

Netanyahu approves USD 35 billion natural gas export deal to Egypt

JERUSALEM, Dec 18 (AP)

ISRAELI Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said on Wednesday that he has approved a USD35 billion natural gas export deal to Egypt, the biggest gas deal in Israeli history. The agreement could also help repair relations between the two countries strained during the two-year war in the Gaza Strip.

The gas will be delivered to Egypt over the next 15 years by US energy giant Chevron, a key owner of the gas field off Israel's coast in the Mediterranean Sea. Half of the proceeds are expected to go to Israel's state coffers.

In a recorded video statement,



Netanyahu said the deal "greatly strengthens Israel's position as a regional energy power, and it contributes to stability in our region." Egypt, which borders both Israel and Gaza, has served as a key mediator between Israel and the Palestinian militant Hamas group leading up to the US-brokered ceasefire that was agreed on in October. Cairo has also has been a vocal critic of

Israel's offensive, which has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians and caused widespread destruction in Gaza.

Egypt did not immediately confirm Netanyahu's announcement.

Israeli Energy Minister Eli Cohen, a close Netanyahu ally, previously held up the deal with Egypt, claiming the terms were not favourable to Israel. His delays prompted US Energy Secretary Chris Wright to cancel a trip to Israel in October.

But Cohen stood alongside Netanyahu during the Wednesday evening announcement and said he supported the final terms of the deal.

Rajnath meets Dutch Foreign Minister

Letter of Intent on defence cooperation inked

NEW DELHI, Dec 18 (PTI)

DEFENCE Minister Rajnath Singh met Dutch Foreign Minister David van Weel here on Thursday with both leaders discussing a range of bilateral security and defence issues including priority areas for “co-development and co-production” of defence equipment.

A Letter of Intent on defence cooperation was also inked between India and the Netherlands in the presence of the two ministers, the Defence Ministry said.

The document was exchanged between Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh and Ambassador of the Netherlands to India, Marisa Gerards.

Singh met with the Dutch Foreign Minister “reaffirming the strong and growing defence partnership between the two countries”, the Ministry said.

“Both ministers discussed a range of bilateral security and defence issues including priority areas for co-development and co-production of defence equipment. They reaffirmed the commitment to enhance military-to-military cooperation with a focus on developing defence cooperation as a key pillar of the strategic partnership,” it said in a statement.

The discussions also highlighted the shared commitment

of India and the Netherlands to a free, open, inclusive, and rule-based Indo-Pacific region, the Ministry said.

The two leaders emphasised on the need for a “closer defence partnership” and connecting the defence industries from both nations, especially in the field of niche technology, it said.

Both countries intend to explore the possibilities of defence cooperation in identified areas for the mutual benefit by developing a Defence Industrial Roadmap for technology collaboration, co-production and co-development of platforms and equipment, the Ministry said.



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh with Netherlands Foreign Minister David Van Weel during a meeting, in New Delhi. (PTI)

China, Mongolia are battling to control massive dust storms

LONDON, Dec 18 (The Conversation)

DUST storms regularly affect northern China, including its capital Beijing. In recent years, Chinese scientists and officials have traced the source of the dust storms to its neighbour Mongolia.

Much of the dust over Beijing in the spring of 2023, for example, originated from parts of Mongolia, seemingly driven by the warming and drying of the climate in the region.

Mongolia's environment has come to be seen as China's problem. Chinese netizens have blamed Mongolia's herders and miners for the exploitation of natural resources and environmental destruction.

In pointing the finger at Mongolians, they ignore the role that Chinese demand for Mongolian resources plays in Mongolia's environmental problems. In the south of Mongolia, it is dust churned up by mining trucks carrying coal to China on unpaved roads that locals are concerned about.

In August 2026, a major UN conference will be held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia's capital, on the subject of tackling desertification. According to the Mongolian organisers of the conference, the country is one of the most severely affected by this process, whereby fertile land becomes like a desert and vegetation disappears, with almost 77 per cent of its land now classified as degraded.

Parliament passes Nuclear Energy Bill

NEW DELHI, Dec 18 (PTI)

PARLIAMENT on Thursday passed the Nuclear Energy Bill, with the Rajya Sabha giving its nod to the legislation seeking to open the tightly-controlled civil nuclear sector for private participation.

The Upper House passed the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Bill by a voice vote, while rejecting several amendments moved by Opposition members to send the proposed legislation to a parliamentary committee. It was passed in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday.

Replying to a discussion on the bill, Minister of State,

Department of Atomic Energy, Jitendra Singh, said it aims at making India self-reliant in nuclear energy and reducing dependence on other sources of energy.

He asserted that nuclear energy is a reliable 24x7 power supply source, which is not so in the case of other renewable energy options.

Stating that the country has already reached 8.9 GW of nuclear energy in 2025, Singh said by 2047, "if we are able to follow the roadmap we have envisaged, we will be 100 GW, and we would be contributing nearly 10 per cent of the energy requirement...".

He also noted that India's
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India, Oman ink free trade pact

MUSCAT, Dec 18 (PTI)

INDIA and Oman on Thursday signed a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), as Prime Minister Narendra Modi held talks with Sultan Haitham bin Tarik and explored ways to further add greater depth to the bilateral Strategic Partnership.

Modi, who arrived in Oman on Wednesday on the last leg of his three-nation tour, was welcomed by Sultan Haitham at Al Baraka Palace in Muscat before their 'one-on-one talks and the delegation-level meeting'.

"Today, we are taking a historic step forward in India-Oman relations."



(Left) PM Narendra Modi being conferred with the Order of Oman by Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tarik, in Muscat, Oman. Report on last page. (Above) Modi during the India-Oman Business Forum. (PTI)

whose positive impact will be felt for decades to come. The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) will energise our ties in the 21st century," Modi said.

He said the agreement will give new momentum to trade, investment and open new opportunities across different sectors, and greatly benefit the youth of both nations.

Modi thanked the Sultan for his efforts in finalising the historic CEPA, as he described it as "a new and golden chapter" (Contd on page 5)

LS passes G RAM G Bill

NEW DELHI, Dec 18 (PTI)

LOKSABHA on Thursday passed a bill to replace the 20-year-old scheme MGNREGA amid tearing of papers by Opposition members who accused the Government of destroying the rural economy and ignoring the principles of Mahatma Gandhi.

In a spirited reply to the eight-hour discussion on the Viksit Bharat Guarantee for Rozgar and Ajeevika Mission-Gramin (GRAMG) Bill, Rural Development Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan claimed large-scale corruption in the implementation of the Mahatma Gandhi National Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA).

As Opposition members tore papers and raised slogans, Chouhan argued that MGNREGA has outlived its utility and the



Chouhan slammed the Oppn for resorting to "hooliganism" in the LS by tearing papers and standing on the desks in the House

focus of the Government was now on creating permanent



(L) Union Minister Shivraj Singh Chouhan speaks in the LS, (above) Opposition members including Leader of Opposition in the RS Mallikarjun Kharge, Congress MP Sonia Gandhi, Samajwadi Party (SP) MP Dharmendra Yadav and others raise slogans during a protest amid its ongoing Winter session, in New Delhi. (PTI)

assets and developing model villages, instead of just paying

wages. Opposition members
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