

# Yoga has become world's largest celebration: Modi

The ancient practice plays a crucial role in promoting physical health, mental well-being, and active ageing, says Prime Minister while participating in International Day of Yoga event in Kolkata

**Shiv Sahay Singh**  
KOLKATA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said yoga united and brought everyone together, and had become the world's largest community celebration.

"June 21, in some parts of earth marks the longest day, and because of International Yoga Day, this day has also become the day of the world's largest collective celebration," the Prime Minister said while participating in an event here to mark the occasion.

Mr. Modi, who participated in yoga along with 35,000 people on Red Road here, referred to Ramakrishna Paramhansa, Swami Vivekananda, Maharshi Aurobindo, and Lahiri Mahasaya, stating that they took the "yoga tradition to new heights".

Observing that the sense of connection is the very essence of yoga, the Prime Minister said the whole country and the entire world seemed connected to one another, which was the true power of yoga.

In September 2014, Mr. Modi proposed at the United Nations that June 21 be celebrated as International Yoga Day.

On December 11, 2014, the UN officially declared



**Leading the way:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi joined 35,000 people at an event in Kolkata. DPR PMO

June 21 the International Day of Yoga, with support from 193 member states and 173 co-sponsors. Since then, Yoga Day is celebrated worldwide every year.

## 'Healthy ageing'

In Kolkata, the Prime Minister was seen interacting with the people and correcting the postures of some of them.

Referring to this year's Yoga Day theme, "Yoga for healthy ageing", Mr. Modi said the ancient practice played a crucial role in promoting physical health, mental well-being, and active ageing, thereby improving the quality of life.

Highlighting the bene-

fits of yoga, the Prime Minister said the practice taught people to be lifelong learners of body and mind.

"Our goal should be to be more flexible at 40 than we were at 20; more energetic at 50 than we were at 30. It helps tune our bodies for flexibility, maintains high energy level," he said.

The Prime Minister said people should not restrict yoga to only particular occasions, and they must make it part of their lives.

"Let us pledge not to limit yoga to just one day or a single event. Let us make yoga an integral part of our lives, our families, and the lives of future genera-

tions," the Prime Minister said.

## Grand event

This was the first time Yoga Day celebrations were held in Kolkata with a lot of fanfare. West Bengal Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari and several other BJP leaders and Ministers were present. The venue and the Kolkata riverfront were decked up over the past several days. Screens live-streaming the event were set up in several parts of the city.

"Celebrating International Yoga Day in such a vibrant city is truly an honour," the Prime Minister posted on social media.



Army personnel of the Dorje Division perform yoga on the occasion of International Day of Yoga in Ladakh on Sunday. ANI

## From mountains to seas, armed forces celebrate Yoga Day

**Press Trust of India**  
NEW DELHI

From the icy heights of the remote Siachen Glacier to the vast Rann of Kutch, and from the hills of the northeast to the naval platforms at sea, the armed forces observed the International Day of Yoga across the country, reaffirming their commitment to physical fitness and mental resilience.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh led the celebrations in Shillong, as he, accompanied by Air Chief Marshal A.P. Singh and other Air Force officers, took part in a yoga session hosted by the Eastern Air Command.

The Chief of Defence Staff, General N.S. Raja Subramani, led the Yoga Day celebrations organised by the Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff at the National War Memorial in

Delhi.

Army chief General Upendra Dwivedi fronted the celebrations with troops in Tezpur, Assam. "His participation alongside soldiers in the eastern theatre symbolised the Army's continued emphasis on fitness, resilience, and operational readiness in all terrains and conditions," a senior official said.

In the national capital, the Army hosted the event at the Cariappa Parade Ground at Delhi Cantonment. Defence attaches from more than 17 countries also joined the event, reflecting the global significance of yoga and its growing acceptance as a path to health, harmony and well-being, the Army official said.

Army jawans and others, positioned in a huge grid formation, stretched their arms and legs to perform various *asanas*.

# PM Modi inducts three new vessels into Indian Navy at Kolkata port

Atri Mitra

Kolkata, June 21

PRIME MINISTER Narendra Modi inducted three new indigenously built naval vessels into the Indian Navy during his visit to Kolkata on Sunday, while remarking that India is no longer just a buyer but also a manufacturer and seller of modern weapons to many countries.

Addressing the formal commissioning of the three indigenously built naval ships at a ceremony at the Syama Prasad Mookerjee Port here, the PM said, "Today, India is no longer just a buyer; it is manufacturing and selling modern weapons to many countries and also building indigenous strength."

The three ships inducted into the Indian Navy on Sunday are **INS Dunagiri**, an advanced stealth frigate; **INS Sanshodhak**, a survey vessel (large); and **INS Agray**, an anti-submarine warfare shallow water craft. Highlighting the importance of the warships, the PM said, "These were made in India and designed in India."

The skill and hard work of In-



PM Narendra Modi, flanked by West Bengal CM Suwendu Adhikari and Governor R N Ravi, during a ceremony to commission two Indian Navy warships and a survey vessel in Kolkata on Sunday. PTI

dian engineers lie behind them. This is the greatest strength of New India. Today, India no longer wants to remain merely a buyer in the defence sector."

He added, "Our military strength cannot become a market for the world. The identity of our strength does not lie in becoming a global market, but in our self-reliance. India wants to become a producer. The day we become a producer, we will also become a decision-maker." As per experts, the commissioning of these vessels is expected to enhance India's maritime combat capabilities, underwater and surface warfare readiness,

hydrographic surveys, and maritime domain awareness.

The PM said that the induction of the three ships would also increase employment in eastern India. Praising the state, Modi said: "Bengal has given momentum to India's growth. It is from Bengal that the campaign for a self-reliant, secure India is being carried forward. To become strong in defense, one must also be powerful at sea."

Talking about the state's recent regime change, Modi said, "Bengal is an important land for connectivity by waterways. The course of the Hooghly River has witnessed history changing. It

has witnessed a new chapter and a new journey of development. Significantly, this port is named after Bengal's illustrious son, Syama Prasad Mookerjee."

Chief Minister Suwendu Adhikari was also present at the event, apart from government officials and senior Navy and Air Force officers.

The vessels were designed by Navy's Warship Design Bureau and built by Kolkata-based Defence PSU Garden Reach Shipbuilders and Engineers Ltd. The warships were ready in March, their formal handover to the Navy remained pending till now.

WITH PTI INPUTS

# Maritime sector a major engine of economic growth, says Modi

**Shiv Sahay Singh**

KOLKATA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday said no nation could emerge as a major power without strong maritime capabilities.

He was speaking at an event here after commissioning three indigenously built naval ships – *INS Dunagiri*, an advanced stealth frigate; *INS Sanshodhak*, a survey vessel (large); and the *INS Agray*, an anti-submarine warfare shallow watercraft.

Describing the event as a milestone in the journey towards “an *Aatmanirbhar Bharat*, a secure India, and a developed India”, Mr. Modi said the government viewed the maritime sector not as an isolated in-



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Krishna Swaminathan at the ceremony in Kolkata on Sunday. PTI

dustry but as a major engine of employment and economic growth. “The country whose maritime strength is robust, its economic and strategic influence will be equally robust. India is preparing itself for this,” he said, asserting that India did not wish to be merely a buyer in the defence sector.

“The strength of the na-

tion’s military cannot be measured by its dependence on global markets but by its ability to become self-reliant. India seeks to become a producer and a manufacturer, because nations that manufacture become decisive players on the global stage,” he said.

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# Maritime sector major engine of growth: PM

Highlighting recent achievements in indigenous shipbuilding capabilities of the country, the Prime Minister noted that more than 40 indigenously built warships and submarines had been inducted into the Indian Navy over the past few years.

Mr. Modi emphasised that time had come for India to enter the next phase of maritime development, and the government had adopted a new vision for the shipbuilding sector and had introduced several policy reforms in recent years to enhance domestic manufacturing capabilities.

“The ₹70,000 crore incentive package announced for the shipping sector is not merely an economic measure but an investment in India’s maritime future and industrial expansion. Initiatives such as Sagarmala reflect this comprehensive vision and are helping reduce logistics costs, accelerate industrial growth and create new opportunities in coastal regions,” he said.

# India-EU trade pact to be signed by December: Goyal

**Press Trust of India**

NEW DELHI

India and the 27-nation European Union will sign the free trade agreement (FTA) by December and are likely to implement the pact by February-March next year, Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said on Sunday.

On January 27 this year, India and the EU announced the conclusion of negotiations for the “mother of all deals”.

“Now, with almost zero duty, almost the entire European market will be open for us. The EU’s FTA



Piyush Goyal

(free trade agreement) will be signed by December and will be effective by February-March,” Mr. Goyal said at an interaction with chartered accountants in Mumbai.

He also said that U.S. Trade Representative Jamieson Greer is coming to India this week to hold trade pact talks with him. “The whole world is looking towards India,” he added. Under the India-EU FTA, about 93% of Indian shipments will enjoy duty-free access to the 27-nation bloc, while imports of luxury cars and wines from the EU will become less expensive.

Taken together, India and the EU account for 25% of the global GDP and one-third (about \$11 trillion) of international trade (about \$33 trillion).

# India-U.S. interim trade deal needs 'final touches': officials

**T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan**

NEW DELHI

With the U.S. Trade Representative (USTR), Jamieson Greer, set to visit India this week, two separate sources in the government have told *The Hindu* that an interim trade deal required only "final touches" and that the U.S. was keen on seeing a deal in place.

Mr. Greer is scheduled to meet Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal and other officials during his two-day visit. However, while the provisions of the deal are nearing completion, Mr. Goyal has indicated that its implementation will still require the U.S. to first finalise various tariffs.



Jamieson Greer

"USTR Greer is scheduled to visit India on June 23 and 24," a senior Commerce Ministry official confirmed, adding that Mr. Greer would meet Mr. Goyal and that the discussions would be centred on "giving final touches to the framework deal".

The USTR's visit comes weeks after Assistant USTR

Brendan Lynch visited New Delhi from June 1 to 4.

Mr. Goyal on Saturday indicated that recent U.S. investigations on forced labour and fresh tariff announcements were a major reason for the delay in finalising the agreement.

"We cannot implement the FTA [free trade agreement] until we secure a competitive advantage," he told presspersons. "The issue currently pending is that our duties need to be lower compared to those of competing nations; once this is settled, the trade agreement will be implemented."

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# Interim trade deal needs 'final touches'

The office of the USTR in March launched an investigation under Section 301 of the U.S. Trade Act of 1974 to look into whether its trade partners, including India, were taking enough steps to stop the import of goods made using forced labour.

As part of this investigation, the USTR in June proposed a 12.5% tariff on 54 countries, including India, alleging they had "failed to impose and effectively enforce" prohibitions on the import of goods produced using forced labour. The final hearing in the case will take place on July 7.

"The Section 301 investigation is legal and is following due process," the Commerce Ministry official said. "India has made its submissions to the U.S. The trade deal covers the entire gamut of trade relations, and whenever a deal is signed, we will have clear answers on Section 301 investigations."

The second official, too, said that they expect U.S. tariffs to remain "in one form or another" as they are part of a politically and strategically sensitive issue of bringing manufacturing and strategic sectors back to the U.S. However, the official added that the trade deal would still provide India an advantage over its competitors.

"The government believes that the U.S. will continue to offer preferential treatment to countries with which it has a trade agreement over those with which it does not," the official said.

TIE-UP WITH HOLTEC INT'L ON THE CARDS, FOLLOWS PACTS WITH EDF, CLEAN CORE AND ROSATOM

# Global nuclear players turn to NTPC for N-tech partnerships

It is the only state-owned company involved in construction of a nuclear power project, apart from NPCIL

Pratyush Deep & Anil Sasi  
New Delhi, June 21

NTPC LTD, the country's largest integrated power generator, is emerging as a key pivot in India's nuclear landscape after the sector was opened up through an overarching legislation late last year.

For decades, the Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL) has been the vanguard of India's traditional nuclear establishment. With the passage of the SHANTI Act, 2005, which eased the liability framework and paved the way for greater private and foreign participation, NTPC is emerging as a second pillar of sorts and a partner of choice for global nuclear technology providers seeking a foothold in the Indian market.

Notably, an NTPC functionary is also seen as a possible contender for a top energy advisory role in the government.

The latest collaboration in the works is with New Jersey-based nuclear technology firm

Holtec International known for its flagship small modular reactor, the SMR-300. The company is understood to be in advanced discussions with NTPC and could formalise a partnership as early as next month, *The Indian Express* has learned.

This comes after NTPC signed a non-binding Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in April with Électricité de France (EDF) to explore co-operation in developing new nuclear power projects in India. The company has also inked an agreement with Russia's state-owned nuclear company Rosatom for its VVER series of reactors — a type of reactors called light water reactors, or pressurised water reactor (PWR).

NTPC is also in talks to buy a minority stake in US-based nuclear fuel technology company Clean Core Thorium Energy (CCTE), the company had informed the stock exchange in January. Both the companies are exploring the "development and deployment of a thorium-based fuel" for

## • DEEPENING NUCLEAR PUSH

**NTPC'S LATEST** collaboration is with New Jersey-based nuclear tech firm Holtec International known for its flagship small modular reactor, the SMR-300

**THE COMPANY** is in advanced discussions with NTPC and could formalise a partnership as early as next month

**THE THERMAL** major is also in talks to buy a minority stake in US-based nuclear fuel tech firm Clean Core Thorium Energy (CCTE)

existing nuclear stations in India, subject to regulatory clearances, Department of Atomic Energy told the parliament earlier this year.

Both Holtec and Clean Core are among the handful of American nuclear companies which have begged 'specific authorisations' from the US government with respect to a restrictive American regulation referred to as "10CFR810" — (Part 810 of Title 10, Code of Federal Regulations of the US Atomic Energy Act of 1954).

The authorisation permits these firms, subject to certain



**CCTE AND NTPC** are exploring the 'development and deployment of a thorium-based fuel' for existing nuclear stations in India

conditions, to transfer technology to Indian entities, which is otherwise barred under 810 regulations.

## NTPC's unique role, NPCIL's hold on PHWRs

NTPC's growing appeal among foreign nuclear technology providers stems from its unique position within India's nuclear ecosystem. Apart from NPCIL, it is the only state-owned power company currently involved in the construction of a nuclear power project. NTPC is developing the Mahi Banswara Rajasthan Atomic

Power Project through ASH-VINI, its joint venture with NPCIL.

In its latest earnings call, NTPC said it has secured capacity consent for 2,770 megawatt-electric (MWe) of the proposed 2,800 MWe Mahi Banswara Rajasthan Atomic Power Project from the customers in Rajasthan, Gujarat, Chhattisgarh, and Andhra Pradesh.

The first concrete pour for the project is expected by August 2027, while synchronisation of the first unit with the grid is targeted for November 2032, the company added.

Another factor working in favour of the state-owned thermal power major, as many in the policy circle point out, is NPCIL's monopoly over the pressurised heavy water reactors (PHWR) technology which has long formed the backbone of India's nuclear power programme.

While PHWRs are a technology India's nuclear establishment has mastered, it is increasingly out of sync with the light water reactors (LWRs), or pressurised water reactors, that are now the most dominant type worldwide. The Americans, Russians and French are among the leaders in LWR technology.

**FULL REPORT ON**

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# E-passport contract probe puts Nepal government under scrutiny

Yubaraj Ghimire

Kathmandu, June 21

A MEETING convened by Nepal's Prime Minister's Office (PMO) last week with senior officials from the country's anti-corruption body and foreign ministry has sparked a fresh political and diplomatic controversy amid an ongoing investigation into the procurement of electronic passports.

The unusual episode unfolded on June 15, when Chief Commissioner Prem Rai of the Commission for Investigation of Abuse of Authority (CIAA) and Foreign Secretary Amrit Rai appeared at the PMO following a verbal summons, according to multiple sources familiar with the matter.

The discussions reportedly centred on the award of

contracts for printing and supplying more than six million electronic passports.

The contracts were awarded in June 2025 to two German companies — Veridos GmbH and Mhuehlbauer. Veridos received a contract worth Rs 6.15 billion for passport printing, while Muehlbauer was assigned biometric services under a separate contract at Rs 1.6 billion.

Sources familiar with the matter said PM Balen Shah had sought information on the progress of the project and concerns surrounding the procurement process. Several officials, speaking on condition of anonymity, claimed members of the ministry's technical procurement team had declined to endorse proposal to award contracts to German firms.

"The members from the

technical side of the procurement team had refused to endorse the ministry's proposal last year," one source said. The CIAA had been informed more than a week earlier about the PM's concerns regarding the passport procurement process.

Addressing the first national convention of the RSP in Chitwan on Sunday, Prime Minister Shah reiterated his government's zero-tolerance policy on corruption. He said the government would continue to question the CIAA's performance if investigations into corruption allegations were not conducted fairly and promptly.

The CIAA has already taken into custody the Director General of the Department of Passports, Mandira Malla, the local representative of Mhuehlbauer, as part of its investigation.

NEGOTIATORS IN SWITZERLAND, TRUMP WARNS IRAN

# ‘Can we turn over a new leaf?’: Vance, Ghalibaf lead talks

Iran links progress to Lebanon, US focus on Tehran n-plan



US Vice President J D Vance with President Donald Trump’s envoys Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner; (right) Iran Foreign Minister Seyyed Abbas Araghchi with Parliament Speaker Mohammed Bagher Ghalibaf at the Qatari-owned mountaintop resort of Buergenstock in Switzerland, Sunday. AP & REUTERS

**Aamer Madhani, Seung Min Kim & Jamey Keaten**  
*Obbuergen (Switzerland),  
June 21*

US VICE President JD Vance said Sunday there was an opportunity to “turn over a new leaf” with Iran as the sides held talks aimed at building out the interim deal to end the war in Iran reached by the two sides last week.

Vance and US negotiators met with Iran’s parliamentary speaker, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, and Foreign Minister

## **E.** EXPLAINED

### Interim deal

The interim deal between the US and Iran is meant to stop fighting on all fronts, including Lebanon. It also gives negotiators 60 days to reach a nuclear agreement, but that can be extended.

Abbas Araghchi at a Swiss mountainside resort near Lake Lucerne.

Mediators from Pakistan and Qatar were also in the room for the direct engagement that, according to Iranian state media, lasted about 80 minutes. The US and Iranian negotiating teams also held separate private talks with Pakistani and Qatari officials.

The US is looking to get Iran locked into negotiations over its nuclear programme amid concerns it may be used for military purposes, which Iran denies. Vance also wants to push Tehran to commit to

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

# US-Iran peace talks

keeping open the Strait of Hormuz, the critical waterway through which about a fifth of the world's traded oil passes.

But the on-again, off-again conflict in Lebanon between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah militants continues to threaten to derail the effort for the US to win concessions from Tehran on its nuclear programme and keep the strait open.

"The question before us now is how much more can we accomplish together? Can we turn over a new leaf?" Vance said as the talks, dubbed the 'Lake Lucerne Summit', got underway.

"Can we change relations in the Middle East permanently, or do we go back to doing things the old way, which is not our preference, but is certainly very much something that can happen."

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmail Baghaei told the country's state news agency ahead of the meeting with Vance that their team's negotiations looked to focus on the war between Israel and Hezbollah in Lebanon.

The interim agreement was signed last week, and now top American and Iranian negotiators are in a 60-day sprint to reach an agreement on the tech-

nical details that hold massive implications for the world economy and global security.

Only days after signing the agreement, it is being stress-tested after fighting escalated in Lebanon between Israel and Hezbollah, and by the subsequent announcement by Iran's military that it had again closed the vital waterway. A renewed ceasefire in Lebanon, brokered Saturday, appeared to be holding.

Vance stressed that "great progress" had been made on Lebanon. But minutes after he finished speaking, President Donald Trump took to social media to threaten Iran if it didn't rein in Hezbollah.

"If they don't, we'll hit Iran very hard again, just like we did last week, only harder!!!" Trump wrote.

Iran is cautiously approaching the talks, given its previous experience with US negotiations on the nuclear issue, which twice in the past year were interrupted by massive military strikes against the country.

"The implementation of any document is more important than its signing," Baghaei said.

Iran's president added that Iran will maintain its right to a

nuclear programme.

"What is certain is that we will never back down from the right to enrich uranium, and the other side is also forced to accept it," Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian said, according to Iran's state media.

Trump, in a telephone interview with *Fox News* Sunday, warned that the Iranian president "better watch his mouth". "He'd better shape up, or we'll take over the rest of the country," *Fox News* quoted Trump as saying.

The agreement says commercial vessels can pass through the Strait of Hormuz for 60 days without charge, but does not preclude future fees imposed by Iran. Trump made his own threat Saturday to levy US tolls if there is no deal with Iran in 60 days, insisting in a social media post that the money would be for "services rendered as the Guardian Angel to the countries of the Middle East."

Further complicating matters, neither Israel nor Hezbollah is a signatory to the deal between the US and Iran, and Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to keep his forces in southern Lebanon until any threat to Israel is eliminated. Hezbollah has refused to halt its attacks unless Israel commits to withdrawing from Lebanon.

— ASSOCIATED PRESS

# ‘Soldiers in Lebanon free to take action if under threat’

**Reuters**

BEIRUT/JERUSALEM

Israeli soldiers are free to act without restriction to eliminate threats in Lebanon, Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said on Sunday, adding troops remained in position in what Israel refers to as a security zone. A ceasefire with Iran-backed Hezbollah took effect on Friday after months of escalating violence, but on Saturday Israeli strikes killed at least 20 people in Lebanon, Lebanon’s state news agency NNA reported.

Israel said the strikes were a response to projectiles fired by the Iran-backed group at its troops in southern Lebanon, prompting attacks on what an Israeli official described as “Hezbollah targets”.



Israel Katz

A Hezbollah official said the group was committed to the ceasefire as long as Israel adheres to it, adding that Israeli forces do not have the right to freedom of movement in south Lebanon.

The official said Hezbollah forces have not fired on Israeli troops since 6.30 p.m. on Saturday.

Security sources said that Israel had also launched no major strikes

on Lebanon since the same time. That represents the longest spell without major strikes since the war in Lebanon between Hezbollah militants and Israel began on March 2.

Later on Sunday, Hezbollah chief Naim Qassem rejected any Israeli security zone in Lebanon, after Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed his troops would remain in the country’s south for “as long as necessary”.

Israeli troops “remaining on Lebanese land is impossible. There are no security zones for Israel... we have a national army which deploys, and it is responsible for preserving sovereignty, and it is who we cooperate with,” Mr. Qassem said in a televised address.

# Starmer mulls political future as resignation pressure builds in party

Burnham is expected to be sworn in as a Member of Parliament today, increasing the urgency around U.K. PM's next move; Trump predicts Starmer would resign, while a U.K. Minister says there's no reason to think Labour leader will leave the post

Reuters  
LONDON

**B**ritish Prime Minister Keir Starmer was considering his political future on Sunday, after rival Andy Burnham's decisive election victory to Parliament prompted more Ministers in the governing Labour Party to call for him to go.

Struggling with some of the lowest popularity ratings for any British leader in modern political history, Mr. Starmer could decide as soon as Monday whether to step aside or fight a leadership contest against Mr. Burnham, one source said.



**Tough call:** Keir Starmer walks with Deputy Prime Minister David Lammy as he visits a housing development in north London. AP

That's the day Mr. Burnham will be sworn in as a lawmaker in the House of Commons. The scale of victory Mr. Burnham won for a parliamentary seat in

northwestern England on Friday has piled pressure on Mr. Starmer, with dozens of lawmakers and some Ministers privately calling for him to set out a

timetable for his departure to clear the way for the former Greater Manchester mayor.

A source with knowledge of the matter said Mr. Starmer was spending the weekend thinking about and discussing his position with his family but that an expected conversation with Mr. Burnham would clarify matters. "Keir likes to think about things," the source said.

Adding to the pressure on Mr. Starmer, U.S. President Donald Trump predicted on his Truth Social platform that "Keir Starmer will resign as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom". Mr. Trump then

repeated his view that Mr. Starmer had "failed badly" on cutting immigration and boosting North Sea oil output.

Mr. Starmer's unpopularity was laid bare by Labour's heavy losses in local elections in May, and polls of party members indicate Mr. Burnham would win a formal leadership contest.

Should Mr. Burnham take the helm, he would become Britain's seventh Prime Minister in the past 10 years.

Meanwhile, British Business Minister Peter Kyle said he has no reason to believe that Mr. Starmer is planning to announce his resignation on Monday.

• WITH SECONDARY EDUCATION AND MOST JOBS OUT OF REACH, THOUSANDS OF AFGHAN WOMEN HAVE TURNED TO ENTREPRENEURSHIP AS THE ONLY PATH TO MAKE MONEY AND MAINTAIN A SOCIAL LIFE

## As opportunities vanish under Taliban rule, Afghan women turn to business to survive

Elian Peltier  
Herat, June 21

THE TALIBAN have imposed some of the world's toughest restrictions on women and girls, but to ward off economic collapse and isolation, they have let women start businesses in Afghanistan, as long as they comply with a cascade of debilitating rules.

More than 10,000 Afghan women have business licenses — a tenfold increase in the past five years, according to the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Industry. With an additional estimated 120,000 working without licenses, small businesses are the largest em-

ployers of Afghan women, according to the World Bank.

But that apparent boom does little to hide the shrinking horizons for women's lives.

Those who dreamed of becoming lawyers, engineers or university professors have turned to carpet weaving, cosmetics or vocational training because they cannot work in government administration or for many nonprofits.

They also cannot run beauty salons, study midwifery or nursing, or speak with male clients, suppliers or banking officials.

The vast majority of Afghan women do not work at all — less than 7% of Afghan women were employed as of 2024, ac-

cording to the UN Development Programme.

Those who do work have faced growing hurdles. The harassment and arrests of dozens of women by the morality police in June led to a rare public protest.

Still, as the Taliban approach the five-year anniversary of their return to power, Afghan women have turned to entrepreneurship as one of the last ways they can support their households and find a semblance of social life.

"The only remaining hope for women in Afghanistan is business," said Behnaz Saljughhi, a representative for female business owners in the province of Herat.



Women weave carpets at a rug workshop run by Ms Azizi. NYT

On a recent morning in a warehouse in Mazar-e-Sharif, in northern Afghanistan, some 60 women knotted, trimmed

and wove rugs under the watch of their boss, Nasira Azizi, 19.

Azizi was 14 when the Taliban swept back to power in 2021

and barred millions of girls like her from studying beyond sixth grade. "I fell into depression," Azizi said about the ban on education. "At home, you see the same faces all the time."

The rug workshop opened up her world. "Here, there are at least more topics to discuss, more motivation to get the job done," she said.

Azizi launched her business with financial support from the U.N. Development Program, including a grant to create jobs for Afghan women who have been expelled from neighboring Iran and Pakistan in recent years.

"Even before the Taliban came, I wanted to be an entrepreneur," Azizi said.

She now has about 450 workers in two workshops and at home. Her two brothers handle the rugs' design and the marketing. Her father runs one of the workshops, where male employees clean the rugs before they are sold.

The rest, management, human resources, finances, falls to Azizi. "The business license is under my name," she said.

Roqia Rezaei, 21, said she had dreamed of becoming a mining engineer before the Taliban took over Afghanistan. Unable to pursue that field, she taught English, but the Taliban government cracked down on private tutoring, and her students dwindled.

In 2022, she founded Mag-nolia, a soap business in Herat, one of Afghanistan's largest cities. It now sustains her family of seven, she said.

The smell of turmeric wafted over Rezaei's workshop on a recent afternoon as her mother stirred the simmering, gluey matter that would soon become soap. Rows of saffron-infused soap bars and dropper bottles filled with black seed oil sat in an adjacent room.

The setup remains rustic — two large stockpots, no automation — but Rezaei has her eye on Iran and Tajikistan as the next frontiers for her business, which she wants to turn into an international brand by 2030. NYT