

# Govt working to increase LS seats by 50% for all States

NEW DELHI, June 29 (PTI)

THE Government is learnt to be working on multiple formulations to increase the number of Lok Sabha seats for all States by 50 per cent to assuage the concerns of southern States, as it seeks to operationalise a fresh draft of the Constitution Amendment Bill on women's quota law.

The draft is being readied keeping in mind the concerns of the southern States that a population-based delimitation exercise would shrink their political power in the Lok Sabha.

The first Bill failed to clear the Lok Sabha test on April 17, as the Government could not muster the two-thirds majority required to pass it.

Building on the earlier Bill, the fresh draft is learnt to have proposed keeping the existing inter-State seat ratios intact based on the 1971 Census.

But this is one of the formulations the Government is working on, and no final decision has

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been reached, sources said.

Lok Sabha and Assembly seats will be redrawn based on the 2011 Census figures, as the numbers of the ongoing Census are yet to come out.

The Bill will be tabled in Parliament only after the Government is confident of the numbers, the sources said.

As of now, the ruling NDA has around 300 MPs in the Lok Sabha with three vacancies. It needs 360 votes to achieve the two-thirds mark.

Under the current law, reservation for women would not be

enforceable before 2034, as the process is tied to the completion of the delimitation exercise post the 2027 Census.

To implement it from the 2029 Lok Sabha elections, changes were needed in the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam, or women's reservation law.

According to the Government's plan, Lok Sabha seats will be increased to a maximum of 850 from the current 543 to "operationalise" the women's quota law before the 2029 parliamentary polls following a delimitation exercise to be carried out on the basis of the last published Census.

According to the Constitution Amendment Bill introduced in April, seats would also be increased in State and UT Assemblies to accommodate 33 per cent reservation for women.

The seats reserved for women in Lok Sabha and legislative Assemblies "shall be allotted by rotation to different constituencies in a state or Union territory", the Bill said.

# Nadda launches Aarogya Setu 2.0 application

NEW DELHI, June 29 (PTI)

UNION Health Minister J P Nadda on Monday launched Aarogya Setu 2.0, a revamped version of the COVID-era application that will now serve as a digital platform for personal health records, with a new feature that allows beneficiaries to track their health insurance coverage and claims.

The upgraded application, aligned with the Ayushman Bharat Digital Mission (ABDM), provides a single digital gateway for citizens to access a range of healthcare services, including creation of Ayushman Bharat Health Account (ABHA) IDs, management of health records and digital registration at hospitals through the "Scan & Share" feature.

According to the Union Health Ministry, the PM-JAY Wallet gives users a real-time overview of the



personal and family health insurance coverage, displaying the total insured amount and the amount already utilised under the Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (PM-JAY), the flagship Government-funded health insurance scheme.

The feature is aimed at improving transparency, helping beneficiaries monitor their remaining coverage and plan future medical expenses. The application will also allow users to upload medical records, includ-

ing laboratory reports in PDF (digital document) or image format, using Artificial Intelligence to digitise them and create personalised health dashboards based on medical history.

Users can sync wearable devices to track steps, calories, heart rate and glucose levels, set medication reminders and manage health goals through the app.

Among other features, Aarogya Setu 2.0 enables users to discover nearby healthcare facilities, locate PM-JAY empanelled hospitals, check real-time blood availability through e-RaktKosh and book ambulances.

The app also supports management of health profiles for family members under a single account and allows users to control consent for sharing their health records in line with India's digital health privacy framework.

## Nadda launches Ayushman Sarathi chatbot for 24x7 PM-JAY services

NEW DELHI, June 29 (PTI)

UNION Health Minister J P Nadda launched Ayushman Sarathi, a WhatsApp chatbot that will enable beneficiaries to access key services under the Ayushman Bharat Pradhan Mantri Jan Arogya Yojana (AB PM-JAY) round the clock without visiting government offices or calling helplines.

Developed by the National Health Authority (NHA), the chatbot provides secure, real-time access to PM-JAY services through WhatsApp using API-based integration with the scheme's digital systems.

According to the Health Ministry, beneficiaries can use

Ayushman Sarathi to check their eligibility under PM-JAY, apply for and download their Ayushman Card, complete eKYC, link Aadhaar, lock or unlock their PM-JAY card, and access services related to the Ayushman Vaya Vandana Card for senior citizens aged 70 years and above.

Users can also view their wallet balance and treatment history, locate nearby empanelled hospitals, register, track or withdraw grievances, request a callback, and submit feedback after hospital discharge.

Beneficiaries can access Ayushman Sarathi by sending "Hi" on WhatsApp to +91 72908 23838, the Ministry said.

# US, Iran pause strikes but disagree over next steps on talks to end war

■ By Jon Gambrell and Josh Boak

DUBAI, June 29 (AP)

PRESIDENT Donald Trump said on Monday that Iran had requested a meeting with US counterparts, though one of Iran's top negotiators said no further talks had been scheduled after attacks across the Persian Gulf over the weekend challenged negotiations to end the war.

The US President has tried to preserve a fragile interim deal, but hostilities mounted in recent days in the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's oil had been shipped before war began. After four days

of trading strikes, both sides appeared to pause their attacks on Monday.

Trump said on social media that a meeting with Iran would happen on Tuesday in Doha, Qatar. Trump special envoy Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner, the President's son-in-law, are flying to Qatar for the meeting, White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told Fox News' "Fox & Friends." But Kazem Gharibabadi, a senior negotiator for Iran, denied any talks had been scheduled.

The US and Iran agreed to an interim deal earlier this month that calls for Tehran to dilute its stockpile of enriched uranium. It also waives US-backed sanc-

tions on the country while opening the Strait of Hormuz and giving each side 60 days to hammer out broader agreements.

Oil prices fell sharply after the signing of the interim deal, but if they were to reverse course in a meaningful way, it could undermine Trump's claims to voters ahead of the November elections that inflation was easing.

Earlier on Monday, Iran's President said that USD 6 billion in frozen Iranian assets would be released by Qatar. Masoud Pezeshkian's mention of the funds appeared aimed at selling the Iranian public on the interim deal, particularly as its grip on the strait has been tested.

# Indian Army field hospital begins ops in Venezuela

CARACAS, June 29 (PTI)

AN INDIAN Army field hospital, deployed in earthquake-hit Venezuela under Operation Amistad, has become fully operational and is providing free round-the-clock medical services, officials said on Monday.

The Indian Embassy in Venezuela said that an Indian medical team comprising highly experienced doctors has established a camp at the International La Rinconada Racetrack in Caracas. The medical camp is “now fully operational. Services are open 24 hours. All services are free,” it said in a social media post. The 7.2 and 7.5-magnitude



earthquakes that struck on Wednesday evening were among the strongest in Venezuela in more than a century and were felt throughout the region.

The death toll from two powerful quakes in Venezuela rose to 1,450 on Sunday, with thousands more injured and many more missing.

Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal, in a social media post, also said that Operation Amistad is “underway” in Venezuela. The Army field hospital is extending “a caring hand to those impacted by the earthquake”, he said.

Indian Army doctors are taking care of people, Jaiswal said, adding that Venezuelan Vice Health Minister and head of Government of the Capital District of Venezuela visited the field hospital.

# Russian strikes kill 8, wound 35 in Ukraine

Zelenskyy condemns 'horrific attacks'

■ By **Hanna Arhirova**  
and **Barry Hatton**  
KYIV, June 29 (AP)

RUSSIAN missiles and drones killed at least eight civilians and injured 35 others in Ukraine on Monday in what Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy described as "horrific attacks".

Since Russia launched its all-out invasion of its neighbour more than four years ago, its forces have conducted strategic bombing in an effort to destroy the country's infrastructure and sap Ukrainian morale. More than 16,000 Ukrainian civilians have been killed, according to the UN.

A Russian missile targeting infrastructure struck the central city of Dnipro, killing five peo-

ple and wounding 29, Zelenskyy said on social media.

Russian drones also hit a passenger minibus in the southern city of Zaporizhzhia, killing three and wounding six, including a child.

In addition, Russia drones killed a 69-year-old woman and a 77-year-old man in Ukraine's northeastern Sumy region, National Police said.

Other deadly attacks occurred in at least six other regions of Ukraine, authorities said.

Some customers in eight Ukrainian regions were left without power on Monday after Russian strikes, after hot weather drove up electricity use as people turned on air conditioners, grid operator Ukrenergo said.

Zelenskyy renewed his plea for Europe to step up its development of air defenses to block Russia's ballistic missiles, which

## Ukrainian drones set another Russian oil refinery ablaze

KYIV, June 29 (AP)

UKRAINE kept up its heavy drone assault on Russia, setting fire to a major oil refinery in the south, as President Vladimir Putin acknowledged for the first time on Sunday that the country was facing a "certain deficit" of fuel and vowed to strengthen protection of oil facilities and boost fuel output. Ukraine has markedly stepped up its long-range attacks on Russian military industries and energy facil-

ities in recent months, aiming to cut Moscow's revenue for its invasion - now in its fifth year - and make Russians feel the consequences.

"Our long-range sanctions' are hard to stop. "People need greater protection from such horrific attacks," Zelenskyy said. "Above all, we need anti-ballistic capabilities. It



is essential that Europe is as active as possible in developing its own anti-ballistic defence" its own systems and missiles."

A marked shift has taken place in the war in recent months, Western officials say, as Ukraine's expanding drone strikes have brought fuel shortages in Russia and Russia-occupied territory.

reached two oil refineries in Russia," Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy wrote on the Telegram messaging app on Sunday. "Each (strike) means a reduction in the resources that fuel the Russian war machine, and another step toward peace."

The campaign has choked Russian fuel supplies, causing widespread shortages and long lines at gas stations across the country and prompting authorities in many regions to introduce fuel rationing.

## Indian Coast Guard rescues flood-hit cargo vessel, escorts it safely to Tuticorin



MV SITTHAA sent out a distress call due to flooding in multiple compartments whilst off Tiruchendur, Tamil Nadu, following India Coast Guard ship Atulya rendered immediate assistance. (PTI)

NEW DELHI, June 29 (IANS)

**THE** Indian Coast Guard (ICG) successfully responded to a distress situation involving cargo vessel MV SITTHAA after it developed flooding in multiple compartments off the coast of Tiruchendur in Tamil Nadu, deploying a specialist boarding team to assist in emergency stabilisation operations, officials said.

The incident occurred on June 27, when the vessel reported flooding in several compartments while sailing off the Tamil Nadu coast. Responding swiftly to the distress call, the Coast Guard dispatched ICG Ship Atulya to the location to provide immediate assistance and help prevent the situation from escalating.

In a post shared on X, the Indian Coast Guard detailed the rescue operation and the coordinated efforts undertaken to safeguard the vessel, its crew and the surrounding marine environment.

# Modi concludes three-day visit to Seychelles

VICTORIA (Seychelles), June 29 (PTI)

**PRIME** Minister Narendra Modi on Monday departed for India concluding a three-day visit to Seychelles during which he held wide-ranging talks with President Patrick Herminie.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi departs for Delhi after concluding his visit to Seychelles. (PTI)

A high-level delegation and members of the Indian diaspora came to the airport to see him off.

The two countries unveiled 19 outcomes in various sectors, including defence, maritime security, digital payments, space and healthcare.

Modi arrived in Seychelles on Saturday.

On Sunday, PM Modi was conferred with 'Guardian of the Blue Horizon' by President Herminie for his green leadership and efforts towards advancing the interests of developing countries.

During the visit, Modi also attended the golden jubilee celebrations of the National Day of Seychelles as the Guest of Honour.

India and Seychelles are currently celebrating 50 years of the establishment of diplomatic ties.

He also addressed the national assembly of Seychelles.

# 8 new Rajya Sabha members take oath

■ **Congress chief Mallikarjun Kharge re-appointed LoP**

■ **Delhi Bureau and Agencies**  
NEW DELHI, June 29

**CONGRESS** chief Mallikarjun Kharge and BJP leader Tarun Chugh were among the eight newly-elected members of the Rajya Sabha who took oath on Monday.

Rajya Sabha Chairman C P Radhakrishnan administered the oath of office to the new members. Kharge was also re-appointed as the Leader of Opposition in the Rajya Sabha with effect from June 26.

Holding a copy of the Constitution in his hand, Kharge



Vice President CP Radhakrishnan greets Congress MP Mallikarjun Kharge after administering oath as a member of the Rajya Sabha. Sonia Gandhi and Priyanka Gandhi-Vadra are also seen. (PTI)

took the oath separately in Radhakrishnan's chamber.

The Congress chief later said that he will continue to raise the concerns, aspirations and the

voice of people in the House with sincerity and conviction, apart from holding the Government accountable.

Radhakrishnan congratulated

Kharge and said the Upper House would benefit from his long experience.

Radhakrishnan later administered oath/affirmation to seven other newly-elected/re-elected members in the Rajya Sabha chamber - Mansingh Meraman Parmar, Tarun Chugh, Alka Singh, Jitendra Meghji bhai Kanzariya, Rajendra Hiralal Jain, M Nagaraja and Adhikarimayum Sharda Devi.

Four members took oath/affirmation in Hindi, one in Kannada, one in Punjabi and one in Manipuri. While two members are from Gujarat, Karnataka, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur and Rajasthan sent one member each to the Upper House.