PM Modi speaks to UK counterpart Burnham

NEW DELHI, July 31 (PTI)

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi and his British counterpart Andy Burnham on Friday vowed to take the India-UK comprehensive strategic partnership to "new heights" and fully harness the trade and investment opportunities presented by the recently-operationalised bilateral trade deal.

Modi and Burnham discussed key aspects of the two-way ties during a phone conversation.

In a social media post, Modi said he congratulated Burnham on assuming the charge of the top office and conveyed his best wishes for a successful tenure.

"We agreed to work together across sectors such as technology, innovation, defence, security, clean energy, education and

people-to-people ties and take the India-UK Comprehensive Strategic Partnership to new heights," he said. "We will also collaborate closely to fully harness the trade and investment opportunities presented by the recently operationalized India-UK Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement, for the shared prosperity and well-being of both our people," Modi said.

A British readout said Burnham began the conversation by reflecting on the strength of the UK-India partnership and the significant impact it has had on local communities across the UK. "The Prime Minister set out his ambitions to further enhance the UK-India relationship, including through the UK-India Vision 2035 framework and strong people-to-people links," it said.

Burnham praised the contribution Indian communities in the UK make to the fabric of UK society, with Modi noting the links between the two leaders' own home cities of Manchester and Ahmedabad, in Gujarat, which he called the "Manchester of India", it said. Turning to trade, Modi underlined the value of the recently introduced free trade agreement which will create opportunities for people across both countries, it added.

DRONE ECONOMICS

BY ROHIT PAWAR

"Nothing is more powerful than an idea whose time has come." - Victor Hugo

THE most disruptive weapon of the 21st century may not be a hypersonic missile, a stealth bomber or an aircraft carrier. It may be a machine small enough to fit into the boot of a car.

The drone is changing warfare not because it is the most powerful weapon. It is changing warfare because it is among the cheapest. That distinction matters.

For decades, military power was measured in numbers. More soldiers, more tanks, more aircraft, bigger defence budgets. Nations believed security came from building larger and more sophisticated forces. The drone is exposing the limits of that thinking. A machine costing a tiny fraction of a fighter aircraft can conduct surveillance, direct artillery fire, strike military positions and threaten assets worth millions. Recent conflicts have shown that expensive platforms can be challenged by systems costing only a fraction of their value.

The real revolution is economic. In many cases, the cost of detecting and destroying a drone exceeds the cost of the drone itself. The attacker spends thousands. The defender may spend far more. No business would accept such a model. Militaries have no choice.

History offers a warning. The longbow shattered the dominance of armoured knights at Agincourt. The machine gun rewrote battlefield tactics. The tank began breaking the deadlock of trench warfare at Somme. Every breakthrough forced militaries to abandon old assumptions. Drones are doing the same.

A capability once reserved for major powers is now available to smaller states, militant groups and criminal networks. Whenever weaker actors could not defeat stronger armies conventionally, they turned to proxy wars, insurgencies and terrorism. Drones fit perfectly into that strategy. They impose costs, create uncertainty and allow weaker adversaries to challenge stronger opponents without matching them tank for tank or aircraft for aircraft.

Also, the Second World War was won not only on the battlefield but also on the factory floor. The Soviet Union overwhelmed Germany by producing reliable weapons in overwhelming numbers while Germany increasingly relied on fewer, complex and expensive platforms. The drone age is reviving that logic. Industrial capacity is once again becoming a strategic weapon.

For India, this is no longer theoretical. The recent approval of a Rs 52,000 crore defence modernisation package reflects how seriously India is taking emerging threats. But money alone will not determine success. Cross-border drones are already being used for smuggling weapons, narcotics and conducting surveillance, while Operation Sindoor demonstrated that drones and loitering munitions are becoming central to modern warfare. The real test is not how much India spends, but how wisely it spends.

Ukrainian soldiers from 108th Separate Territorial Defence Brigade operating a heavy, 'Baba Yaga' drone as a signal repeater and bomber.

DRDO has developed indigenous anti-drone systems capable of detecting, tracking and neutralising hostile UAVs through radar, electro-optical sensors and electronic warfare. Indigenous loitering munitions such as Nagastra, swarm drone programmes and long-range unmanned systems reflect a growing domestic capability.

Indian Armed Forces are also evaluating indigenous private-sector solutions. Systems such as 'Indrajaal' have attracted Army interest for their layered, cost-effective approach to countering drone threats. Alongside DRDO projects such as Durga II, laser-based directed-energy weapons and advanced electronic warfare systems, they point towards the future India should pursue. India's objective should be simple: defeat cheap drones cheaply.

Achieving that will require DRDO, private industry and defence startups to innovate together at scale.

Buying drones is only half the challenge. Protecting high-value military assets from inexpensive drones is the real test.

India will continue investing in fighter aircraft, warships and missile systems. Drones do not make these platforms obsolete. They do, however, force a reassessment of how they are protected. A platform worth thousands of crores can no longer be judged only by its offensive capability. Its survivability has become just as important.

The battlefield of the future will feature autonomous systems, artificial intelligence and coordinated drone swarms operating at unprecedented speed. Victory will depend not only on innovation but also on the ability to manufacture, replace and adapt faster than the adversary.

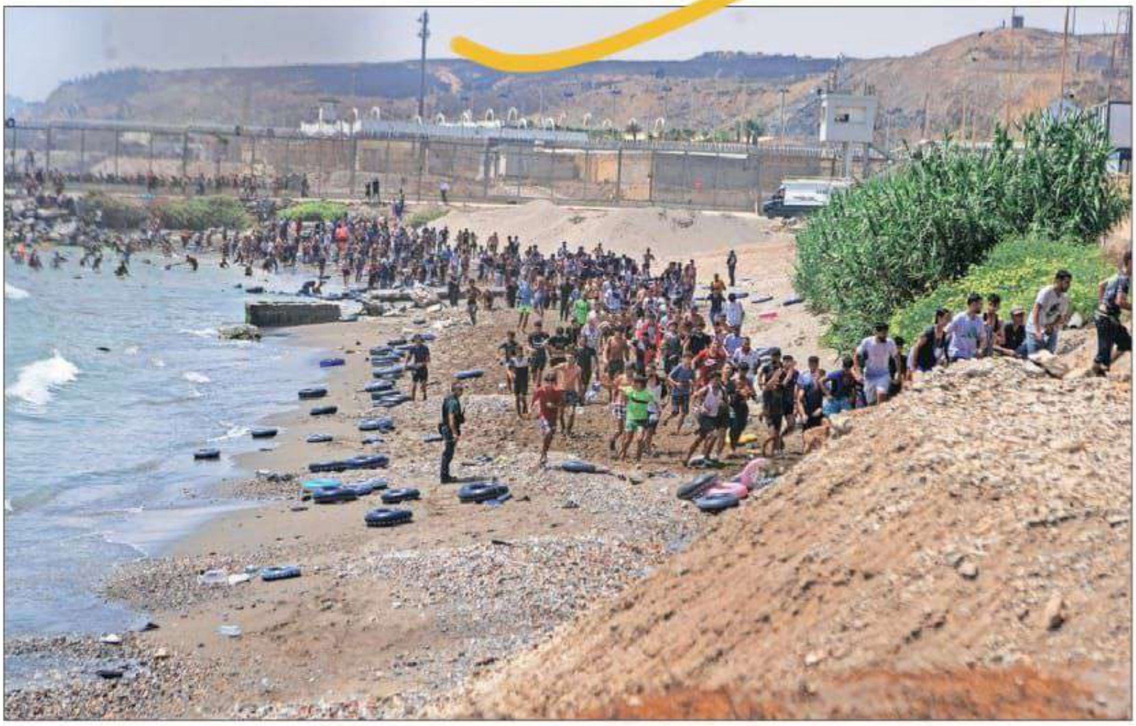
There is an old military saying that generals often prepare for the previous war instead of the next.

India's challenge is not merely recognising drones as a technological threat. It is recognising that they have fundamentally altered the economics of war. Defence planning must therefore value production capacity as much as procurement, and innovation as much as inventory.

The next great military breakthrough may not be a faster missile or a more advanced fighter aircraft. It may be the ability to destroy an entire drone swarm at negligible cost. The countries that master the equation first will shape the future battlefield.

> The greatest danger to India's security is not the drone itself. It is the temptation to fight an economic problem with expensive military solutions. Victory will depend not only on innovation, but on the ability to manufacture, replace and adapt faster than the adversary. Industrial capacity is becoming a strategic weapon once again. A robust indigenous defence industry will also reduce dependence on foreign supply chains, ensuring that India can sustain military production even when global supply chains are disrupted by war or geopolitical crises.

Over 60,000 migrants cross into Spain from Morocco; 57 die after border breach



Migrants cross from Morocco into the Spanish exclave of Ceuta on Thursday. (AP/PTI)

CEUTA, July 31 (AP)

OVER 60,000 migrants have entered Spain's Ceuta from Morocco in the past 24 hours, Ceuta's President says. That is equivalent to 70 per cent of the city's regular population.

At least 57 migrants have died in the process.

"The situation that Ceuta is going through is absolutely unsustainable," said Juan Jesus Vivas on Friday.

The border crisis boiled over Thursday and continued on Friday with security forces clashing with migrants on the Moroccan side of the border.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez condemned the breach of the border on Friday speaking in Ceuta, describing the events as "a violation of Spain's territorial integrity."

The Spanish leader cast blame on human smugglers, saying they "deceive so many young people, and ultimately lead many of them to their deaths - whether in the ocean or, as in this case, at Spain's border in the autonomous city of Ceuta."

Live footage of the border showed hundreds of migrants gathered on a hill overlooking Ceuta being dispersed with tear gas by Moroccan forces, while others continued to swim to the Spanish territory.

At the same time, large groups of migrants walked back from Ceuta toward Morocco to return home.

Rachid Sbihi, who leads a local workers association representing Civil Guard officers, called the situation a "serious humanitarian crisis," saying thousands of migrants, including unaccompanied children, were left sleeping in parks and on sidewalks, while others roamed the streets aimlessly.

"People are still entering. The reinforcements, including Spanish military troops, that have arrived are only helping the injured and other humanitarian efforts," he said. "It's chaotic."

CABINET DECISIONS

Cabinet approves Rs 84,084 cr 'Samudra Manthan' offshore exploration scheme

NEW DELHI, July 31 (PTI)

THE Union Cabinet on Friday approved the Rs 84,084 crore "Samudra Manthan" National Offshore Exploration Scheme to partly fund the high cost of finding oil and gas in deepwater areas, drilling exploratory wells and building common infrastructure to bring new discoveries into production.

Under the scheme, the Government will provide support of up to Rs 650 crore for each well drilled in deepsea and ultra-deepsea areas, officials said, as part of efforts to boost domestic oil and gas output and reduce reliance on imports.

More than half of the scheme's total outlay, or Rs 43,200 crore, will be allocated over five years through 2031 to support deepsea drilling, an activity involving high costs and significant geological risks as not every exploratory well results in a commercial discovery. Another Rs 10,000 crore has been earmarked to partially fund common infrastructure needed to bring discovered oil and gas reserves into production. The scheme also provides Rs 28,534 crore for offshore data acquisition and Rs 2,000 crore for developing oil and gas manufacturing and services zones.

Drilling in ultra-deepwater areas, where water depths exceed 1,500 metres, can cost between USD 100 million (about Rs 950 crore) and USD 250 million (around Rs 2,400 crore) per well, with no certainty that the investment will result in a discovery or contribute to higher domestic production.

The Government expects the scheme to accelerate exploration in offshore basins, attract investment and help unlock India's offshore hydrocarbon potential.

India's reliance on imported crude oil, the key raw material used to produce fuels such as petrol and diesel, has increased over the past decade from 77 per cent to 88 per cent. The country also imports around half of its natural gas requirements, which is used in sectors including fertiliser production, power generation, compressed natural gas for vehicles and piped cooking gas supplies to households.

Approves extension of PM-KISAN scheme till FY'31

THE Government on Friday extended the PM-KISAN scheme for the next five years till 2030-31 with a total outlay of over Rs 3.15 lakh crore, a decision aimed at providing financial support to farmers. Under the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) scheme, launched in February 2019, eligible landholding farmer families get financial assistance of Rs 6,000 per year. The amount is transferred directly into their bank accounts in three equal instalments. Nearly 4.5 lakh crore have been disbursed so far under this scheme.

A total financial outlay of Rs 3,15,614 cr has been approved for the Scheme during this period, he added. The extension of the scheme will enhance farmers' capacity to invest in agriculture, improve productivity, help reduce agricultural risks and strengthen the rural economy.

Rs 5,070 cr approved for floating solar projects

THE Government on Friday approved Pradhan Mantri Surya Sarovar Yojana (PM-SSY) for development of floating solar photovoltaic projects with energy storage systems with a total outlay of Rs 5,070 crore, an official statement said. The scheme envisages the development of 5,000 MW of Floating Solar Photovoltaic projects with co-located Energy Storage Systems having a minimum storage capacity of two hours, i.e 10,000 MWh, the statement said.

The approval follows the recent assessment undertaken by the National Institute of Solar Energy (NISE), which has estimated a floating solar potential of approximately 102.18 GWp across reservoirs and other suitable inland water bodies in the country.

Central Financial Assistance of Rs 1 crore per MW will be provided for eligible Floating Solar Photovoltaic projects after successful commissioning.

India, Bhutan sign Rs 4,000 cr LoC deal

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and his Bhutanese counterpart Dasho Pema Lektup Dorji and others during a meeting.

THIMPHU, July 31 (PTI)

INDIA and Bhutan reviewed the progress of New Delhi-supported development projects in the Himalayan nation during a high-level talk, as the two sides signed a concessional Line of Credit (LoC) agreement worth Rs 4,000 crore and expanded cooperation in the health sector.

The fifth India-Bhutan Development Cooperation Talks, co-chaired by Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri and his Bhutanese counterpart Dasho Pema Lektup Dorji on Thursday, focused on the implementation of projects under Bhutan's 13th Five-Year Plan, the Indian Embassy in Bhutan said in a social media post. The two sides reviewed the progress and implementation of India-supported projects across diverse sectors, it said.

Bhutan appreciated India's significant support and its contribution to the country's socio-economic development, the mission said. During the talks, both sides reviewed the overall progress and implementation of India's support of INR 10,000 crore for Bhutan's 13th FYP period (2024-29), the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said in a joint press release.

This support covers Project Tied Assistance (PTA) projects, High Impact Community Development Projects (HICDP), Economic Stimulus Programme (ESP) and the Programme Grant, it said.

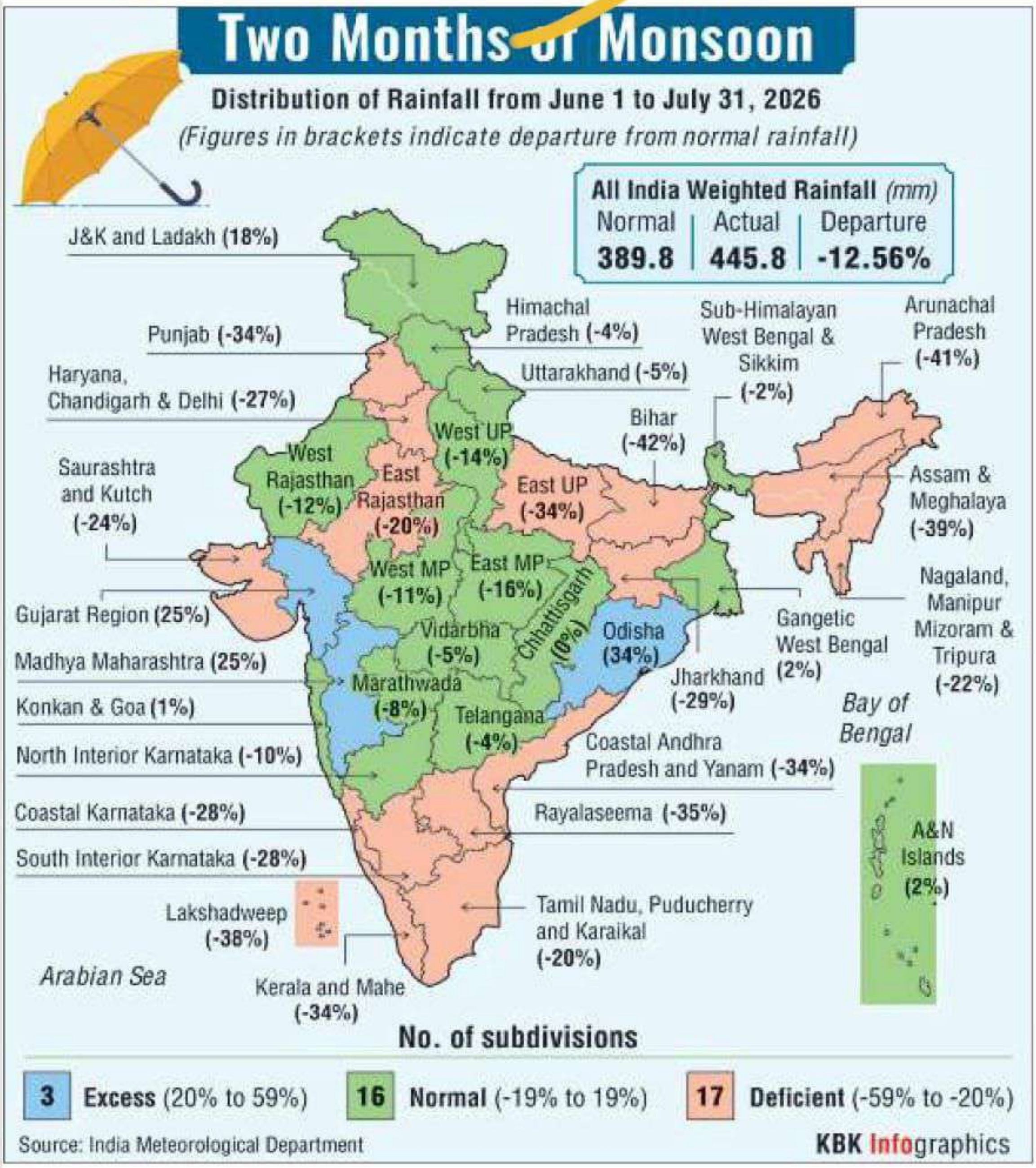
A total of 12 new PTA projects amounting to INR332 crore were approved, covering sectors such as infrastructure, healthcare, agriculture, urban amenities and disaster management, the release said. With this, a total of 82 PTA projects have been approved under the 13th FYP, amounting to INR 6,860 crore. India has also released INR 1,250 crore towards ESP, INR 735.20 crore towards HICDPs and INR 200 crore towards Programme Grant.

"The meeting reviewed the progress in utilisation of these funds," the release said.

The two Foreign Secretaries also virtually inaugurated the Thimphu Ecological Park and the Olakha Park, developed under the "Green Infrastructure and Open Spaces in Thimphu" project funded by India as part of bilateral economic development. An agreement for a concessional line of credit of Rs 4,000 crore (Nu 40 billion) was exchanged between the Export-Import Bank of India and Bhutan's Ministry of Finance to support development initiatives in the country, the embassy said.

The two sides also exchanged a memorandum of understanding (MoU) for cooperation in health education and research between the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) and Bhutan's Khesar Gyalpo University of Medical Sciences, it said.

Below-normal rainfall from August to September: IMD



NEW DELHI, July 31 (PTI)

INDIA as a whole is most likely to witness below-normal rainfall during the second half of the southwest monsoon from August to September, the India Meteorological Department (IMD) said in its monthly forecast issued on Friday.

The rainfall is expected to be less than 94 per cent of the Long Period Average (LPA), it said.

LPA refers to the rainfall recorded over a particular region in a given period, such as a month or a season, averaged over a long period, typically 30 to 50 years.

The LPA of rainfall over the country as a whole during the August to September period, based on historical data from 1971 to 2020, is 422.8 mm.

Dr Mrutyunjay Mohapatra, Director General of Meteorology at the IMD, said, "During this (August-September) period, below-normal rainfall is very likely over many parts of the country, except some parts of peninsular India, central India, northern parts of northwest India, and east and northeast India, where normal to above-normal rainfall is likely."

For the month of August, rainfall over the country as a whole is also expected to be below-normal, with less than 94 per cent of the LPA, the IMD said.

The LPA of rainfall over India during August, based on the 1971-2020 data, is 254.9 mm.