

Defence proposals of ₹2.38 lakh cr. get approval

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Defence Acquisition Council, chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, on Friday granted Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for capital acquisition proposals worth about ₹2.38 lakh crore, significantly enhancing India's combat, surveillance and mobility capabilities across the armed forces.

For the Army, approvals include air defence tracked systems.

The Air Force received approvals for medium transport aircraft and the S-400 long range, surface-to-air missile system.

For the Coast Guard, approval was given for heavy duty air cushion vehicles.

India signs ₹858-cr. defence deals with Russian, U.S. firms

Saurabh Trivedi

NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Defence on Friday signed contracts worth ₹858 crore for the procurement of air defence systems for the Army and maintenance support for the Navy's reconnaissance fleet, reinforcing India's balanced defence partnerships with Russia and the United States.

A contract worth ₹445 crore was signed with Russian agency JSC Rosobornexport for the procurement of the Tunguska Air Defence Missile System for the Army. The deal was inked in the presence of Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh at Kartavya Bhavan. The system is expected to significantly enhance India's multi-layered air defence capabilities



The Tunguska weapon system will enhance capabilities against aerial threats such as drones and cruise missiles. FILE PHOTO

against aerial threats such as aircraft, drones and cruise missiles, while further strengthening the Indo-Russian strategic defence partnership.

In a parallel move, the Ministry signed a ₹413-crore contract with U.S. firm Boeing India Defense Private Limited for depot-level inspection of the Navy's P-8I Long-Range Maritime Reconnaissance Air-

craft under the 'Buy Indian category with 100% Indigenous Content'.

The contract will enable in-country maintenance, repair and overhaul (MRO) of the P-8I fleet, enhancing operational readiness, in line with the government's Aatmanirbhar Bharat and Make in India push. The agreements underline India's focus on strengthening combat capabilities.

Women saw higher wage growth than men across all job types in 2025: Govt

Siddharth Upasani
New Delhi, March 27

WAGES FOR women rose at a faster pace than for men across all three categories of jobs in 2025, according to the statistics ministry's Periodic Labour Force Survey (PLFS) for the last calendar year, released on Friday. According to the data, 2025 saw earnings of women rise 7.2%, 8.8%, and 5.4% for salaried jobs, self-employment, and casual labour, respectively, compared to 2024.

Meanwhile, earnings for men posted a growth of 5.8% and 8% for salaried jobs and self-employment, respectively, but fell by 0.2% for casual labour. To be sure, women continue to earn much less than men. In salaried jobs, women in 2025 earned only 76% of what men earn, little changed from 2022. Meanwhile, in casual labour, income inequality saw slight improvement in 2025, with females earning 69% of what males did, up from 66% in 2024. Women, however, fare the worst when it comes to self-employment, earning only 36% of what males earn, the PLFS data showed.

In another positive development, the PLFS — the Indian government's flagship jobs survey — showed that the proportion of women in salaried jobs rose to 18.2% in 2025 from 16.6% in 2024, with the fraction in self-employment declining to 64.2% from 66.5%. Casual labour saw an increase to 17.6% from 16.9%. The trend was somewhat similar for males.



Women continue to earn much less than men. REUTERS

At an all-India level, the proportion of employed with salaried jobs rose to 23.6% from 22.4% in 2024.

Salaried jobs are indicative of higher-quality employment as they provide social security cover, among other benefits.

The PLFS data for 2025 comes days after the Ministry of Statistics and Programme Implementation (MoSPI) made public the results of its Annual Survey of Unincorporated Sector Enterprises (ASUSE), which showed that pay in India's informal sector rose by just 3.9% in 2025, less than half the 13% increase seen in 2023-24 (October-September). At the same time, the informal sector saw a sharp reduction in the number of establishments it added, leading to far fewer hirings.

As per the ASUSE survey, the number of establishments increased by 58.5 lakh, down from an increase of 83.5 lakh in 2023-24, to 7.92 crore. As a result, fewer jobs were created: 74.5 lakh in 2025 compared to

1.1 crore in the 12 months ended September 2024. In terms of the headline figures, the annual PLFS data showed that India's rural unemployment rate declined to 2.4% in 2025 from 2.5% in 2024, while urban joblessness fell to 4.8% from 5%.

However, the rural Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR) — the fraction of the population seeking work — inched down slightly to 62.8% in 2025, suggesting a smaller proportion of rural Indians were looking for jobs than the previous year. Meanwhile, the urban LFPR held steady at 52.2%.

Unemployment among the youth declined to 9.9% in 2025 from 10.3% the previous year, although female youth unemployment edged up to 11.3% from 11.1%. Using health ministry's population projections, MoSPI estimates the number of employed workers in 2025, aged 15 years and above, at 61.6 crore: 41.6 crore male and 20 crore female. **FULL REPORT ON**

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Finance Minister rejects rumours of a lockdown

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said in the Rajya Sabha on Friday that the Centre is actively responding to the rapidly changing situation in the country following the war in West Asia. She urged certain political leaders to stop fearmongering and said the government has no plans to go in for a lockdown.

Replying to a debate on the second Appropriation Bill and the Finance Bill, both of which were returned after a voice vote, Ms. Sitharaman said neighbouring countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh have announced lockdowns, restricting movements and public events.

“We are not doing this. But rumours are being spread by some leaders that there will be a lockdown. There is no plan for a lockdown in India. These leaders must stop spreading rumours. They are engaging in rumour-mongering to create panic among the public. Lockdown is in Pakistan, not in India,” the Finance Minister said.



Union Minister Nirmala Sitharaman speaks in Rajya Sabha during the Budget Session of Parliament, in New Delhi on Friday. ANI

She said among its neighbourhood countries, India is maintaining a level of stability. “The positive message to the public is to face this situation in a united manner. The government is active and responding to the rapidly changing situation,” she said after Opposition MPs raised issues of cooking fuel shortage across the country and the plight of Indian migrant workers in West Asia.

Maintaining that international crude oil prices have surged within a month of the West Asia conflict, she said consumer prices of petrol and diesel increased all over the

world and in Southeast Asian nations the increase is 30 to 50%.

“We are managing carefully. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has told us that there should not be any burden on the citizens of India. That’s the guidance given to me,” she said.

“The volatility of cost and supply constraints will not hit the ordinary citizens. Price will remain unchanged for the citizens,” she said.

Answering questions on unemployment, she said the government is creating jobs and it has resulted in distribution of 11 lakh appointment letters publicly.

5 India-bound LPG ships stay anchored near Hormuz Strait

M. Kalyanaraman

CHENNAI

Five LPG carriers, all Indian flagged and bound for India, are anchored north off Dubai-Ras Al Khaimah, just southwest of the Strait of Hormuz, as per ship tracker websites.

Appearing to bunch together so they can troop out of the strait, these ships carry more than 1.7 lakh tonnes of LPG – equivalent to nearly six days of India's current import requirements. But they were not moving on a day Iran seemed to clamp down on any ship movement across the strait after earlier saying it would approve ships of friendly countries to pass through.

On Friday, Iran's Revolutionary Guards said that they had turned back three ships trying to transit the Strait of Hormuz, adding the route was closed to vessels travelling to and from ports linked to its "enemies". "This morning, following the lies of the cor-

rupt U.S. president claiming that the Strait of Hormuz was open, three container ships of different nationalities... were turned back after a warning from the IRGC Navy," the Guards said on their Sepah News website. A total of 26 ships have been approved by Iran to transit the strait recently, using a route around Larak Island just off the country's coast, dubbed the "Tehran toll booth" by leading shipping journal *Lloyd's List*. Most were Greek- and Chinese-owned, as well as other Indian-, Pakistani- and Syrian-owned vessels.

Iran had previously announced that ships of India and some other countries – Russia, Iraq, Pakistan, China and Thailand – can pass the strait. However, Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi had said that the U.S., Israel and some Gulf States involved in the current war will not be allowed to pass through the strait.

(With inputs from AFP)

Amid conflict, India sends out invites for key BRICS meetings

Suhasini Haidar

NEW DELHI

Hoping to forge an elusive consensus over the war in West Asia, New Delhi is going ahead with planning key meetings of BRICS countries this year in India, and has sent out invitations for the BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meeting to be held in May and the 18th BRICS Summit in September.

According to officials and diplomats, the invitations to the 10-nation grouping that also includes Iran and the United Arab Emirates went out in mid-March. Both countries have rebuffed several attempts by India – the current Chair of BRICS – for a joint statement. Officials said it is unclear whether they will attend the meeting together, but “as of now” the BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meeting is due to be held in-person in mid-May. The summit, which could bring Russian President Vladimir Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping and leaders from Brazil, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran and the UAE together in Delhi, is expected to be held on September 9-10.

“One of the key events on the political track, in addition to the traditional leaders' meeting [in September], will be the BRICS Foreign Ministers' Meeting, scheduled for May,” Russian government spokesperson Maria Zakharo-



India is set to host the BRICS Foreign Ministers' meet in May.

va told journalists in Moscow this week. “This will be a good opportunity for a thorough discussion of current issues on the international agenda, the role of BRICS in the world, and opportunities for joint action,” she said, responding to questions about how the grouping would tackle the war in West Asia.

Diplomats have openly acknowledged difficulties in forging a statement that is agreeable to both Tehran and Abu Dhabi. “We have an ongoing conversation with BRICS members on the conflict in West Asia,” External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said at a media briefing on Friday. “As you're aware, some of the BRICS members are also involved directly in the conflict... Because we have differing opinions, it has been difficult for us to forge a consensus on this particular conflict.”

In June 2025, the BRICS then chaired by Brazil had managed to issue a strong statement when the U.S. and Israel jointly struck a number of Iranian nuclear sites, condemning the military strikes against Iran.

Petrol, diesel excise duty cut; prices won't change

Centre reduces duty on petrol, diesel by ₹10 a litre each, but says the move will not lower fuel prices; it says the cut aims at easing the fiscal hit on oil marketing companies due to high oil prices

Saptaparno Ghosh

NEW DELHI

The Union government on Thursday reduced the special additional excise duty on petrol and diesel by ₹10 a litre each, effectively bringing down the duty on diesel to zero and on petrol to ₹3 a litre. However, the move will not translate into lower fuel prices for consumers.

Instead, the government said the duty cut was aimed at reducing the fiscal hit that oil marketing companies were absorbing due to high and rising oil prices.

In response to a question from *The Hindu*, Vivek Chaturvedi, Chairman of the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs, said the reduction was ex-

Fiscal cushion

Government cuts excise duty on fuel to ease OMC losses, but consumers see no relief at pumps



Fuel rush: Long queues seen at a petrol pump in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, on Friday.

pected to cost the exchequer ₹7,000 crore over the next 15 days.

The government also hiked the export duties on diesel to ₹21.5 a litre, and on ATF to ₹29.5 a litre. Mr. Chaturvedi said the government expected to add

- Oil marketing companies (OMCs) will not pass on **excise cuts** to consumers, govt. says

- The purpose of the cuts is to **reduce the losses** OMCs are facing

- Govt. estimates these losses to be **₹2,400 crore a day**

- Govt.'s net revenue loss due to tax cuts expected at around **₹5,500 crore per 15 days**

- Private sector OMC Nayara Energy has **raised petrol and diesel prices**

₹1,500 crore to the exchequer through these hikes, which would mitigate some of the impact of the excise duty cuts on domestic petrol and diesel.

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Centre hikes LPG allocation by 20%

NEW DELHI

Offering respite to entities, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas called for increased allocation of the hydrocarbon gas by another 20%, taking the total allocation of commercial LPG to 70% of pre-crisis levels. » **PAGE 11**

Trump extends pause on strikes

U.S. President Donald Trump said he is pausing any strike on Iran's power plants until April 6 and added that "talks" with the Islamic Republic are going "very well". "Talks are ongoing, and they are going very well," he wrote in a social media post. » **PAGE 12**

Balen Shah sworn in as Nepal PM, Modi says 'look forward to working closely'

Yubaraj Ghimire
Kathmandu, March 27

NEPAL'S RAPPER-turned-politician Balendra Shah, popularly known as Balen Shah, was on Friday sworn in as the 43rd Prime Minister of the country, ending over five months of political uncertainty after the previous KP Oli government stepped down following days of intense protests led by students.

Nepal President Ram Chandra Poudel administered the oath of office to the Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP) leader at 12.34 pm, which is said to be "an astrologically preferred moment", at his office in Sheetal Niwas. For about 10 minutes preceding the ceremony, the President's office reverberated with the chanting of vedic mantras, and recitation of Mangal Path from the Buddhist scriptures.

Apart from Shah, who turns 36 next month, Poudel also administered the oath of office to 14 other ministers, including five women, with the top picks being Dr Swarnim Wagle, a Harvard university alumni, as Finance Minister and Sishir Khanal, a graduate from the University of Wisconsin, as Foreign Affairs Minister.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi led the international com-



Nepal PM Balendra Shah hugs the outgoing interim PM Sushila Karki after being sworn in by President Ram Chandra Poudel, Friday. REUTERS

munity in congratulating Shah. "Your appointment reflects the trust reposed in your leadership by the people of Nepal. I look forward to working closely with you to take India-Nepal friendship and cooperation to even greater heights for the mutual benefit of our two peoples," Modi posted on X.

Pakistan Prime Minister

Shehbaz Sharif also said he looked forward to working closely with Shah. China's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jian said that China "stands ready to work with the new government to further strengthen traditional friendship and practical cooperation".

The US Embassy said it was looking forward to working with

the new government for "prosperity and regional stability".

Soon after swearing-in ceremony and allocation of portfolios, the first meeting of the new Cabinet decided to initiate criminal action against four top officials of the previous government, including Oli and ex-Home Minister Ramesh Lekhak, on a report submitted by an

inquiry commission probing the official crackdown on protesters last year that led to at least 78 deaths. Government spokesperson and Education Minister Sasmit Pokhrel said the government will further study the role of the previous regime and security agencies in the excessive use of force on the protesters last September. The commission re-

E. EXPLAINED

Delhi keeps watch

Balendra Shah becoming Prime Minister, and Rastriya Swatantra Party's rise to power, is being closely tracked in Delhi. For some years now, India's ties with Nepal have been under strain, especially over unresolved territorial disputes and Beijing's growing influence.

port is a 907-page document with no action recommended.

The Cabinet also decided to come out with an action plan package to be completed within the first 100 days of the new government.

The RSP was founded by Rabi Lamichhane who invited Shah, who was then the Independent Mayor of Kathmandu, to join the party and head the government if the party won the elections. In the March 5 elections, Shah defeated Oli by a huge margin while the RSP won a landslide victory, securing 182 seats out of 275, to become the first single-party government in Nepal.

G7 ministers demand an end to attacks on civilians in Iran war



Foreign Ministers of the Group of Seven nations during the meeting at the Vaux-de-Cernay Abbey in Cernay-la-Ville outside Paris on Friday. PTI

Reuters

Vaux-de-Cernay, March 27

THE FOREIGN ministers of the G7 group of nations called on Friday for an immediate stop to attacks against civilians and civilian infrastructure in the Iran war.

In a joint statement agreed on the second day of a G7 meeting in France - this year's host country - the ministers said they had underscored the importance of minimising the impact of the conflict on regional partners, civilian populations and critical infrastructure.

"We focused on the value of diverse partnerships, coordination, and supporting initiatives, including to mitigate global economic shocks such as disruptions to economic, energy, fertilizer and commercial supply chains, which have direct impacts on our citizens," they said in the statement seen by Reuters.

The ministers also reiter-

Over 1,900 dead in Iran since start of attacks: IFRC

MORE THAN 1,900 people have been killed and close to 20,000 injured in Iran since the start of US and Israeli attacks, said Maria Martinez of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) on Friday, citing figures provided by the Iranian Red Crescent.

Martinez said the Iranian Red Crescent continues to serve as the only nationwide humanitarian organization operating across the country amidst the escalating conflict.

REUTERS

ated the need to restore safe and toll-free freedom of navigation in the Strait of Hormuz.

The G7 members are the

United States, Britain, Canada, France, Germany, Italy and Japan, along with the European Union.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio told G7 counterparts on Friday that the U.S.-Israeli military war against Iran should end in a matter of weeks, three people familiar with the talks told Reuters.

At a meeting of G7 foreign ministers in France, Rubio did not ask his counterparts to contribute ships to clear the Strait of Hormuz now but asked them to prepare for a postwar role, said the sources, speaking on condition of anonymity.

Rubio said he also discussed the situation in Cuba with G7 counterparts during a meeting in Paris. Rubio said the economy on the communist-run island needed to change and would not change unless the system of government changes, adding power blackouts were down to Cuba's aging infrastructure.