

Global crude oil prices climb above \$90

NEW DELHI, July 20 (IANS)

GLOBAL crude oil prices surged more than 3 per cent, climbing above the \$90-a-barrel mark on Monday as escalating military tensions between the United States and Iran fuelled fears of supply disruptions through the Strait of Hormuz.

International benchmark Brent crude rose nearly 3 per cent or \$2.63 to trade above \$90 a barrel after gaining more than 3 per cent in the previous session. Similarly, US West Texas Intermediate (WTI) crude advanced 3.51 per cent or around \$3 to \$85.39 a barrel.

In the domestic market, MCX crude oil futures (August) climbed 2.65 per cent or Rs 210 to an intraday high of Rs 8,120 as of 10:29 am.

The rally followed fresh military exchanges between the US and Iran over the weekend, with

Tehran declaring that the ceasefire between the two countries had effectively collapsed, rais-



ing concerns over potential disruptions to crude shipments through the Strait of Hormuz.

The US Central Command said American forces carried out a ninth consecutive night of strikes on Iranian targets, describing the operation as aimed at weakening military capabilities allegedly used in attacks on commercial and civilian shipping.

According to market experts, crude oil prices are likely to remain supported in the near

term as escalating tensions in the Middle East and concerns over shipping disruptions through the Strait of Hormuz continue to underpin sentiment.

"MCX crude has broken above the Rs 8,000 level, reflecting strong bullish momentum. The near-term bias for both domestic and global crude remains cautiously bullish, although elevated prices may trigger phases of consolidation," the experts said.

Maritime security concerns also intensified after Iran's navy said it stopped four unidentified vessels attempting to pass through what it described as an unsafe route in the Strait of Hormuz.

Reports claim that two of the vessels were involved in accidents and halted, while the remaining ships turned back, adding to concerns over the security of one of the world's key energy shipping corridors.

India extends grant support to Maldives for fitness centres across 42 islands

MALE, July 20 (PTI)

INDIA and the Maldives have signed agreements under which New Delhi will provide equipment support for fitness and recreation centres in 42 islands, further expanding bilateral development cooperation, according to the Maldives' foreign ministry.

The Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) were signed on Sunday by Maldivian Foreign Minister Iruthisham Adam, Indian High Commissioner G Balasubramanian and Maldives' Youth Empowerment, Sports and Fitness Minister Abdulla Rafiu at a ceremony in Male, the ministry said in a press statement.

The agreements are aimed at improving access to fitness facilities across island communities, with a special focus on women, girls and youth, while promot-



ing healthier lifestyles and community well-being, it said.

The project is part of India's grant assistance under the High Impact Community Development Project (HICDP), whose total outlay has been enhanced over the years to MVR 355 million (USD 22.9 million),

it said.

Speaking at the ceremony, the Maldivian foreign minister said the initiative represented "a meaningful investment in the health and well-being of island communities" and would contribute to women's empowerment, equality and social inclusion.

She also thanked India's government and its people, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar for their continued support in strengthening bilateral ties.

Launched in 2019, the HICDP supports community-driven projects implemented by local councils and institutions across the Maldives. As many as 56 projects have been approved under the scheme across the Maldives, of which 24 have been completed and inaugurated.

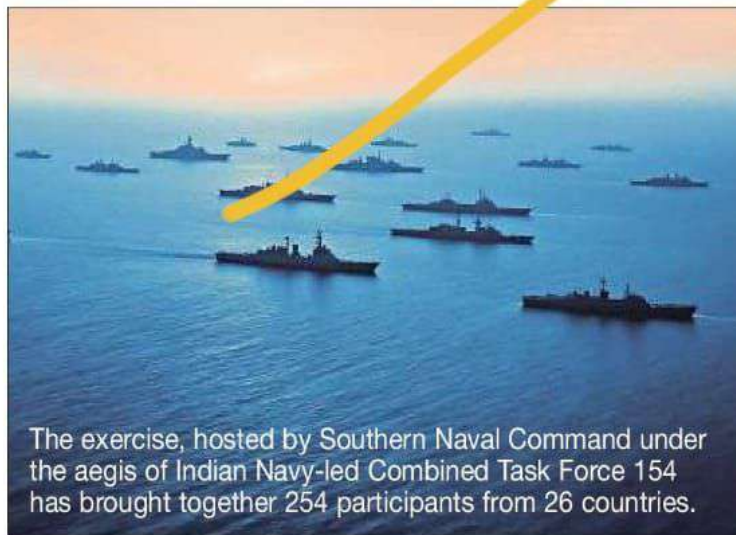
Multinational maritime security exercise begins in Kochi

KOCHI, July 20 (PTI)

OPERATION Southern Readiness 26-2, a four-day multinational maritime security training engagement, commenced at the Southern Naval Command on Monday, a Defence spokesperson said. According to a statement, the exercise is being hosted by the Southern Naval Command under the aegis of the Indian Navy-led Combined Task Force 154, in partnership with the Combined Maritime Forces.

The engagement has brought together 254 participants from 26 countries, supported by 74 facilitators, representatives of four international organisations and subject matter experts.

"The exercise marks the first edition of Operation Southern Readiness to be held in India and represents an important milestone in the growing engagement between the Indian Navy and the CMF," the



The exercise, hosted by Southern Naval Command under the aegis of Indian Navy-led Combined Task Force 154 has brought together 254 participants from 26 countries.

statement said.

"CTF 154, the CMF's dedicated Training Task Force, is currently commanded by the Indian Navy and focuses on strengthening the capac-

ity, interoperability and professional readiness of CMF partner nations through multinational maritime training," it added.

According to the Defence

spokesperson, the opening ceremony featured welcome remarks by Commodore Milind M Mokashi, SC, Commander, CTF 154; an inaugural address by Commodore Dan Thomas, Deputy Commander, Combined Maritime Forces; and a keynote address by Rear Admiral Deepak Singhal, VSM, Chief Staff Officer (Training), Headquarters Southern Naval Command. The speakers underscored the importance of professional training, shared learning and multinational cooperation in addressing contemporary maritime security challenges, it said.

"The opening day, themed around Ship Management and Special Training, combined professional interaction with subject matter experts and practical exposure. A session by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime focused on maritime security threats in the Red Sea and the western Indian Ocean," the statement said.

Cotton blossoms as India's 'white gold'

NEW DELHI, July 20 (IANS)

INDIA ranks first globally in acreage and second in production and consumption of cotton, with the country's cotton production standing at 290.91 lakh bales in 2025-26 while domestic consumption reached 328 lakh bales during the same period, according to factsheet issued on Monday.

The sector contributes nearly 19 per cent of global fibre production, according to the Government.

Recent interventions by the Government to promote the production of cotton focus on productivity, quality, market access and value addition.

MSP operations continue to provide price support during market downturns. The Mission for Cotton Productivity aims to raise output to 498 lakh bales by 2031.

Technology demonstrations, digital procurement and traceability initiatives are strengthening competitiveness. These efforts are enhancing productivity, improving quality and reinforcing India's position in the global cotton

economy, the government said.

Due to its economic importance in India, cotton is also termed as 'White-Gold'.

The crop supports the livelihoods of around 6 million cotton farmers with 114.84 lakh hectares devoted to the crop nationwide.

It also sustains employment for another 40-50 million people engaged in related activities such as cotton processing and trade.

Beyond clothing, cotton plays a vital role in earning foreign exchange through exports of fibre, yarn, fabrics and garments. India continues to maintain a strong presence in the global cotton trade.

In 2024-25, the country exported an estimated 18 lakh bales, equivalent to 0.31 million metric tonnes. This accounts for about 3.37 per cent of total world exports, amounting to 541.69 lakh bales (9.21 million metric tonnes), which reflects India's role as a significant exporter in the international cotton market. Further, India exports cotton to several major global markets, reflecting strong and diversified international demand.



Hope Monsoon Session is productive: PM



Prime Minister Narendra Modi arrives to address the media on the first day of the Monsoon Session of Parliament, in the presence of Union Ministers Kiren Rijiju and Arjun Ram Meghwal along with MoS L Murugan and Jitendra Singh, in New Delhi. (PTI)

■ Delhi Bureau and Agencies

NEW DELHI, July 20

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Monday called for a productive Monsoon Session of Parliament, saying there would be no room for chaos or raising voice if discussions in the House are conducted with logic and facts.

His remarks came ahead of the start of the Monsoon Session of Parliament, which will be stormy with the opposition set to raise the issues of the NEET paper leak, the alleged theft of donations at the Ram temple in Ayodhya and E20 petrol.

Addressing reporters in Parliament complex, the Prime Minister said seasonal monsoon is beginning to show its positive impact, and the Monsoon Session of Parliament is also commencing.

"When both are productive, they contribute to the well-being of the nation and of all living beings. With this hope, we pray that the monsoon remains proactive and that the Monsoon Session is equally productive," he said.

He said as the session begins, the country has picked up speed, and Parliament's spirit can infuse new energy into this momentum and a positive spirit is essential to achieve national goals.

Modi stressed that meaningful discussions should take place in the House and collective resolutions made to move the country forward.

"Our House has many experienced Parliamentarians, regardless of party, whose knowledge and wisdom are needed by Parliament and the nation. Therefore, Parliament must function, meaningful discussions must take place, and collective resolutions must be made to move the country forward. This is the demand of the times and the aspiration of the youth," he said.

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Andy Burnham takes charge as UK's new Prime Minister

■ By Aditi Khanna

London, July 20 (PTI)

ANDY Burnham, newly elected leader of the Labour Party, on Monday took charge as the UK's new Prime Minister.

In his inaugural speech at 10 Downing Street, Burnham said he will make politics more about problem-solving and ensure his appointment is a "circuit breaker" moment for the country.

The 56-year-old leader of the Labour Party broke from prime ministerial tradition by choosing to address the nation from his new headquarters without the customary podium used by



Andy Burnham

most of his predecessors.

"We will make this moment a circuit-breaker for Britain, bringing forward the biggest changes in the last 40 years; a

new political model and a new economic model," Burnham said in his first address as PM.

Accompanied by his wife Marie-France van Heel and surrounded by several party colleagues expected to be appointed among his close aides, Burnham pledged a collaborative approach and singled out "ending rough sleeping" among his priorities by building more homes. "We will help people to live well, building a more preventative state, investing in people's success, rather than paying for people's failure; and that work starts now," said Burnham.

"I will soon go through that

door behind me and issue my first instruction: to end rough sleeping in our country," he said.

Burnham took formal charge as Britain's new Prime Minister after his audience with King Charles III, who invited the former mayor of Greater Manchester to form a new Government following the resignation of Keir Starmer moments earlier to mark the formal handover of power.

"His Majesty received in audience the Rt. Hon. Andrew Burnham MP and requested him to form a new administration," a Buckingham Palace statement said.