

# We are very close to framework deal with US: Commerce Secretary

NEW DELHI, Dec 15 (PTI)

**INDIA** and the US are “very close” to finalising the framework for their proposed bilateral trade agreement, Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agrawal said on Monday, noting that both nations are actively engaged in negotiations.

The two countries are holding two parallel negotiations -- one on a framework trade deal to address the high tariffs and another on a comprehensive bilateral trade agreement (BTA).

The new US Deputy Trade Representative, Rick Switzer, was here last week for trade talks with the secretary.

During Switzer’s visit, both



sides took stock of bilateral trade relations and reviewed the progress of negotiations of the framework deal and the comprehensive BTA.

“We are very close on the framework deal, which we feel can be done in a short period of time. But I would not like to put a time period on that,” Agrawal told reporters here.

# Top UAE commander, Army chief discuss ways to boost defence ties

NEW DELHI, Dec 15 (PTI)

COMMANDER of the Presidential Guard of the UAE, Major General Ali Saif Humaid Alkaabi, called on Army Chief Gen Upendra Dwivedi and held discussions on enhancing defence cooperation and deepening military-to-military engagement, officials said on Monday.

The visiting United Arab Emirates leader also engaged in high-level discussions with senior military leaders. He was briefed on Operation Sindoor and India's security perspective in the region, they said. The Indian Army also shared some photos of his visit in a post on X.

On the meeting between the two leaders, the Army said, "They held discussions on enhancing



United Arab Emirates Presidential Guard Commander Major General Ali Saif Humaid Alkaabi with other officials at National War Memorial to pay tribute to bravehearts in New Delhi. (PTI)

bilateral defence cooperation, deepening military-to-military engagement and reinforcing their shared commitment to regional stability and global peace.

"He also engaged in high-level discussions with senior military leaders wherein he was briefed on Operation Sindoor and India's security perspective in the region," it posted.

# Raj Kumar Goyal sworn in as Chief Information Commissioner



NEW DELHI, Dec 15 (PTI)

**FORMER** IAS officer Raj Kumar Goyal was on Monday sworn in as Chief Information Commissioner (CIC) by President Droupadi Murmu.

A three-member panel headed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi last week recommended Goyal's name as the CIC.

Goyal is a 1990-batch (retired) Indian Administrative Service (IAS) officer of Arunachal Pradesh-Goa-Mizoram-Union Territories (AGMUT) cadre. He superannuated as Secretary, Department of Justice under the Ministry of Law and Justice, on August 31.

He has also served as Secretary (Border Management) in the Home Ministry and held key posts both at the Centre and in the erstwhile State of Jammu and Kashmir.

President Murmu administered the oath of office and secrecy to Goyal at a ceremony held at the Rashtrapati Bhavan. The event was attended by Vice President C P Radhakrishnan and Union Minister of State for Personnel Jitendra Singh, among others.

# PM Modi, Jordan King discuss bilateral ties

AMMAN, Dec 15 (PTI)

**PRIME** Minister Narendra Modi and Jordan's King Abdullah II ibn Al Hussein met here on Monday and reviewed the entire gamut of bilateral relations and exchanged perspectives on regional and global issues of mutual importance.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who arrived in Jordan on a two-day visit at the invitation of Abdullah II, was warmly welcomed by the king at the Husseinia Palace, where they held a one-on-one meeting before the delegation-level talks.

PM Modi told King Abdullah II that he was confident that their meeting would give a new impetus and depth to India-Jordan ties.

"We will continue our cooperation in areas such as trade, fertilisers, digital technology, infrastructure and people-to-people



Prime Minister Narendra Modi meets King of Jordan Abdullah II, in Amman, Jordan. (PTI)

ties," he said.

Modi said the two countries share a common and clear stance against terrorism and praised King Abdullah II's "active and positive role" on the Gaza issue.

He thanked the Jordanian king for extending a warm welcome to him and his delegation.

*(Contd on page 5)*

# MGNREGA to be reframed as Viksit Bharat-GRAMG bill

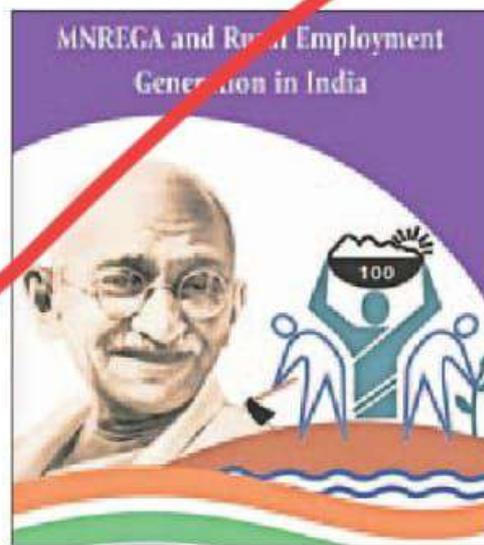
NEW DELHI, Dec 15 (PTI)

**THE** Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission (Gramin) (VB-GRAMG) Bill, 2025 that seeks to replace the existing rural employment law MGNREGA is set to be introduced in the Lok Sabha during the ongoing Winter session of Parliament.

According to a copy of the Bill, it will provide a statutory guarantee of 125 days of wage employment in every financial year to every rural household whose adult members volunteer to undertake unskilled manual work.

Within six months from the date of commencement of the VB-GRAMG Act, States will have to make a scheme consistent with the provisions of the new law.

Under this centrally sponsored scheme, the financial liability would be shared between the



Centre and the State Governments. It would be 90:10 for the North-eastern States and Himalayan States and 60:40 for all other States and Union Territories with legislature. For the UTs without legislature, the whole cost would be borne by the Centre.

The MGNREGA was a 100 per cent centrally sponsored scheme. While MGNREGA was a

demand-driven scheme with the Union Government bound to allocate more money if demand for work was there, under the proposed scheme, the Centre would determine State-wise normative allocation for each financial year. Any expenditure incurred by a State in excess would be borne by the State Government.

The wage rate would be specified by the Central Government through a notification. The Bill says it should not be less than the prevailing wage rates under the MGNREGA.

Until a wage rate is notified by the Centre, MGNREGA wage rates will continue to apply in the areas covered by the new Act.

Unemployment allowance would be paid if an applicant is not provided work within 15 days, which will have to be paid by the

*(Contd on page 5)*

# MGNREGA to be reframed as Viksit Bharat-GRAMG bill

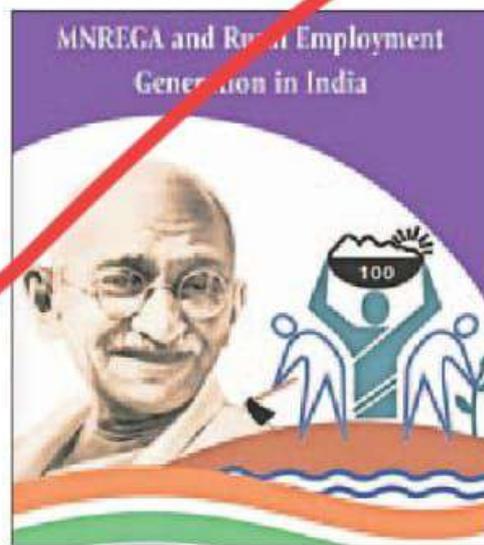
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