

# Akash Prime successfully tested in Ladakh by Army

**Saurabh Trivedi**

NEW DELHI

To further strengthen the air defence system, the Army has carried out successful trials of the indigenously developed air defence system “Akash Prime” in Ladakh.

A senior official confirmed that the Army Air Defence Corps conducted the trials in collaboration with senior scientists from the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), which developed the missile system.

The two-day trial was conducted at an altitude of over 15,000 feet in eastern Ladakh. The Akash Prime scored two direct hits on fast-moving aerial targets in the rarefied high-altitude atmosphere.



**On top:** The Army carried out successful trials of the indigenously developed air defence system in Ladakh. X/DRDO

The latest version of the Akash system would form the third and fourth regiments of the Akash air defence systems in the Indian Army. The Akash air defence system is a medium-range, surface-to-air missile platform.

## **Prithvi-II and Agni-I**

The Ministry of Defence on Thursday confirmed that

short-range ballistic missiles – Prithvi-II and Agni-I – were successfully test-fired from the Integrated Test Range in Chandipur, Odisha.

The launches validated all operational and technical parameters. These tests were conducted under the aegis of the Strategic Forces Command, added the Ministry.

# Cong. brass unhappy over MLAs not opposing public security Bill in Assembly

Party's Maharashtra legislators were directed to oppose the Bill and register dissent before panel constituted to scrutinise it; central leadership distributed note with analysis of 'problems' with Bill

**Vinaya Deshpande Pandit**  
MUMBAI

**T**he Maharashtra Special Public Security Bill, 2024, was passed through the State Assembly on July 10 and the Legislative Council the next day with minimal resistance from the Opposition benches.

While a Communist Party of India MLA objected, Assembly Speaker Rahul Narvekar declared the Bill, put to vote through a voice vote, approved by a majority.

It has now emerged that Congress MLAs were directed to oppose the Bill in the Assembly and to register their dissent in the joint Legislative Committee constituted to scrutinise it.

Yet, no dissent note was placed on record to the panel or the Speaker, nor did the Congress MLAs explicitly oppose the Bill on the floor of the House.

*The Hindu* has accessed a draft of the seven-page dissent note the party leadership had sent to the



Opposition leaders staging a protest during the Monsoon Session of Maharashtra Assembly in Mumbai on Thursday. PTI

MLAs on July 10, asking them to place their opposition on record.

Senior Congress leaders admitted that the MLAs "failed to uphold the party's stance" in the Assembly, but claimed that the legislators had opposed the Bill during the voice vote.

## 'Was not aware'

"I wasn't aware that the Bill was to be tabled that day. If I were in the House, I would have torn it to pieces," Congress Legislature Party (CLP) leader Vijay Wadetiwar, who was ab-

sent that day, told reporters on Thursday.

Congress sources said the party leadership has taken a serious view of the lapse on the part of the MLAs, and Mr. Wadetiwar has been issued a notice to explain why they "failed to take up the issue in the Assembly".

The CLP leader has, however, denied receiving any notice.

The party leadership had sent the dissent note with a "clause-by-clause analysis of the problems with the Bill".

"We all received the dissent note, but after the Bill was already passed. What was the point in submitting the note after the Bill was already passed?" a Congress MLA told *The Hindu*.

The next day, the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA), including leaders of the Congress, submitted an eight-page dissent note to the Chairperson of the Legislative Council.

Opposition leaders staged a walkout after speeches by Congress and Shiv Sena (UBT) MLCs against the legislation.

## 'Not allowed to speak'

Former Maharashtra Congress chief Nana Patole, a member of the joint committee, told *The Hindu*: "We made them remove many problematic provisions. We still had objections that we thought we would take up in the House. They did not allow us to speak. Yet, I presented my side."

He added that he had not received any dissent note from the party.

**NATO CHIEF THREATENED SANCTIONS OVER RUSSIA TRADE**

# Securing energy needs overriding priority: Govt's firm reply to NATO

Guard against double standards, says MEA; feel no pressure: Minister Puri

**SHUBHAJIT ROY &  
SUKALP SHARMA**  
NEW DELHI, JULY 17

IN A sharply-worded response to NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte's warning that countries like India, China and Brazil could be hit very hard by secondary sanctions if they continued to do business with Russia, the Ministry of

External Affairs Thursday cautioned against "double standards" and underlined that "securing the energy needs of our people is understandably an overriding priority for us".

Also Thursday, a day after Rutte's remark, Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said he didn't "feel any pressure", making clear that India does not see any oil supply disruption if



Sufficient supply: Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri

its Russian crude imports get impacted because the country has diverse sources of oil and there is enough supply available in the market.

Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson for the Ministry of External

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EXPLAINED

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Amid efforts to seal deal

THE NATO chief's warning comes at a time when Delhi and Washington are working to seal a trade deal. Geopolitical shifts, freight and refinery economics will shape India's crude sourcing decisions, diversification strategy.



# Securing energy needs overriding priority: Govt on NATO warning

Affairs, said, "We have seen reports on the subject and are closely following the developments. Let me reiterate that securing the energy needs of our people is understandably an overriding priority for us. In this endeavour, we are guided by what is on offer in the markets, and by the prevailing global circumstances. We would particularly caution against any double standards on the matter."

He was responding to Rutte who, while speaking to reporters after meeting US senators Wednesday, said, "If you are the President of China, the Prime Minister of India, or the President of Brazil, and you continue to trade with Russia and buy their oil and gas, then you know: if the man in Moscow doesn't take the (Ukraine war) peace negotiations seriously, I will impose 100 per cent secondary sanctions."

"My encouragement to these three countries, particularly, is: if you live now in Beijing, or in Delhi, or you are the President of Brazil, you might want to take a look into this, because this might hit you very hard," he said.

Rutte also urged the leaders

of the three nations to directly urge Putin to commit to peace talks. "So please make the phone call to Vladimir Putin and tell him that he has to get serious about peace talks, because otherwise this will slam back on Brazil, on India, and on China in a massive way," he said.

Petroleum Minister Puri, speaking at the UrjaVarta 2025 event in New Delhi, said, "I don't feel any pressure in my mind. India has diversified the sources of supply... I am not worried at all. If something happens, we will deal with it... There is sufficient supply available."

He said India, in recent years, had expanded its crude sourcing slate from 27 countries to around 40 countries.

India and China are the top importers of Russian crude, and Delhi is engaging with US lawmakers and the Trump administration to voice concerns regarding India's energy security. India depends on imports to meet around 88 per cent of its crude oil needs, and Russia has been the mainstay of India's oil imports for nearly three years now. Russia currently accounts for around 40 per cent of India's to-

tal oil imports.

According to Puri, the massive market share of Russian crude in India's oil imports doesn't mean that the country is dependent on Russia for oil, and other suppliers can quickly come in to replace Russian volumes if there is any major disruption.

Even in the case of Russia, the country used to account for less than 2 per cent of India's oil imports prior to the war in Ukraine, but quickly displaced heavyweights like Iraq and Saudi Arabia to become the top supplier after much of the West began shunning Russian crude after the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine. Russia then began offering discounts on its oil to willing buyers, and Indian refiners were quick to avail the opportunity, ramping up imports of discounted Russian barrels.

So far, India has not scaled back on its oil imports from Russia, maintaining that it is willing to buy oil from whoever offers the best price, as long as the oil is not under sanctions. Russian oil itself is not sanctioned, but the US and its allies have imposed a price cap of \$60 per barrel, as per which Western

shippers and insurers cannot participate in Russian oil trade if the price of Moscow's crude is above that level.

It is yet to be seen if the recent tariff threats made against countries like India and China for their energy imports from Russia will translate into tangible tariff action. The Trump administration has been rather mercurial on trade tariffs: making sweeping announcements, then pausing and negotiating. The hope in India's oil sector is that the US won't actually implement tariffs related to India's oil imports from Russia, as it is in the interest of the US and the global economy that the international oil market remains well-supplied. If Russia is unable to supply its crude, global oil prices are bound to rise due to lower supply being available.

But if the US goes ahead and imposes such tariffs, India would be pushed to cut down oil imports from Russia and increase imports from other suppliers, primarily its traditional West Asian suppliers like Iraq, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, which would push up the cost of imports by a few dollars a barrel.



# India warns against 'double standards' over Russian oil

Centre responds to U.S. Bill seeking to impose duties on countries buying Russian oil, and threat from NATO chief; Petroleum Minister says the sanctions will be 'dealt with' when they are passed

**Suhasini Haidar**

NEW DELHI

**I**ndia on Thursday cautioned against "double standards", even as U.S. lawmakers consider a Bill that would impose 500% duties on India and other countries buying Russian oil.

The comments by the External Affairs Ministry come after indications that U.S. President Donald Trump is backing the Russian Sanctions Act, 2025, introduced by Republican Senator Lindsey Graham. Mr. Trump had even threatened secondary tariffs of 100% on countries that continue trade on sanctioned Russian products.

On Wednesday, NATO Secretary-General Mark Rutte, who met with Mr. Trump and members of

## Strong stand

The 'Sanctioning Russia Act of 2025', expected to be introduced in U.S. Congress in August, mandates 500% duties on goods and services from countries buying Russian oil

### What the NATO chief said

- India, China, and Brazil should tell Vladimir Putin to be serious about peace talks with Ukraine
- Continuing to do business with Russia will 'slam back' on these countries
- The secondary sanctions by U.S. will hit these countries 'very hard'

### Centre's response

- Securing energy needs is an 'overriding priority' for the government
- India is guided by what markets offer and global circumstances
- Maintain caution against double standards on the matter



the U.S. Congress, also issued a threat, in particular to China, India, and Brazil, who are among the top buyers of Russian crude oil, oil products, and coal. "Beijing and Delhi" should push Russian President Vladimir Putin towards

ending the war in Ukraine, or face tariffs, the chief of the military alliance said.

Responding to questions on the issue, the External Affairs Ministry said it was following the developments closely. "Securing the energy needs of our

people is understandably an overriding priority for us. In this endeavour, we are guided by what is there on offer in the markets, as also by the prevailing global circumstances," spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said. "We would particularly caution against any double standards on the matter," he added.

### 'Diverse sources'

At an industry event in Delhi on Thursday, Union Petroleum Minister Hardeep Puri said India would "deal" with sanctions when they are passed, pointing out that India has diversified its supply sources, buying oil from about 40 countries now, as opposed to 27 in the past.

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# India warns U.S. against 'double standards'

The MEA's comments came in a possible reference to the fact that European Union members continue to procure oil, LNG, and pipeline gas from Russia despite the sanctions, and are also major buyers of processed products that go through Indian refineries, including Gujarat's Nayara Energies, which has minority control by Russia's ROSNEFT.

However, while Russia sells about half its oil exports to China, and about 38% to India (as of February 2025), it exports only about 6% to EU countries.

However, despite requests from Tehran, India has so far not reversed a decision taken under pressure from the first Trump administration in 2017, to stop all oil imports from Iran.

Amidst intense negotiations over tariffs, as well as market access to India, particularly in the areas of agriculture, dairy and genetically modified produce, New Delhi has also been coordinating with the U.S. government about the deportation of Indians illegally resident in the U.S.

On Thursday, Mr. Jaiswal said that 1,563 Indian nationals have been deported in the first six months of Mr. Trump's second tenure, from January 20 to July 15 this year.

# U.K. govt. plans to reduce age of voting from 18 to 16

This move marks the most significant franchise reform since 1969; the proposals, published in a 'policy paper', also included measures to curb election interference from abroad via donations

**Sriram Lakshman**  
LONDON

**T**he U.K.'s Labour government on Thursday announced plans to reduce the voting age from 18 to 16, a campaign promise for the Labour and the biggest change since 1969, when the voting age was reduced from 21 to 18. The proposals, published in a 'policy paper' on Thursday, also included curbs on election interference from abroad via donations.

Lowering the voting age to 16 would bring national elections in line with the voting age in the Welsh and Scottish legislatures and in the local elections in those jurisdictions.

The proposals would bar 'shell companies' from making donations, "requiring companies to have made sufficient U.K. (or Ireland) generated income in order to donate". Eligible Irish companies will be able to donate towards Northern Ireland elections. Former ally of U.S. President Donald Trump



The new proposals are likely to benefit Labour, because younger U.K. voters tend to vote for centre-left and left parties. AFP

and billionaire entrepreneur Elon Musk had caused a furore in the U.K. last year, after it was reported that he was considering a large donation to far-right party Reform U.K. It is unclear how the proposed rules would impact Mr. Musk's ability to fund U.K. parties through his U.K.-based companies.

Thursday's paper pointed to the Electoral Commission's estimate that 7-8 million people who were otherwise eligible to vote were not registered. Registration will begin at the age of 14, under the proposed

legislation, which aims to move towards automatic voter registration – already under way in several other countries. The government also proposed to introduce U.K. bank-issued cards as an acceptable form of ID at the polling booth as well as digital IDs such as digital veteran cards and driving licences.

The Conservative government of Rishi Sunak had introduced stricter ID requirements in 2023, arguing that it was done to tackle voter fraud and not to benefit at the polls. Soon after the stricter ID laws

were passed, former Conservative Minister Jacob Rees-Mogg had suggested that the party had shot itself in the foot by making the changes, when it performed badly in local polls in May 2023. Speaking at the National Conservatism Conference, Mr. Rees-Mogg had suggested that his party had tightened voter ID to garner an electoral advantage.

The new proposals, if they become law, are likely to benefit Labour, because younger U.K. voters tend to vote for centre-left and left parties. Some 20% of in the 70+ year age group voted for Labour in the 2024 elections, while 41% of 18-24 year olds voted for the party, as per data from YouGov. Prime Minister Keir Starmer's popularity has declined since his party won a landslide victory in July 2024.

"I think it's really important that 16- and 17-year-olds have the vote, because they are old enough to go out to work, they are old enough to pay taxes..." Mr. Starmer said on Thursday.



**'TO FIND LOCATION OF ALIENS,' SAYS DEAL BETWEEN DEPARTMENTS**

# Trump admin hands over health data, addresses to deportation officials

**KIMBERLY KINDY  
& AMANDA SEITZ**  
WASHINGTON, JULY 17

IMMIGRATION AND Customs Enforcement officials will be given access to the personal data of the nation's 79 million Medicaid enrollees, including home addresses and ethnicities, to track down immigrants who may not be living legally in the United States, according to an agreement obtained by The Associated Press.

The information will give ICE officials the ability to find "the location of aliens" across the country, says the agreement signed Monday between the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services and the Department of Homeland Security. The agreement has not been announced publicly.

The extraordinary disclosure of millions of such personal health data to deportation officials is the latest escalation in the Trump administration's immigration crack-



President Donald Trump in Washington on Wednesday. AP

down, which has repeatedly tested legal boundaries in its effort to arrest 3,000 people daily.

Lawmakers and some CMS officials have challenged the legality of deportation officials' access to some states' Medicaid enrollee data. It's a move, first reported by the AP last month, that Health and Human Services officials said was aimed at rooting out people enrolled in the program improperly.

But the latest data-sharing agreement makes clear what ICE officials intend to do with the health data. "ICE will use the CMS data to allow ICE to receive identity and location information on aliens identified by ICE," the agreement says.

Such disclosures, even if not acted upon, could cause widespread alarm among people seeking emergency medical help for themselves or their children. AP

## US Senate passes aid, public broadcasting cuts in win for Trump

**PATRICIA ZENGERLE**  
WASHINGTON, JULY 17

THE US Senate early on Thursday approved President Donald Trump's plan for billions of dollars in cuts to funding for foreign aid and public broadcasting, handing the Republican president another victory as he exerts control over Congress with little opposition.

The Senate voted 51 to 48 in favor of Trump's request to cut \$9 billion in spending already approved by Congress. Most of the cuts are to programs to assist foreign countries suffering from disease, war and natural disasters, but the plan also eliminates all \$1.1 billion the Corporation for

Public Broadcasting was due to receive over the next two years.

Trump and many of his fellow Republicans argue that spending on public broadcasting is an unnecessary expense and reject its news coverage as suffering from anti-right bias.

Standalone rescissions packages have not passed in decades, with lawmakers reluctant to cede their constitutionally mandated control of spending. But Trump's Republicans have shown little appetite for resisting his policies since he began his second term.

The \$9 billion at stake is extremely small in the context of the \$6.8 trillion federal budget, and makes a tiny portion of the funds approved by Congress. **REUTERS**

# Zelenskyy shakes up Ukrainian Cabinet, appoints a new PM

**Associated Press**

KYIV

Ukraine's Economy Minister and the key negotiator in the mineral deal with the U.S, Yuliia Svrydenko, was appointed as its new Prime Minister on Thursday, becoming the country's first new head of government since the start of Russia's full-scale invasion in 2022.

Ms. Svrydenko is one of a group of officials taking on new roles in Ukraine's government, as President Volodymyr Zelenskyy reshuffled the



Yuliia Svrydenko

Cabinet in a bid to energise a war-weary nation and boost domestic weapons production.

Denys Shmyhal, who served as PM from 2020 to 2025, will become the Defence Minister.

# India reiterates call for Bangladesh poll that is 'inclusive'

**Kallol Bhattacharjee**

NEW DELHI

India on Thursday reiterated that the next election of Bangladesh should be "inclusive" and have "everybody in its fold". The official spokesperson of the Ministry of External Affairs commented on the election a day after student leaders of the interim government-backed National Citizens Party clashed with cadres of the Awami League in the latter's stronghold of Gopalganj.

"On elections in Bangladesh, you know our point

of view. We have said that, as a democracy, we would welcome holding of elections, that is inclusive and includes everybody in its fold," said official spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal.

In a press statement, the interim government announced that a committee has been formed to investigate the violence in Gopalganj. Sources in the Awami League countered the interim government by circulating an audio statement purportedly by former Prime Minister Hasina, in which she condemned the interim government.