

'Over 1 cr houses delivered to urban poor under PMAY-U'

NEW DELHI, Aug 9 (IANS)

PRADHAN Mantri Awas Yojana – Urban (PMAY-U) has achieved another significant milestone with the sanction of more than 1.25 crore houses, of which more than 1 crore houses have been completed and delivered to beneficiaries across the country, according to a statement issued by the Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs on Sunday.

As many as 2.09 lakh houses were sanctioned last week under Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana – Urban 2.0 for economically weaker section (EWS) families across the States and Union Territories (UTs) of Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Gujarat, Jammu and Kashmir, Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Manipur, Odisha, Rajasthan, Tamil Nadu, Telangana, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, the statement said.

The approval was given at the eighth meeting of the Central Sanctioning and Monitoring Committee under PMAY-U 2.0 held at Sankalp Bhawan here



under the chairmanship of Satendra Singh, Department of Urban Development Secretary under Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA) to review the scheme's progress and approve additional housing proposals sent by States and UTs, the statement said.

Around 1.42 lakh houses have been sanctioned under Beneficiary Led Construction (BLC) vertical of the scheme, wherein financial assistance of up to Rs 2.5 lakh is provided to

beneficiaries to construct pucca houses on their own land.

Meanwhile, 67,045 houses are for Affordable Housing in Partnership (AHP) vertical, under which affordable housing projects are developed by public/private agencies in partnership with States and UTs, with eligible EWS beneficiaries receiving Central assistance for allotted houses.

With the latest approvals, the total number of houses sanctioned under PMAY-U 2.0 has

crossed 18.38 lakh, of which 14.40 lakh are BLC houses and 2.48 lakh are AHP while 1.36 lakh houses are allotted to Interest Subsidy Scheme (ISS) vertical beneficiaries and 13,046 are sanctioned as Affordable Rental Housing (ARH). The MoHUA Secretary undertook a comprehensive review of the progress of the scheme, assessing the pace of implementation across States and UTs, timely grounding and completion of sanctioned houses, geo-tagging, fund utilisation, beneficiary verification, occupancy status and overall progress under PMAY-U and PMAY-U 2.0.

He emphasised the need for expeditious implementation, timely release of funds, effective monitoring and close coordination among all stakeholders, including the beneficiaries, to ensure that the benefits of the scheme reach every eligible urban family.

Beyond creating housing assets, PMAY-U 2.0 is fostering social inclusion, improved living conditions and enhanced economic security for lakhs of urban families.

8 political parties join hands to form 'Progressive Front' in Nepal

■ By Shirish B Pradhan

KATHMANDU, Aug 9 (PTI)

EIGHT Nepalese political parties have announced the formation of a new alliance named the 'Progressive Front' based on "shared political issues and common agendas."

The alliance was announced at a programme held in Kathmandu on Saturday comprising Janata Samajbadi Party (JSP), Janamat Party (JP), Aam Janata Party (AJP), Nagarik Unmukti Party Nepal (NUPN), Pragatishil Loktantrik Party (PLP), Nepal Sanghiya Samjawadi Party (NSSP), Bahujan Samajbadi Party Nepal (BSPN) and Khambuwan Rastriya Morcha (KRM).

According to a statement issued by the Progressive Front, the alliance is preparing to move

forward on the basis of shared political issues and common agendas. The formation comes amid ongoing efforts among Madhesh-based parties and some other fringe parties to forge political collaboration and cooperation. The front aims to work for the formation of a "just, inclusive and discrimination-less unified society" by ending all types of discrimination and anomalies irrespective of the people's castes, creed and classes, the statement said. "The front also aims to institutionalise and develop a federal, democratic, republic governance system and an inclusive democratic system in practical terms," it said.

The alliance also seeks to ensure equal and proportionate representation based on population in the Parliament, both

the House of Representatives and the National Assembly, as well as provincial assemblies. The front said it aims to end all types of exploitation, inequalities and discrimination against Madhesis, ethnic groups, Dalits, women, Tharu, Muslims, backward classes and sexual minorities.

According to experts, the new alliance is expected to have an impact on Nepal's political scenario despite not having representation in the federal Parliament.

Those who signed the joint statement include Upendra Yadav from JSP, CK Raut from Janamat Party, Prabhu Sah from AJP, Resham Chaudhari from NUPN, Santosh Pariyar from PLP, Rijwan Ansari from NSSP, Harinandah K Ranjan from BSPN and Ram Kumar Rai from KRM.

Russian Dy PM calls for rail route to Indian Ocean

MOSCOW, Aug 9 (PTI)

RUSSIA needs to create a rail-way route to the Indian Ocean to reduce dependence on strategically sensitive maritime choke-points like the Strait of Hormuz and Bosphorus Strait, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin has said.

His comments came amid the conflict in West Asia, which has severely disrupted shipping through the Strait of Hormuz -- a waterway through which roughly one-fifth of the world's energy supplies pass in normal times. "A rail link to the Indian Ocean should also be explored. Risks related to the Bosphorus and the Strait of Hormuz might require alternative routes: through Turkmenistan, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Any options providing access to India are acceptable," Khusnullin told Russia's state-run 'TASS news agency' on Thursday.



Marat Khusnullin

While the Strait of Hormuz connects the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, the Bosphorus Strait connects the

Black Sea to the Sea of Marmara. Turkiye, which controls the Bosphorus Strait, has said it remains open amid heightened concerns.

The proposal comes as Russia faces growing Western pressure over its energy exports, with the US Senate on July 29 advancing legislation that could impose

steep tariffs on countries, including India, that continue to buy Russian oil and gas.

The proposal could also have wider geopolitical implications, given its potential to pass through Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan and provide Russia with an alternative overland connection to the Indian Ocean.

'US sanctions on Russia may affect oil supplies to India'

NEW DELHI, Aug 9 (PTI)

A US Senate vote to advance tougher sanctions on Russia raises the risk of disruption to Russian crude supplies but is unlikely to immediately alter oil flows to India and China, according to Kpler analyst Sumit Ritolia.

The US Senate on Friday passed a bipartisan Russia sanctions bill that would give

President Donald Trump authority to impose tariffs of up to 100 per cent on imports from countries that are among the world's largest buyers of Russian oil and gas.

The Lindsey O Graham Sanctioning Russia Act of 2026 targets the five biggest purchasers of Russian energy and is aimed at cutting Moscow's revenues from oil and gas sales.

The measure still needs to

clear the US House of Representatives and faces further legislative and administrative steps before it could take effect. According to Ritolia, the measures still face further legislative and administrative hurdles, while their impact will depend largely on how aggressively the US administration implements them, including whether it grants exemptions or waivers.

Kusha missile test brings India closer to self-reliance: Report

NEW DELHI, Aug 9 (IANS)

THE first test of the Kusha long-range surface-to-air missile system is set to bring India closer to self-reliance and be a key part of Sudarshan Chakra, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's two-phase Mission for a multilayered national defence umbrella, against ballistic missiles, fighter aircraft, drones and other threats by 2035, a media report said.

"India's first test of its Kusha long-range surface-to-air missile system is seen as a milestone that could pave the way for New Delhi to bolster its home-grown air defence network and meet the challenges of future conflicts," the

report by the South China Morning Post said.

It cited IAF's Air Marshal Ravi Singh Krishna Kapoor (retd) as saying that Kusha could be integrated into the country's air defence architecture easily as it was a domestically developed system.

"The threats are multiplying with the proliferation of drones and missiles, further complicated by fifth-generation fighters. The best way of air denial is to have a robust integrated multi-layered air defence system capable of detecting, identifying, engaging and destroying intruders," Kapoor said, as per the report.

He also said that Kusha could complement Russia's S-400 Triumf surface-to-air missile systems as part of the outermost umbrella of India's air defence, with the short-to-medium range surface-to-air missiles such as the Akash being part of the inner layer, the report added.

"At the same time, the Kusha could also play a limited offensive role to prevent enemies from launching their weapons, as shown during Operation Sindoor, Kapoor added, citing the need to counter modern aircraft such as the Chinese next-generation advanced fighters equipped with long-range air-to-air missiles," it said.

Houthi claim attacks on Saudi Arabian oil facility and Yemeni port

SANAA, Aug 9 (AP)

YEMEN'S Houthis attacked a crucial port on the Red Sea, killing people and further escalating the conflict over strategic waterways in the Middle East. They also said they attacked an oil facility on Sunday in south-western Saudi Arabia, the latest attack by the Iranian-backed rebels on the kingdom.

Meanwhile, Iran has made new demands about the restart of negotiations and the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz, the Pentagon is pressing the US defence industry to accelerate production of weapons, and Israel is insisting it won't withdraw from Gaza until Hamas disarms. Here's a look at developments across the Middle East on Sunday.

BrahMos emerges as India's defence export star after Op Sindoor: Report

NEW DELHI, Aug 9 (IANS)

THE accuracy and lethality of the BrahMos supersonic cruise missile played a crucial role in prompting Pakistan to swiftly call for a ceasefire during Operation Sindoor, as the weapon demonstrated its capability to successfully evade Chinese-origin air defence systems deployed by it, according to a new report.

The battlefield performance of the missile subsequently triggered keen interest among several countries seeking to strengthen their defence capabilities, according to a report published by The Week.

India had earlier signed a \$375-million agreement with the Philippines in January 2022 to supply three BrahMos missile batteries. Following Operation Sindoor, negotiations with other prospective buyers also gathered pace.

Vietnam has concluded a deal



estimated at \$629 million, while Indonesia has also finalised an agreement believed to be worth between \$200 million and \$300 million.

The report mentioned that the BrahMos project traces its origins to 1997. At the time, A P J Abdul Kalam, who was then heading the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and serving as the head of the Integrated Guided Missile

Development Programme (IGMDP), was overseeing a programme whose five flagship missile systems -- Prithvi, Agni, Akash, Trishul and Nag -- did not include a terrain-hugging cruise missile.

This gap eventually paved the way for the development of BrahMos, a supersonic cruise missile jointly developed by India and Russia, according to The Week report.

It said that in 1997, a team of 27 Indian representatives, comprising DRDO scientists, officials from Government defence companies and representatives of the private sector, travelled to a military-industrial facility in Reutov, a small township located outside Moscow. The team studied an engine that powered a Russian cruise missile, with Russian authorities willing to share the technology with India.

The engine was used to power Russia's Onyx supersonic cruise missile, while work was underway to further refine the missile system. The Indian delegation spent nearly three months in Russia assessing and evaluating the technology.

Impressed by what they witnessed, New Delhi subsequently signed an inter-Governmental agreement with Russia in 1998 to establish what would eventually become BrahMos Aerospace, the report stated.

Ukrainian drone explodes in Bulgaria near gas pipeline

SOFIA (Bulgaria), Aug 9 (AP)

A DRONE entered Bulgarian airspace on Saturday and exploded close to an international gas pipeline shortly after crossing the border from Romania. There were no casualties or damage.

Drones straying into NATO airspace have not been uncommon since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. The Defence Ministry in Sofia, Bulgaria's capital, later said there were indications the drone was the kind used by Ukrainian armed forces and that the incident was likely accidental. Bulgaria and Romania are both members of NATO and the European Union.

A Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spokesperson said the Ukrainian

military was looking into the incident but that it did not deliberately target Bulgaria. Heorhii Tykhyi said on Saturday that Ukraine and Bulgaria were in "close contact" to establish the circumstances of the incident.

Bulgaria's Prime Minister Rumen Radev said the drone exploded just after 5 am about 100 metres (109 yards) inside Bulgarian territory. It was not detected or identified while flying through either Romanian or Bulgarian airspace.

"There are no casualties or damage to buildings. The area has been cordoned off. We continue to monitor the situation," Radev said following a government emergency meeting. Radev said the unmanned aerial vehi-

7 killed in Russia, Ukraine strikes

KYIV, Aug 9 (AP)

RUSSIA and Ukraine exchanged strikes overnight that killed civilians and injured many others on both sides, local authorities reported.

Large-scale Russian missile strikes on Ukrainian cities have become almost routine in recent weeks, with Moscow exploiting Ukraine's critical shortage of interceptors for the US-made Patriot systems -- the sole air defence weapon in its

arsenal able to shoot down ballistic missiles.

In the latest attacks, Ukrainian drones killed five people and injured two dozen others, including a 4-year-old boy, in Russia's border region of Belgorod, according to the regional administration.

In Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, Russian missiles struck a high-rise apartment block in the Saltivskiy district, killing two people and injuring 13.

cle exploded around 200 metres (218 yards) from a Romanian compressor station, and about 1

kilometre (0.6 miles) from Bulgaria's compressor station on the Trans-Balkan gas pipeline.

Defence pact with Saudi, Pak not aimed at Iran or any other country: Turkiye

ANKARA, Aug 9 (AP)

A DEFENCE agreement between Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and Turkiye is not aimed against Iran or any other country, Turkiye's Foreign Minister said Saturday, describing the pact as an important step toward regional stability. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif signed the agreement in the Saudi holy city of Mecca on Friday. It states that an attack on one would be considered an attack on all three.

The "Mecca Joint Defence Agreement" brings together oil-rich Saudi Arabia and nuclear power Pakistan as well as Turkiye, which has NATO's second-largest army and a rapidly growing defence industry. It deepens

Turkiye's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan insisted that the three countries do not view any particular state as an adversary unless they take hostile action against them

cooperation and deterrence at a time of increased regional uncertainty and threats from the war in Iran.

In an interview with Turkiye's state-run Anadolu Agency, Turkiye's Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan insisted that the three

countries do not view any particular state as an adversary unless they take hostile action against them. "We don't have anything written down - nothing we've signed - that defines a common threat," Fidan said. "Any country that does not attack us is not a target for us."

The Turkish minister described the agreement's clause on mutual defence as being "technically the same" as NATO's Article 5, under which an attack on one of the 32 members is considered an attack on them all.

Asked how the mechanism would work, Fidan said a member would need to formally request help and that the other two countries' assistance could range from intelligence sharing to logistic support - or the deployment of military units depending on the threat.

#Cheer4Bharat: PM lauds CWG medallists

NEW DELHI, Aug 9 (Agencies)

PRIME Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday met members of the Indian contingent that returned with medals from the Commonwealth Games in Glasgow and congratulated the athletes for their impressive performances at the multi-sport event.

"Those who play, will flourish. Always cheer for Bharat. Bharat Mata Ki Jai," PM Narendra Modi posted on Instagram. Modi shared a short video clip of his interaction with the medallists on 'Instagram', describing the meeting as a special occasion and praising the athletes for making the country proud. Later, the PM also tweeted about his meeting with the athletes.

"Delighted to host our outstanding medal winners from the Commonwealth Games 2026 at 7, Lok Kalyan Marg. Heard about their experiences from the Games. Each one of them has made our nation proud through their exceptional performances. Their success will motivate many youngsters," Modi posted on 'X' while sharing some photographs of the meeting.

Among those who interacted with Prime Minister



was boxer Sakshi Chaudhary, who won the gold medal in the women's 51 kg category at the Games. India enjoyed a strong campaign in Glasgow, finishing with 39 medals, including 13 gold. Sakshi, said: "Our honourable PM sir has welcomed all the medallists from the Commonwealth Games and we are feeling very proud of this. We have really enjoyed meeting him, he is very humble."

Modi, while interacting with the athletes, said: "Jo khelega, woh khilega. Always cheer for Bharat."

The Prime Minister spoke to the medallists and congratulated them for their efforts.

India's boxing contingent enjoyed a particularly successful campaign, with the country's pugilists winning a record haul of 10 medals at the Glasgow Games. Sakshi was among the seven Indian boxers who returned with gold. India finished fourth in medal standings with 39 medals (13 gold, 17 silver and nine bronze) despite competing in a significantly reduced programme that excluded medal-rich sports such as wrestling, badminton, table tennis, hockey and shooting. India's boxing contingent returned from Glasgow with seven gold and three silver medals, with the seven gold medals coming from Preeti Pawar (54 kg), Jaimine Lamboria (57 kg),

Sakshi Chaudhary (51 kg), Priya Ghanghas (60 kg), Arundhati Choudhary (70 kg), Sachin Siwach (60 kg) and Ankush Panghal (80 kg). The three silver medallists were Jadumani Singh (55 kg), Olympic medallist Lovlina Borgohain (75 kg) and Narender Berwal (90+ kg). The seven gold medals also marked the best-ever performance by Indian women boxers at the Commonwealth Games.

Indian judo contingent also produced its best-ever Commonwealth Games performance. India participated in 12 judo events in Glasgow and won four medals—two gold, one silver and one bronze, compared to three medals, with no gold, in 2022. The breakthrough was led by Khelo India athletes Asmita Dey and Harsh Singh, who created history by winning India's first-ever Commonwealth Games gold medals in judo. Asmita became the first Indian woman judoka to win Commonwealth Games gold, while Harsh became the first Indian male judoka to achieve the feat. Athletics delivered 10 medals, comprising five silver and five bronze. Gulveer Singh became the first Indian track and field athlete to win two individual medals at a single Commonwealth Games, claiming silver in the men's 10,000m and bronze in the 5,000m.