

ONGC starts drilling first deepwater well in Mahanadi basin



NEW DELHI, July 25 (PTI)

STATE-owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) on Saturday commenced drilling its first deepwater exploratory well in the Mahanadi offshore basin, marking the start of an ambitious campaign to tap India's deep and ultra-deepwater hydrocarbon resources. ONGC spudded exploratory well, MN-DW18-1-H-D under the Government's Samudra Manthan mission, the firm said in a statement.

The well is being drilled around 23 nautical miles from the Konark discovery off the Odisha coast, building on ONGC's recent Utkal and Konark discoveries that have strengthened the hydrocarbon prospectivity of the Mahanadi Offshore Basin. The drilling campaign forms part of the push to accelerate exploration of India's offshore oil and gas reserves.

In his Independence Day address on August 15, 2025, Prime Minister Narendra Modi had called for harnessing the country's untapped offshore hydrocarbon potential.

India placed in lower tariff tier at 10 pc under US Section 301 measures on forced labour: Govt

NEW DELHI, July 25 (PTI)

THE Government on Saturday said the US has kept India in lower tariff bracket of 10 per cent under its Section 301 measures on alleged forced labour concerns. The United States Trade Representative (USTR) on July 23 announced the final measures under Section 301 of the US Trade Act, 1974. The measures follow USTR's investigation into the acts, policies and practices of 60 economies, including India, relating to the imposition and enforcement of prohibitions on the importation of goods produced with forced labour.

USTR has imposed an additional 10 per cent tariffs on imports from India.

The US had initially proposed a 12.5 per cent tariffs. India remained closely engaged with USTR throughout the investigation via detailed written submissions and in-person consultations, including participation in public hearings.

"As a result of these sustained efforts, India has been placed in the lower tier of additional tariffs under the final measures,

providing a relative advantage to Indian exports in key sectors," the commerce ministry said in a statement.

A substantial share of India's exports to the United States, which currently attract zero addi-



tional duties, such as generic pharmaceuticals, smartphones and certain other specified products, continue to remain outside the scope of the additional 10 per cent duty, it said.

Further, products already covered under Section 232 measures, including steel, aluminium and auto parts, are not subject to the additional 10 per cent duty.

Section 232 duties are applicable broadly to all countries with limited exceptions.

"On account of these exemptions, an estimated 45 per cent of India's exports to the United States remain outside the purview of the additional 10 per cent Section 301 duty," the Ministry said.

The remaining 55 per cent of exports will attract the additional 10 per cent duty, where India's tariff incidence is comparatively lower than that for most other economies covered by the investigation.

It also said the textile-specific mechanism referenced in the final measures is yet to be established and operationalised and India continues to engage with the US on this matter as part of the ongoing negotiations for the Bilateral Trade Agreement.

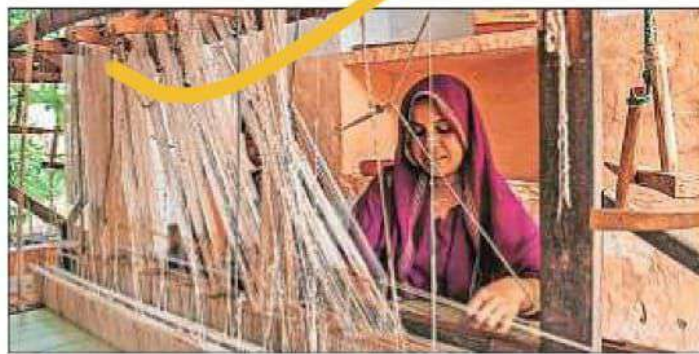
"The Government remains committed to working with the US towards the early conclusion of the India-US Bilateral Trade Agreement, as announced on 2nd February 2026 and in accordance with the Joint Statement issued on 7th February 2026," it said.

Govt programme supports 4.32 lakh rural enterprises

NEW DELHI, July 25 (IANS)

THE Start-up Village Entrepreneurship Programme (SVEP) supported 4.32 lakh rural enterprises by June-end, and delivered notable gains in profitability, incomes and social inclusion of entrepreneurs of disadvantaged sections of society, the Government said on Saturday. Under SVEP, around 86 per cent of entrepreneurs belong to SC, ST, minority and OBC communities, an official statement said, adding that Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, West Bengal and Madhya Pradesh recorded the highest numbers of enterprises supported.

The programme, implemented through State Rural Livelihoods Missions, supports



non-farm enterprises with training, finance, mentoring and community-led institutional support.

Through SHGs, CRP-EPs, bank linkages, and convergence with schemes like Pradhan Mantri Mudra Yojana, SVEP has expanded its outreach. SVEP has emerged as an effective

grassroots model for poverty reduction, local employment generation, and rural economic development.

The Government has released a cumulative central share of Rs 942.09 crore up to February 2026 continued expansion of SVEP for continued expansion of SVEP.

This is nearly 738 per cent

higher than the cumulative Rs 112.39 crore released between the programme's launch in 2016 and January 2018.

SVEP is implemented through the State Rural Livelihoods Missions (SRLMs), with a provision of Rs 6.50 crore per block and an average investment of Rs 27,083 per enterprise.

It has demonstrated that rural entrepreneurship can act as a powerful driver of inclusive economic growth when supported by strong community institutions, the statement noted. By empowering women, SC or ST communities, and first-generation entrepreneurs, the programme has transformed local aspirations into sustainable enterprises.

Houthis fire missiles at Saudi Arabia in response to strikes on Yemeni city

CAIRO, July 25 (AP)

YEMEN'S Iran-backed Houthi rebels said on Saturday that they fired missiles and drones at Saudi Arabia in response to Saudi airstrikes on the strategic Red Sea city of Hodeida, in another escalation over vital shipping routes in the Middle East, while the United States and Iran vie for control of the Strait of Hormuz.

Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree, the Houthis' military spokesman, said in a pre-recorded statement that the attack targeted facilities in the Red Sea cities of Yanbu and Jizan that belong to Aramco, the world's largest oil company.

Saudi Arabia's civil defence said alerts sounded multiple times early Saturday in both cities, but the

Kingdom hasn't commented further.

There were no reported strikes overnight in Iran, in an apparent break from nearly two weeks of consecutive nights of US attacks, though tension remains high following a recent escalation between the two countries over the Strait of Hormuz.

Red Sea escalation further threatens global shipping

The rising tension in the Red Sea threatens to further choke global shipping because the rebels have said they would close the Bab el-Mandeb Strait to Saudi-linked shipping.

That strait, at the southern tip of the Arabian Peninsula, is a vital shipping chokepoint, connecting the Red Sea to the Gulf of Aden. Around 12

per cent of the world's trade, including a quarter of its container traffic, passes through the narrows.

The Houthis targeted two Saudi oil tankers in the Red Sea this week. In response, Saudi Arabia struck the Yemeni port city of Hodeida, the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen said early on Saturday.

The strikes late Friday hit the city's port and the state-run telecommunications corporation, injuring two people, said Anees al-Asbahi, a spokesman for the Houthi-run health ministry.

The Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen said it didn't hit the port but struck "legitimate military targets" in Hodeida province, which "were linked to threats to commercial vessels in the Red Sea."

Bill introduced in US Senate seeks 3-year pause on H-1B visas, codify USD 100K fee

■ By Sagar Kulkarni

WASHINGTON, July 25 (PTI)

A US senator has introduced a bill in the Senate that seeks to pause issuance of new H-1B visas for three years and codify the USD 100,000 fee imposed by the Trump administration, which was struck down by a federal court. US Senator Tim Sheehy, a Republican from Montana, said the US should not be issuing visas that make it easier to undercut the rights of American workers.

The H-1B visa is a non-immigrant visa that allows US companies to employ highly skilled foreign workers in speciality occupations that require theoretical or technical expertise. American technology companies depend on it to hire tens of thousands of employees each year from countries like India and China.

"The H-1B programme was created to address workforce shortages for specialised, difficult-to-fill positions -- not to displace qualified, hardworking Americans with cheaper, foreign labour," Sheehy said in a



statement on Thursday.

"My legislation, the End H-1B Abuse Act, restores the programme to its original intent and puts American workers first by closing loopholes that incentivise abuse, strengthening guardrails and prioritising our national security interests," he said.

Sheehy described the End H-1B Abuse Act as "a critical, proactive step" to protect American workers, curb H-1B fraud, and address what he called national security risks created by a programme that has operated for years with inadequate guardrails.

The proposed legislation is supported by the Immigration

Accountability Project and the Federation for American Immigration Reform (FAIR). The bill seeks to pause new H-1B visas for three years and then restart the programme under far tighter limits and higher standards.

It also seeks to codify President Donald Trump's USD 100,000 fee for each H-1B petition.

The Boston-based First Circuit Court of Appeals on Friday denied the Trump administration's motion to stay US District Judge Leo T Sorokin's June 8 ruling that struck down the fee, terming it an unlawful tax not authorised by Congress. The bill also proposes to permanently replace the random lottery in statute with a wage-based selection system and bans concurrent employment and third-party staffing-agency models. It also seeks to end the "dual intent" provision for H-1B visa holders and prevent H-class visa holders from bringing dependants. The proposed legislation would also bar federal agencies from sponsoring or employing non-immigrant visa holders.

DHARMENDRA PRADHAN QUIT; CJP WITHDRAWS STIR

In a space of just a few hours nation was surprised to see Union Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation followed by CJP's meeting with Union Ministers JP Nadda and Jitendra Singh and calling off of students' protest lasting 36 days that also saw a strong police action to stall angry protesters to march to Parliament. This rapid train of developments was triggered by withdrawal of 26-day fast by Ladakh activist Sonam Wangchuk in the intervening night of July 23-24. While Wangchuk and CJP described the developments as "Victory of democracy", Congress leader Rahul Gandhi called for change in the Government.

'Pained by last 10 days' events' Govt accepts all CJP demands



NEW DELHI, July 25 (Agencies)

EDUCATION Minister Dharmendra Pradhan resigned from his post on Saturday over the NEET paper leak row, saying it is not a matter of "individual prestige" for him.

Pradhan said he is disturbed to see the series of events that have unfolded in the last 10 days and sent his resignation to Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

"I took responsibility of NEET paper leak from day one," he

said. He also said that anti national forces should not be allowed to take advantage of situation at Jantar Mantar and across country.

Pradhan's resignations comes amid Cockroach Janta Party-led protests at the Jantar Mantar, demanding his accountability over the NEET-UG 2026 paper leak and irregularities in the CBSE's on-screen marking process, besides seeking wider reforms in the conduct of public examinations. Submitting his resignation, Pradhan reaffirmed his commitment to youth and

education while thanking Prime Minister Narendra Modi for support, framing it as a response to protect exam integrity and students' future. In his letter, Pradhan said, "For over four decades, I have dedicated myself to the cause of students, teachers, and educational reform. I have always believed that a robust, inclusive, and visionary education system forms the cornerstone of a strong nation."

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NEW DELHI, July 25 (PTI)

SOON after Education Minister Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation, the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) on Saturday called off its 36-day protest at Jantar

Mantar over the NEET issue with immediate effect, saying the Government has accepted all its demands.

The two sides will again meet after four weeks to work on broader reforms in the examination system, the CJP said.

Announcing the withdrawal of the protests with immediate effect from all sites across India, CJP spokesperson Saurav Das said besides Pradhan's resignation, the Government has also agreed to provide "honourable" compensation to the families of those who committed suicide and withdrawal of FIRs in Delhi and other BJP-ruled States.

"The CJP declares that we withdraw the agitation in good faith and understanding that the agreed-upon terms will be executed within the agreed-upon timeline," Das said at a joint press conference along with



Union Ministers JP Nadda and Jitendra Singh hold third round of talks with Cockroach Janta Party's Chief Spokesperson Saurav Das and its National Spokesperson Ashutosh Ranka, in New Delhi on Saturday. (ANI)

Government interlocutors, Union Ministers JP Nadda and Jitendra Singh.

Das was accompanied in the meeting by another CJP spokesperson, Ashutosh Ranka.

"As the Government accepted all our demands after 36 days of protests, we appeal to everyone to peacefully withdraw from protest sites and go home," Ranka said.

Das said they have shared a draft of the demands with the Government and the

Government will share a written guarantee by Tuesday.

Nadda said the CJP representatives came to the meeting with a written draft in which they presented certain points regarding the cases filed during the agitation. He said along with that, the CJP also raised the remaining demands: that no retaliatory measures should be taken, that compensation should be provided, and that their five-point charter should be considered.

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Joshi appointed as Education Minister

NEW DELHI, July 25 (PTI)

UNION Minister Prahlad Joshi has been appointed as Education Minister following Dharmendra Pradhan's resignation from the post on Saturday. Joshi has been given additional charge of the Education Ministry besides his role as Consumer Affairs Minister.

A Rashtrapati Bhavan communique said the President, as advised by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, has accepted the resignation of Pradhan with immediate effect. It said that on the advice of the Prime Minister, the President has directed that Joshi, Cabinet Minister, be assigned the charge of the Ministry of Education, in addition to his own duties.

