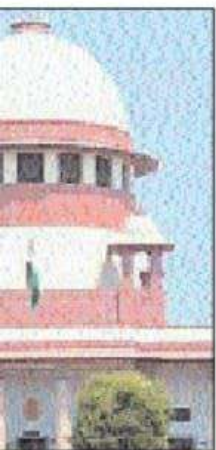


Raise retirement age of judicial officers from 60 to 61 years: SC to Govts

NEW DELHI, July 22 (PTI)

THE Supreme Court on Wednesday asked the States and Union Territories to consider raising the age of superannuation of judicial officers from 60 to 61 years.



A bench comprising Chief Justice Surya Kant and justices Joymalya Bagchi and V Mohana passed the direction while hearing a petition seeking uniform enhancement of the retirement age of district judicial judges from 60 to 62 years across the country.

"All State Governments and Union Territories (UTs) are directed to take a decision, in consultation with their respective jurisdictional high courts, on this issue. In case they agree, judicial officers in such states shall be permitted to continue in service up to the age of 61 years. Such

continuation shall remain subject to the final outcome of these proceedings," the bench ordered.

The provision will come into effect from April 1, 2026.

While the retirement age of Supreme Court judges is 65, the high court judges superannuate at the age of 62 years.

It also said that the interim arrangement would not prejudice the final adjudication on the substantive legal question of whether the retirement age of district judicial officers should be uniformly enhanced from 60 to 62 years throughout the country.

"We clarify that the question of law formulated at the outset shall be decided by this court independently, irrespective of the stand that may be taken by the states or the high courts," the bench said.

It directed all states and UTs, after consulting their respective high courts, to place their stand on record within two weeks.

Eye on China, Navy inducts sub-hunter INS Malvan

New Delhi/Pune: Beefing up India's submarine-hunter fleet to counter the rising underwater presence of Chinese Navy in Indian Ocean Region, Indian Navy Wednesday commissioned Malvan, the second of the Mahe-class anti-submarine warfare shallow water craft, at the Karwar naval base.

The commissioning ceremony was presided over by IAF chief Air Chief Marshal A P Singh in the presence of Vice Admiral Sanjay Vatsayan, Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Western Naval Command, report **Surendra Singh** and **Sandip Dighe**.

Lauding the Navy's growth, the IAF chief said, "No future war is going to be fought by an individual service. All of us... whichever colour... all have to fight together as one nation..." He emphasised the importance of safeguarding sea lines of communication to ensure unimpeded maritime trade.

Built by Cochin Shipyard Limited, Malvan is made to conduct anti-submarine operations, low intensity maritime operations and mine warfare.

Waghnakh, the famed weapon used by Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, is now on the crest of INS Malvan.

EAM meets Wang & joins Quad meet in diplomatic tightrope

4-Nation Grouping Pushes Back Against Beijing's Assertiveness

Sachin.Parashar
@timesofindia.com

India's policy of "multi-alignment" and strategic autonomy was evident in Manila Wednesday as external affairs minister **S Jaishankar** met his China counterpart, **Wang Yi**, in the Philippines and also joined a meeting of Quad foreign ministers that had US secretary of state **Marco Rubio** declaring Quad remained a priority and would meet again later this year.



The Quad meeting saw discussions on the situation in East China Sea and South China Sea, with Japan opposing any unilateral attempt to change the status quo by force or coercion and expressing grave concerns over export restrictions, including on critical minerals.

The meeting took place amid escalating China-Philippines tensions over another flare-up in South China Sea.

Even in the absence of a summit, Quad — comprising Australia, India, Japan and US — has remained functional with the foreign ministers meeting for a second time this year, after Delhi in May. Jaishankar, Rubio and their Australian and Japanese counterparts, Penny Wong and Toshihiro Motegi, respectively, met on the margins of Asean-related meetings in Manila.

In a joint press release, they reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening a free and open Indo-Pacific and their "unwavering" support for Asean unity and centrality, while also declaring they were united in their conviction that peace and stability in



'COMMON VISION'

the Indo-Pacific maritime domain underpin the security and prosperity of the region.

The statement outlined shared priorities related to maritime and economic security, critical and emerging technologies, and humanitarian assistance in support of the implementation of Asean Outlook on the Indo-Pacific.

According to a Japanese readout, the ministers looked forward to the convening of the next Quad Leaders' Summit. However, there was no word on the dates. Unlike the joint statement issued in Delhi, the press release made no mention of the summit. With President Donald Trump unlikely to visit India this year, it is now expected to take place only on the margins of the G20 summit in the US in Dec.

The foreign ministers are likely to meet again on the sidelines of a G20 ministerial in Atlanta in Oct.

"US, India, Australia and Japan share a vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific that is grounded in the rule of law, sovereignty, and territorial integrity," said Rubio in a post on X, adding that strong cooperation was vital to supporting Asean's own priority and centrality in the region.

US ambassador Sergio Gorr, who joined Rubio for the Quad meeting, said there was a very productive discussion on delivering results related to a free and open Indo-Pacific. "Our four nations share a common vision," he said.

Need fair market access, supply-chain reliability, China told

Sachin.Parashar
@timesofindia.com

External affairs minister **S Jaishankar** has underlined the significance of fair market access, trade balance and supply chain reliability in a meeting with his Chinese counterpart, **Wang Yi**, while welcoming recent measures to normalise Sino-Indian ties like upgrading of the visa framework and resumption of direct flights, Kailash pilgrimage and border trade.

In a meeting on the margins of Asean events in Manila, Jaishankar also stressed that border peace would remain a prerequisite for normal ties. Ahead of the Brics summit India will host in Sept, he thanked Wang for China's support for India's presidency. While a final confirmation from Beijing is still awaited, President Xi Jinping is likely to attend.

Ties have improved since PM Narendra Modi and Xi met in Kazan in 2024. However, for India, addressing economic friction, including the \$100 billion trade imbalance, is an essential next step.

"Fair market access and trade balance ranks high in that regard. There are also concerns about predictability of supply chains. Facilitating both official and people-to-people exchanges merit our attention. We also need to agree on the meetings of various mechanisms and platforms as per our mutual priorities," said the minister.

Jaishankar said the issue of peace at the border would need constant attention. "It is

EAM talks of trade with Rubio, sailors with Sergey Lavrov

S Jaishankar had a meeting with his **Marco Rubio** on the sidelines of Asean in Manila, focusing on issues related to trade and tariffs along with the critical minerals partnership. According to a US readout, they agreed on the importance

of finalising the interim trade deal, which is "almost complete". They also discussed finalising key defence agreements to fulfil commitments made between President Donald Trump and PM Narendra Modi. "Our relationship with India is vitally important," said Rubio on X.

The US ambassador to India said Rubio may visit this year. Jaishankar said the meet focused on priority areas for India-US Comprehensive Global Strategic Partnership.

In a meeting with his Russia counterpart, **Sergey Lavrov**, Jaishankar reiterated India's strong concerns about the safety of Indian seafarers. He said they also discussed trade, energy and science. **TNN**

natural that... India and China would have their own particular interests. That is why our leaders agreed that differences should not become disputes. It is the responsibility of diplomacy to properly manage them," he said. Jaishankar reiterated India's position that the bilateral relationship must be built around the "three mutuals" — respect, interest and sensitivity.

From oil to atoms: US to open N-door to Saudis

Deal Stabilises Gulf, Which Is Vital For India, But Regional Security Fears Loom

Chidanand Rajghatta | TNN

Washington: The Trump White House is expected to unveil a landmark 30-year civilian nuclear cooperation agreement with Saudi Arabia on Wednesday in a deal that may reverberate far beyond West Asia while triggering a fierce debate in Washington over nuclear proliferation, regional security, and America's long-term interests.

The proposed agreement, similar to the one with India under Section 123 of the US Atomic Energy Act, would permit extensive US-Saudi civilian nuclear cooperation and eventually allow Riyadh to enrich uranium on its own soil under jointly agreed conditions. US firms led by Westinghouse are expected to play a central role in building Saudi nuclear infrastructure, a project potentially worth tens of billions of dollars.

Unlike the "gold standard" agreement signed with the UAE in 2009, Riyadh is not required to immediately renounce uranium enrichment or plutonium reprocessing, and the reported agreement also omits the International Atomic Energy Agency's additional protocol requiring more intrusive inspections. Those departures have alarmed non-proliferation experts and lawmakers.

Secretary of state Marco Rubio sought to reassure critics before the formal announcement, saying, "The US is not going to reach any agreement with any country in the world that leads to the risk of proliferation," while punting details of the deal to the White House.

The administration broadly argues that bringing Saudi Arabia's nuclear ambitions under an American umbrella is preferable to allowing Riyadh to turn to China or Russia for nuclear technology, not to speak of sidelining Pakistan, which has long provided implicit nuclear cover for the Saudis. It also maintains the agreement would create thousands of American jobs while restoring a relationship strai-



The Trump administration broadly argues that bringing Saudi Arabia's nuclear ambitions under an American umbrella is preferable to allowing Riyadh to turn to China or Russia for nuclear technology

ned by disagreements over the recent conflict with Iran and Saudi concerns about US regional commitments.

Republican and Democrat lawmakers are expected to scrutinise the agreement when it reaches Congress, particularly because it appears to weaken safeguards that administrations had insisted upon. Congress can reject the agreement only by assembling a veto-proof majority, making outright defeat difficult, but there definitely will be hearings that are bound to be contentious.

The strongest concerns centre on Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's repeated assertion that Saudi Arabia would acquire nuclear weapons if Iran developed one. That statement has become the principal argument for oppo-

nents who fear the agreement could accelerate a regional nuclear competition.

Darya Dolzikova, senior research fellow for Proliferation and Nuclear Policy at the Royal United Services Institute, argues that a US-Saudi accord has strategic merit because it can "help preclude a bigger Russian and/or Chinese presence in the region" and support America's nuclear industry. But, she cautions, "robust non-proliferation controls are paramount", particularly if enrichment remains an option.

The timing of the deal, coming in the midst of the US-Iran war, is especially delicate. Washington has maintained that Iran should have "zero enrichment" capability while simultaneously considering a framework that could

eventually permit Saudi enrichment, an apparent double standard that critics say risks undermining America's non-proliferation credibility.

Meanwhile, the agreement presents an uncomfortable dilemma for Israel, which has traditionally opposed any regional enrichment capability outside its own undeclared nuclear deterrent, and which fears Saudi technological advances could eventually alter the regional balance, regardless of current political ties.

Pakistan also figures prominently in the strategic calculus. For decades, Western intelligence assessments have suggested that Riyadh's close financial and military relationship with Islamabad could provide Saudi Arabia with an implicit nuclear hedge, although neither govt has acknowledged such an arrangement publicly. By embedding Saudi Arabia's civilian nuclear programme within an American framework, Washington may hope to reduce incentives for Riyadh to depend on Pakistan for strategic insurance while simultaneously deepening US influence

over the kingdom's long-term nuclear trajectory.

The agreement also carries implications for India, which has steadily expanded strategic partnerships with both Washington and Riyadh while strengthening energy, investment and defence ties with Saudi Arabia. A closer US-Saudi alignment could reinforce stability in Gulf energy supplies that are vital to India's economy. At the same time, any erosion of non-proliferation norms or a future regional nuclear competition would complicate India's security environment, particularly if Pakistan sought to leverage its historic strategic relationship with Saudi Arabia.

Iran is almost certain to portray the agreement as evidence of American double standards after years of pressure on Tehran's enrichment programme. Egypt and Iraq are likely to watch cautiously, wary of any shift in the regional strategic balance, while the UAE, which accepted far stricter restrictions under its own agreement, may privately question why Riyadh is receiving more permissive terms.

bridge or a power plant

Pakistan leverages Iran mediation in bid for \$10bn US lifeline

Chidanand Rajghatta | TNN

Washington: Pakistan has quietly approached the Trump administration for a \$10 billion "exchange stabilisation facility," a financial lifeline that would shore up its fragile economy even as Islamabad seeks to capitalise on its renewed diplomatic importance in West Asia.

The request, first reported by Reuters, was made directly to US treasury secretary Scott Bessent and envisions a five-year facility designed to strengthen Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves and ease pressure on its rupee. US sources say the proposal is under consideration and no decision has been made.

If approved, the arrangement would be unusual because since 2002 the US treasury department has extended comparable exchange stabilisation facilities to only two countries – to Argentina more recently and to Uruguay in the past – making Pakistan's request exceptional in size and strategic significance.

The timing reflects Pakistan's attempt to convert recent diplomatic role into economic gains after it played mediator in facilitating contacts between Washington and Tehran, prompting jibes in Indian quarters about extracting brokerage fee or "hafta" (extortion).

For Pakistan, the economic stakes are considerable given the country narrowly avoided sovereign default in 2023 after securing an IMF bailout and emergency assistance from friendly govts. Although the country's macroeconomic indicators have improved modestly, foreign exchange reserves remain vulnerable, external debt repayments are substantial, and the economy continues to depend heavily on repeated financial infusions from the usual suspects – IMF, China, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.



Pak FM Muhammad Aurangzeb with US treasury secy Scott Bessent in Washington Tuesday

Such recurring dependence has long shaped Pakistan's economic reputation as a country with a begging bowl approach. Since the 1950s, successive govts have relied on foreign aid, multilateral lenders and bilateral bailouts to bridge chronic fiscal and balance-of-payments deficits. Economists have frequently described the country as living "hand to mouth" – meeting immediate financing needs through successive rescue packages while struggling to implement structural reforms that would reduce reliance on external assistance.

For the Trump administration, any decision will involve strategic as well as financial calculations, although \$10 billion is chump change in the overall scheme of things. A stabilisation facility could also provide Washington greater leverage at a time when China has emerged as Pakistan's principal strategic and economic partner.

Critics in Washington, however, are likely to question the wisdom of extending such support to a country that has repeatedly required international bailouts. Some lawmakers may also argue that scarce US resources should be directed toward domestic priorities rather than another rescue package for Islamabad, with memories of the country harbouring and hosting Al Qaeda terrorists. There's also the personal financial angle given the close ties Pakistan has cultivated with American "crypto bros," including Trump family and friends.

Anurag Jain named new Niti Aayog CEO

New Delhi: Govt Wednesday appointed 1989-batch IAS officer **Anurag Jain**, currently chief secretary of Madhya Pradesh, as chief executive officer (CEO) of Niti Aayog for two years. Centre's premier think tank has been without a full-time CEO since BVR Subramanyan's term ended last Feb.

Jain comes with varied experience across ministries, having worked in department of financial services at the time of the launch of PM Jan Dhan Scheme over a decade ago. After that he moved to the PM's Office, before taking charge as DDA vice-chairperson. He also had stints in the department for the promotion of industry and internal trade where he worked on PM Gati Shakti, using it as a key tool for holistic infrastructure development, and the transport and highways ministry as secretary.

He will join within months of reconstitution of Niti Aayog, which now has a new vice-chairperson and new members, barring Rajiv Gauba. TNN



Nepal PM ends envoy snub amid protests, to meet ambassadors of India and China

Vishant Agarwala
@timesofindia.com

Nepal PM **Balendra Shah** is set to break his self-imposed rule of avoiding one-on-one meetings with foreign diplomats by holding separate talks with Indian ambassador Naveen Srivastava and Chinese ambassador Zhang Maoming this week, a reset that comes as govt faces growing street protests and questions over its early policy choices.



The two meetings are expected to be held on the same day, an arrangement meant to signal that both India and China remain central to Nepal's foreign policy.

Shah took office on March 27 after riding a Gen Z-driven political wave that promised a

break from Nepal's old political order, but his first weeks in power were marked by an unusual diplomatic posture. He avoided individual meetings with envoys and visiting officials who would ordinarily expect one-on-one access to head of govt, including India's foreign secretary Vikram Misri, whose Kathmandu visit was postponed after Shah declined to meet him. It was the same story with senior US diplomats, including assistant secretary of state Samir Paul Kapur, who visited Kathmandu in April.

Shah's aides had framed the approach as a "new protocol" under which the PM would not hold one-on-one meetings with foreign officials below foreign minister level, leaving such engagements to

foreign ministry channels or collective briefings.

Shah did receive ambassadors and heads of diplomatic missions collectively on April 8. At that meeting, attended by representatives from 17 countries and the UN, he spoke of a "balanced foreign policy" and relations based on "trust, mutual respect and shared prosperity". His govt later presented the format as part of stricter enforcement of Nepal's "diplomatic code of conduct".

Officials said the decision to begin separate meetings with India and China was deliberate. "It is natural to begin with ambassadors of our two neighbours given Nepal's foreign policy priorities," an official said, adding that scheduling the meetings on the same day was meant to avoid any perception of preference.

Assam floods worsen, 50 dead so far, 100+ reported missing

Heavy Rain In Arunachal, Nagaland Hits Dists With Little Flood History

Prabin.Kalita@timesofindia.com

Guwahati: At least 31 people died and over 100 were reported missing in Assam Wednesday as flooding triggered by a cloudburst in neighbouring Nagaland and continuous rainfall turned catastrophic, affecting 8 lakh people in 16 districts and taking the monsoon toll to over 50.

Sivasagar reported 20 of these casualties, including four women and two children, while adjoining Charaideo accounted for five. Two people died in Golaghat and one in Jorhat. All four districts border Nagaland. The Assam State Disaster Management Authority said rivers in these districts were in spate, inundating roads, farmlands and homes.

Chief minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, who toured the affected districts, described the disaster as "unprecedented" and announced ex gra-

tia of Rs 4 lakh for the families of those who died in flood-related incidents.

"A cloudburst triggered exceptionally heavy rainfall in Arunachal Pradesh and Nagaland, with precipitation of 141% and 181% above normal, respectively. The resulting unprecedented discharge of floodwaters into Assam has inundated districts that have witnessed little to no flooding in recent history," Sarma posted on X. "Large areas are still under water, and we are reaching out to all those affected to help them tide over this crisis."

The full extent of the damage is yet to be assessed as several areas remain inaccessible. "So far, we have reports of about 100 people missing in Sivasagar district," he said.

In Sivasagar, 3.6 lakh people have been directly affected by flooding. Another 5.6 lakh people across Charaideo, Jorhat, Biswanath, Dhe-



Since Tuesday, rescue teams have saved more than 6,000 people in 4 Upper Assam districts

maji, Dibrugarh, Golaghat, Kamrup, Kamrup Metropolitan, Karbi Anglong, Nagaon, Sivasagar and Tinsukia districts have suffered the ravages of flooding.

Acknowledging complaints over delayed relief, Sarma said many villages remain cut off and assured affected families of rehabilita-

tion and livelihood support.

Officials said 273 relief camps and distribution centres are operational in 10 districts, sheltering over 12,200 displaced people. Since Tuesday, the Army, NDRF, SDRF, fire services and police have rescued more than 6,000 people in Charaideo, Golaghat, Jorhat and Sivasagar.

Preliminary estimates show 872 villages and 24,210 hectares of agricultural land have been submerged, with extensive damage to embankments, roads, bridges and other public infrastructure.

The Brahmaputra remained above the danger level at Neamatighat in Jorhat, while its tributaries Buridihing and Dhansiri were also flowing above the red mark.

The Met department has issued a yellow alert for Assam, with thunderstorms and heavy rainfall forecast over the next four days. Although the upper cyclonic circulation over central Assam and adjoining Nagaland has weakened, the weather office warned that localised heavy rain could aggravate flooding.