attended by about 30 heads of state and government from Asia, Africa and Latin America.

"G77 should focus on its core mandate and not get distracted by bilateral political conflicts," said Verma, who also suggested that the group change its name to reflect its numerical strength and empirical weight at the UN. G77 had 77 members when it was founded in 1964. According to reports from Cuba, the summit witnessed calls for "changing the rules of the game" to herald a new global order.

In his remarks at the event, which sought to address developmental challenges through

effective deployment of science, technology and innovation, Verma said that the G20 summit in India had shown that when there is a political will, reforming multilateralism is possible.

"Further, we take great pride in our Presidency, as Africa — represented by the African Union — for the very first time now, deservedly sits at the high table of a global body, like the G20. By delivering on his promise to Africa, Prime Minister Modi has confirmed the representation of the developing world, including from the G77, is now at its highest in the G20," said Verma.

At the summit, India also proposed that the G77 come together to speak in one voice at the UN on economic and developmental challenges, without getting distracted by bilateral issues, and also reinforce the unity and solidarity of the Group.

"Consensus has been our guiding principle and must be honoured. Our working methods and procedures must be credible, open, consultative and transparent, and codified to avoid ambiguities," said Verma.

To counter China in IOR, India plans 175-warship Navy by '35

'But Projections Show Beijing May Have 555 Warships In Next 5-6 Yrs'

Rajat.Pandit@timesgroup.com

New Delhi: The Navy now has 68 warships and vessels on order, collectively worth an estimated Rs 2 lakh crore, in line with India's continuing quest to build a stronger blue-water force to protect its huge geostrategic interests as well as counter China's ever-expanding footprint in Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

The 132-warship Navy, with 143 aircraft and 130 helicopters, also has the initial approval or 'acceptance of necessity' (AoN) for another eight next-generation corvettes, nine submarines, five survey vessels and two multi-purpose vessels to be built in India in the coming years.

Faced with the slow pace of construction in Indian shipyards, progressive decommissioning of old ships and budgetary constraints, the Navy will however reach a force-level of just about 155-160 warships by 2030.

"The figures are dynamic. But the aim now is to have at least 175 warships — if not 200 — by 2035 for credible strategic reach, mobility and flexibility in the IOR and beyond. There will have to be a concomitant increase in the number of fighters, aircraft, helicopters and drones," a source said.

The growing maritime threat from China cannot be ignored. The People's Liber-



China has inducted 150 warships over the last 10 years. The Indian Navy now has 68 warships and vessels on order, worth nearly Rs 2 lakh crore, to boost its blue-water force to protect the country's geostrategic interests

ation Army-Navy (PLAN) is aggressively hunting for more overseas bases after Djibouti on the Horn of Africa, Karachi and Gwadar in Pakistan and now possibly Ream in Cambodia to overcome its existing logistical challenge in the IOR and the larger Indo-Pacific.

China, of course, is also building vessels at a furious rate to further add to what is the world's largest Navy with 355 warships and submarines. "China has inducted as many as 150 warships over the last 10 years. Projections show the PLAN may well reach 555 warships in another five-six years. Chinese aircraft carriers will also begin to operate in the IOR by then," an officer said.

The Indian Navy, however, is yet to even get the preliminary nod for the construction of a third aircraft carrier that will take over a decade to build. The case for a smaller 45,000-tonne "repeat order" of INS Vikrant, which is still months away from becoming combat-ready after being commissioned a year ago, is now being finalised instead of a more potent and cost-effective 65,000-tonne carrier.

The depleting underwater combat arm is another major worry. With the continuing delay in kicking off the long-pending 'Project-75-India' to build six advanced diesel-electric submarines for over Rs 42,000 crore, the government is now going in for three

more French-origin Scorpene submarines to be built at Mazagon Docks (MDL). They will follow the first six such submarines built for over Rs 23,000 crore there.

The good news is that the seven 6,670-tonne stealth frigates being constructed under Project-17A — four at MDL and three at GRSE in Kolkata at an overall cost of Rs 45,000 crore — are slated for delivery in the 2024-2026 timeframe.

Of the other 61 ships on order, all also being constructed in India except for two frigates in Russia, two more guided-missile destroyers (Imphal and Surat) will also soon follow the first two, INS Visakhapatnam and INS Mormugao, commissioned earlier under the Rs 35,000 crore Project-15B at MDL.

Then there is the recently inked over Rs 19,000 crore contract with Hindustan Shipyard (HSL) for five 44,000-tonne fleet support ships, whose deliveries will begin after four years.

There are also six next-generation missile vessels to be built by the Cochin Shipyard for Rs 9,805 crore, with the deliveries to begin from March 2027. The deliveries of the 11 next-generation offshore patrol vessels — seven at Goa Shipyard and four at GRSE — in turn will commence from September 2026 for an overall cost of Rs 9,781 crore.

PM: First be vocal for local, then go global

TIMES NEWS NETWORK

New Delhi: Referring to the key points of the 'PM Vishwakarma Scheme', PM Narendra Modi said on Sunday that "Vishwakarma friends" would get loans of up to Rs 3 lakh "without being asked for any collateral" with very low interest. He said banks would not ask for any guarantee as they had "Modi's guarantee".

"Our Vishwakarma colleagues are the pride of 'Make in India' and this International Convention Centre will become a medium to showcase this pride to the world," Modi said.

The Vishwakarma scheme is aimed at benefiting artisans overwhelmingly drawn from among socially backward communities. Political circles have seen this as an attempt to forge the myriad artisan castes engaged in 18 different traditional occupations — carpentry, pottery and the like — into an important political constituency. On their own, these castes lack the numbers, resources and clout to make a big difference but collectively, they can potentially have important weightage.

Underlining that 'Vishwa-



PM Modi with a 'Vishwakarma' during the launch of 'PM Vishwakarma' scheme at India International Convention and Expo Centre on Sunday

karmas' would always remain significant in society, no matter the advancements made in technology, Modi acknowledged the contribution of the 'shramiks' (labourers) and artisans in the construction of the "magnificent" convention centre and said he dedicates 'Yashobhoomi' to "every worker of the country, to every Vishwakarma".

Under the scheme, artisans and craftspeople will be registered free of charge through Common Services Centres (CSC) using the biometric-based portal. They will be provided recognition

through PM Vishwakarma certificate and ID card, skill upgrade involving basic and advanced training, toolkit incentive of Rs 15,000, collateral-free credit support of Rs 3 lakh — up to Rs 1 lakh (first tranche) and Rs 2 lakh (second tranche) — at a concessional interest rate of 5%, incentive for digital transactions and marketing support.

Noting that "training, technology and tools" were critical for "Vishwakarma brothers and sisters" in the changing times, the PM spoke about training provisions under the scheme and asked the artisans to purchase their toolkits "only from GST registered shops" and said these tools must be "made in India".

Pitching for the use of local products in a big way, he said "vocal for local" was the responsibility of the entire country. "First we have to be vocal for local and then we will have to take the local global," he said while appealing to people not just to limit their love for local products to only buying 'diyas' (earthen lamps) during festivals but broaden their choice to other local and traditional products made by artisans and craftspeople.