

**KERALA ONLY MAJOR STATE LAGGING BEHIND, BUT NOT OPPOSED**

# Boost for labour reforms as West Bengal on board now

Ravi Dutta Mishra &  
Aanchal Magazine  
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THE BJP's recent electoral gains has led to an upside for labour reforms. States that were holding out from implementing the long-pending labour codes are now coming on board. With a BJP government in place now, West Bengal, which lagged behind in framing the draft rules for the four labour codes, is getting ready to roll them out.

Opposition-ruled state Kerala is now the only major state that still remains out of the loop on the new labour codes and is yet to notify the rules, a senior government official said. However, Kerala is "not against" the implementation but is moving slowly in formalising the process for rollout of the four labour codes, the official added.

With the Congress-led UDF replacing the CPI(M)-led LDF government in Kerala, the official said the change in government could open the door somewhat as the state is "not against" the implementation of the labour codes and will open up to the benefits of the codes.

"West Bengal and Kerala are yet to notify the rules for the labour codes. But West Bengal is going to implement the codes soon. Kerala is the only major state that's left. It has said that it will assess the same but has not opposed it. That there could be challenges at the time of implementation of the new rules has been discussed with the states. The Centre has assured the states that it will resolve all queries," the official said.

The official pointed out that Karnataka, despite being an Opposition-ruled state, has accepted the codes and prepared the draft rules.

The Centre had notified the four labour codes — Code on Wages, 2019; Industrial Relations Code, 2020; Code on Social Security, 2020; and Occupational Safety, Health and Work-



ing Conditions (OSH) Code, 2020 — in November 2025, close to five years after getting the law passed in Parliament. In December last year, the Ministry of Labour and Employment, in a written response, had said that states/Union Territories are still in the process of finalising the rules, adding that 34 of the 36 states and Union Territories (UTs) had finalised the rules for the Code on Wages, Code on Social Security and Industrial Relations Code.

The Mamata Banerjee-led government in West Bengal had refused to comply with the labour codes, alleging that if the law was implemented, many workers would be deprived of social security.

Last December, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge had also opposed the codes, saying they pose a threat to job security as the threshold for requiring prior government approval for layoffs had been raised from 100 to 300 workers, adding that companies would hire short-term workers to avoid giving benefits to long-term workers.

## • ROAD AHEAD

**WEST BENGAL**, which lagged behind in framing the draft rules for the four labour codes, is getting ready to roll them out after the BJP government came to power

**OPPOSITION-RULED** Kerala is now the only major state that still remains out of the loop on the new labour codes and is yet to notify the rules. However, the state is "not against" the implementation

**THE CENTRE** had notified the four labour codes in November 2025. In December last year, the government had told that 34 of the 36 states and UTs had finalised the rules for the Code on Wages, Code on Social Security and Industrial Relations Code.

The Code on Wages seeks to redefine the break-up of wages to increase the share of the basic pay component — to enable higher provision for social security, especially in the service sector. The codes also aim to expand the social security provisions for gig workers.

While most states have finalised draft rules under the labour codes, as per the government reply in Parliament, the progress varied, depending on the government in power. For instance,

BJP-ruled states like Gujarat, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana and Assam finalised the draft rules in the first half of the year, but Opposition-ruled states like Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Telangana were slower. Labour laws fall under the concurrent list of the Constitution. Hence, both the Centre and states are empowered to make rules. But in the event of a conflict between state and central laws, central legislation generally takes precedence, unless the state's law has obtained presidential assent.

FULL REPORT ON  
[WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](http://WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM)

# Indian mission in touch with Sri Lanka prison riot victim's family; investigation under way

**Meera Srinivasan**

COLOMBO

The High Commission of India in Colombo is in touch with Sri Lankan authorities and the family of the Indian inmate who was among those killed in the recent prison riots, sources told *The Hindu* on Friday. However, neither the Sri Lankan nor Indian authorities have officially commented on the development.

The victim, Sarathchandra U., 73, was killed in the deadly clashes that broke out in a prison in Negombo, located about 35 km north of Colombo and adjoining the Bandaranaike International Airport, on July 6. A total of 28 persons, including eight



Security personnel escort prisoners to a bus at Negombo Prison on the outskirts of Colombo following clashes between inmates. AFP

prison officers, were killed in the riots, one of the most violent episodes witnessed in Sri Lankan prisons. Over 100 inmates were injured. Soon after the riots, authorities moved over 1,000 prisoners, including some Indian nationals in custody, from

Negombo to other prisons across the island.

While the Indian inmate is said to have hailed from Kerala, relatives in his native village earlier told *The Hindu* that he had moved to Chennai over four decades ago, maintaining no contact with his village.

“His family prefers to keep details of imprisonment and the circumstances of his death private,” an official source said. Sources confirmed that the Indian mission had sent a note verbale to Sri Lanka’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs on learning about the Indian prisoner’s death.

According to initial investigations, the riots were triggered after rival gangs clashed over some members tipping off prison authorities about a drug operation on the premises.

Rights defenders have long flagged chronic overcrowding in Sri Lankan prisons.

Amid long-standing concerns about severe overcrowding in prisons, the Anura Kumara Dissanayake

administration has decided to expand its prison capacity, including at an old hospital facility, to manage the crisis. Official data show that Sri Lanka houses around 42,000 inmates across its 22 prisons, with drug-related offences accounting for about two-thirds of the prison population.

Meanwhile, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka has launched an investigation into the violence at Negombo Prison. The government has appointed a committee headed by a retired judge of the Supreme Court to carry out an investigation into the incident, while the Police Criminal Investigation Department, too, is pursuing a probe.

# Sheikh Hasina plans Bangladesh return in Dec, says may get arrested or killed

Krishna N Das

New Delhi, July 10

OUSTED BANGLADESHI Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, facing a death sentence back home where her party is banned, told *Reuters* she and senior party colleagues plan to return from exile in India around December and surrender.

Hasina said she and members of her Awami League aim to return voluntarily to the country they fled two years ago and present themselves in court, testing Bangladesh's handling of its most prominent political opponent. "They may arrest me on my return, they may even kill me," Hasina, 78, said in the nearly hour-long telephone interview late on Thursday and into Friday.

"Still, I have to go," she said. "My party leaders and workers are being subjected to tremendous repression. If death comes, I want it to come on my own soil, where my parents are buried and where their blood was shed." Hasina, who has fielded written questions from news outlets but not previously given an interview during her exile, said she has not consulted with any foreign government on whether or when to return.

This is the first time she has set out a timetable for her return, said she plans to surrender or said other exiled Awami League leaders would do so. Among them, former Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal also faces a death sentence. Reuters could not contact the other party members or establish where they were.

The authorities in Dhaka "want to take me back, they are repeatedly sending letters to India seeking to have me sent back", she said. "I will go myself."

Spokespeople for the Bangladesh government did not respond to requests for comment on Hasina's remarks. India's foreign ministry did not respond to a request for comment. In April, the ministry said it was examining Bangladesh's request to extradite her and that it wanted to "engage constructively with the new government and further strengthen bilateral ties".



“My party leaders and workers are being subjected to tremendous repression. If death comes, I want it to come on my own soil, where my parents are buried and where their blood was shed

SHEIKH HASINA,  
FORMER BANGLADESH PM

"Cases have been filed against almost all of our leaders and workers, and many of them are in hiding," Hasina told *Reuters* from her exile home in Delhi. "So I said that this time I am returning home, and one day, all of you should come. All together, we will all surrender in court."

She declined to give a date for her return or say exactly when she would surrender or to what court. "I believe in justice and I feel that once proceedings start, it will be clear to the people how farcical the court is — and that I want to prove it."

Hasina said she has held online meetings covering 125 of Bangladesh's 300 parliamentary constituencies as part of efforts to reorganise the Awami League. "They may have convicted me, and I may not be able to contest elections," she said. "But why should they suspend the Awami League? If we have done badly, let the people decide."

Hasina fled Bangladesh in 2024 after protests ended her 20 years as prime minister across multiple terms. The country's war-crimes court sentenced her in November to death in her absence for ordering a deadly crackdown on a student-led uprising. She has denied the charges from exile.

REUTERS

# Catholic body meets Home Minister Shah, flags concerns over FCRA Bill

**Vijaita Singh**

NEW DELHI

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India (CBCI) submitted a memorandum against the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, to Home Minister Amit Shah on Friday. Jonathan Lalremruata, adviser to the apex body of the Catholic church in India, said.

Cardinal Anthony Poola, Metropolitan Archbishop of Hyderabad and CBCI president, and Anil Couto, Metropolitan Archbishop of Delhi, were present at the meeting.

The CBCI had sought an audience with the Home Minister to express concerns about the provisions of the Bill and the FCRA Amendment Rules, 2026, notified on June 22. The Rules mandate NGOs to specify the list of activities that can be pursued by them under the five per-



Amit Shah

mitted categories – social, political, educational, cultural, and religious – and also state the geographic area where they would operate. The Rules permit 16 categories of religious activities, “conduct of religious education, moral instruction, *satsangs*, discourses, and meditation retreats”, but specifically bar “proselytisation”.

The CBCI said the term should be omitted as it had no relevance to the FCRA activities and without a definition was sure to be misused. “Inclusion of such words amounts to degrading the good intentioned

charitable, educational, healthcare, and humanitarian services rendered by faith-based organisations. All such compassionate and charitable activities are directed only towards nation-building and public welfare, and should not be misinterpreted as acts of religious conversion,” the CBCI said.

The Bill was introduced in the Lok Sabha on March 25 but following an uproar by the Opposition parties, its discussion and passage were deferred. One of the key changes proposed in the Bill is the appointment of a “designated authority” to take over, manage, or dispose of assets created from foreign funds when an NGO’s FCRA registration is suspended, cancelled, or not renewed. This authority will have the powers of a civil court and can order the transfer or sale of assets owned by NGOs to either the govern-

ment or any other body.

The CBCI opposed the provision, stating it could be applied retrospectively. Its memorandum said the takeover of assets should take effect only after finalisation of the process of adjudication, including statutory appeal to a regular court. “Violations of the law should be differentiated into minor and major. Technical violations or that of meagre financial value should be treated as minor and should not attract the major penalty of cancellation of registration / renewal or confiscation / cessation of assets,” it said.

Reacting to the meeting, Congress general secretary K.C. Venugopal took to X, stating, “In typical BJP fashion, HM Amit Shah has lied to the CBCI about FCRA and is wrongly deflecting blame to hide his government’s culpability in weaponising the FCRA laws.”

# Couple arrested in Manipur over killing of six Naga persons

**The Hindu Bureau**

GUWAHATI

A joint team of the Manipur Police, National Investigation Agency, and Central Reserve Police Force on Friday arrested a couple for their alleged involvement in the killing of six Liangmai Naga civilians more than a month ago.

In a statement, the police said Pradip and his wife, Ayingbi, alias Mangaih, were arrested from Leilon Vaiphei village in the Kuki-dominated Kangpokpi district early in the morning. Both are residents of the village, located less than 30 km northwest of the State's capital, Imphal.

"They were identified by the families of the victims. [Their involvement was] also established in the NIA evidence," Manipur's Director-General of Police, Mukesh Singh, said. The police said they had carried out search-and-seizure procedures, while legal formalities were under way.

The six were among 48 people – 28 Kukis and 20 Nagas – abducted hours after unidentified gunmen ambushed and killed three church leaders from the



The six were among 48 people abducted after an ambush in Kangpokpi district on May 13.

Thadou community in Kangpokpi district on May 13. Eighteen of the 20 Nagas were abducted from Leilon Vaiphei village.

The Thadous are divided over their ethnic affiliation to the Kuki group.

The Kuki abductors released 14 Nagas and the Naga abductors released 14 Kukis in a hostage exchange deal on May 13. Among the Nagas released were the 12 abducted from Leilon Vaiphei.

Following appeals by various church organisations and the government's assurance to establish the identity of the six missing Nagas, the Nagas released the remaining 14 Kuki hostages on June 9. Security personnel recovered the bodies of the six Nagas from Kangpokpi district on June 10.

# India lays out tariffs and quotas for U.K. vehicles under trade deal

**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

The Indian government has released the list of quotas and tariffs for automobile imports from the United Kingdom under the trade deal between the two countries.

The India-U.K. Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA) will come into force on July 15. As per the Directorate General of Foreign Trade's notification, a total of 20,000 completely built units (CBUs) of petrol and diesel passenger vehicles will be allowed for import from the U.K. at concessional rates of 30-50%, de-

**A total of 20,000 CBUs of petrol, diesel PVs will be allowed at concessional rates of 30-50%**

pending on the size of the car, down from the normal import duty of between 66-110%.

This quota will increase to 37,000 cars by year five of the deal, which is also when the concessional tariff will settle at 10% and remain there.

However, after this, the size of the quota will gradually decrease, settling at 15,000 passenger vehicles in year 15.

Similarly, the notification also lays out the quotas and tariffs for electric vehicles (EVs), hybrids, and hydrogen-based passenger vehicles.

## **Basis for gradations**

While the gradations for the conventional fuel passenger vehicles are made on the basis of engine size, the gradations for these alternate fuel vehicles are on the basis of cost.

The concessions for these vehicles will kick in only from year six of the deal, providing domestic manufacturers a buffer before they will have to start competing with U.K. brands.

# SC pulls up Maharashtra govt. over 'disturbing' delays in criminal trials

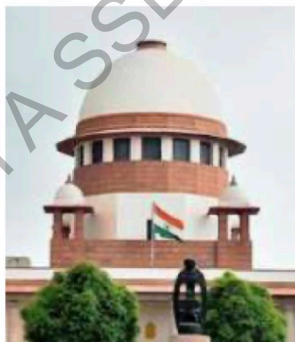
**Aaratrika Bhaumik**

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Friday observed that it was "disturbing" that the Maharashtra government routinely opposed bail applications "tooth and nail" but failed to discharge its obligation of ensuring that criminal trials were conducted without undue delay.

The court directed the State to apprise it of any specific policy or mechanism in place to address delays in the conduct of criminal trials.

A Bench comprising Justices Ahsanuddin Amanullah and Sheel Nagu was hearing an appeal filed by a foreign national challenging a Bombay High Court order rejecting his bail application in a case involving charges of murder and rioting. The Bench noted that he had remained in custody for over four



years, during which only two of the 45 prosecution witnesses had been examined.

Counsel appearing for the Maharashtra government told the Bench that "substantial progress" had since been made in the trial. "These are old matters. I can say that we are now improving... I know it is our fault, and we are trying to improve," he submitted.

Justice Amanullah, however, expressed reservations about the slow pace of the trial. He

pointed out that the Maharashtra government had repeatedly come under scrutiny for delays that resulted in the prolonged incarceration of undertrial prisoners. "Every day we see that Maharashtra is in default. Tooth and nail opposing bail, but nothing on the ground. Double standards. We will expose you before the public," the judge remarked.

## Detailed affidavit

The State counsel then sought an opportunity to file a detailed counter-affidavit explaining the reasons for the slow progress of the trial. He further urged the court to call for a report from the trial court to ascertain the "administrative problems" that had contributed to it.

The Bench accordingly directed the Maharashtra government to place on record an affidavit explaining the reasons for the pro-

longed pendency of the trial. "In the said affidavit, the State will come out with a specific policy of how it proposes to deal with such a situation," the Bench ordered.

Justice Amanullah also pointed out that the apex court had, only a day earlier, pulled up the Punjab government over delays in criminal trials and imposed costs of ₹50,000 on the Superintendent of Police, Amritsar, in a case where an accused booked under the Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances Act had undergone prolonged incarceration owing to delay in the trial.

The Bench posted the matter for further hearing on July 24 to consider the affidavit to be filed by the Maharashtra government. It, however, declined to grant bail to the appellant, observing that no case for such relief had been made out at this stage.

# PM's New Zealand visit will unlock new avenues of cooperation: govt.

**Press Trust of India**

AUCKLAND

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday arrived in New Zealand on the final leg of his three-nation visit.

He will hold talks with his counterpart Christopher Luxon and address the Indian diaspora in New Zealand.

Mr. Luxon received Mr. Modi at the airport. "This visit is historic, being the first Prime Ministerial visit to New Zealand in four decades. I look forward to holding talks with Prime Minister Luxon and discussing the complete range of the India-NZ friendship," Mr. Modi said in a post on X.

## Boosting trade ties

During his two-day visit, he will hold talks with Mr.



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with his New Zealand counterpart Christopher Luxon at the Auckland airport on Friday. ANI

Luxon on ways to enhance economic, trade and commercial engagements.

In a post on X, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said: "This historic visit is set to strengthen bilateral ties and unlock new avenues of cooperation across several areas especially trade, defence,

sports, culture, education, and people-to-people exchanges."

Mr. Modi arrived in New Zealand after concluding a three-day visit to Australia, where he held summit talks with Prime Minister Anthony Albanese. Both leaders reinforced the vital role of the bilateral part-

nership in ensuring a peaceful Indo-Pacific.

A major highlight of the summit talks between the two leaders was their focus on significantly ramping up defence ties, especially in the maritime domain. An agreement on civil nuclear energy to facilitate the commercial supply of uranium from Australia to India to fuel New Delhi's nuclear power projects was sealed after over two years of negotiations.

He also met Australia's Leader of the Opposition Angus Taylor on Friday and discussed bilateral ties.

Mr. Modi was in Indonesia before that, where 14 agreements were inked to boost cooperation in critical minerals, maritime security, and other key sectors.

# Centre defends E20, admits fuel economy may reduce by 3%-5%

**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

While admitting that E20-blended fuel could result in a 3%-5% reduction in the fuel economy of “some vehicles”, the government has sought to explain why the blended fuel is not currently cheaper than pure petrol or fuel with lower ethanol levels.

The core reason, it said, was that the government is seeking to compensate farmers adequately, and so E20 fuel becomes relatively more expensive to produce than pure petrol whenever oil prices fall to around \$70 a barrel.

This statement, issued on Friday as an FAQ document by the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, comes at a time when critics are questioning why fuel with 20% ethanol is not cheaper than pure petrol or fuel with 10% ethanol.



Activists protesting in New Delhi against the fuel policy on Friday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

“It is true that in some vehicles there may be a 3-5% reduction in fuel economy,” the Ministry said. “But mileage is only one parameter. E20 offers a significantly higher-octane rating, superior anti-knock characteristics, faster combustion, better pickup, smoother acceleration and cleaner engine operation.”

“It substantially reduces lifecycle carbon emissions by around 40%,” it added.

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# Govt. defends E20, says fuel economy may fall

The government also sought to explain why E20 fuel is not cheaper than pure petrol or fuel that has lower ethanol levels.

“Today, the government purchases ethanol at remunerative prices so that Indian farmers are fairly compensated,” it said. “Take maize-based ethanol. We have progressively increased its procurement price and today it is around ₹71.86 per litre, even before GST, transportation, storage and depot handling costs.” “Therefore, if international crude oil is trading at around \$70 per barrel, E20 is actually costlier to produce than pure petrol,” the government explained.

However, it added that the price advantage of ethanol kicks in when crude oil prices reach \$120-130 per barrel, as the economics naturally reverse and ethanol becomes even cheaper.

The fact that 20% of the fuel sold in India is ethanol has also insulated the Indian market against global oil price volatility and allowed the Indian government to pass on much lower fuel price hikes than in comparable nations.

Overall, the government also sought to assure the public that the decision to move to ethanol-blended fuel was not a “rushed” one.

“This has been a journey spanning over two decades from pilot projects in 2001, policy notification in 2013, institutional reforms after 2018, massive investments beginning in 2021, and then a carefully calibrated, phased increase in blending levels,” the document said.

It added that all stakeholders, including automobile manufacturing companies, oil marketing companies, and the Department of Food and Public Distribution, were consulted before rollout.

# Easing on China is right move at right time

**I**N 2019, India decided against joining RCEP, a trade agreement spanning 15 Asia-Pacific countries. A few months later, in April 2020, the Centre amended the FDI policy via Press Note 3, making government approval mandatory for investments from countries that share a land border with India. Both decisions were, in part, driven by concerns over China. But despite the ambiguity since then over the relationship with Beijing, trade ties between the two countries have deepened considerably. Imports from China touched \$131 billion in 2025-26 and the country now accounts for roughly half of India's non-oil goods trade deficit. However, FDI from China has been minuscule. Since 2000, investment flows to India have added up to just \$2.5 billion. The government has now approved a joint venture between Dixon Technologies and Vivo Mobile for manufacturing electronic devices and smartphones in the country. This is a step in the right direction.

In recent years, there has been a concerted attempt by multinationals to diversify away from China. India has, however, not been a significant beneficiary of the China+1 play, with countries like Vietnam benefiting more. The Economic Survey 2023-24 put forth two choices to benefit from the trade diversion away from China — either integrate more deeply with its supply chains or encourage greater FDI from the country. The Survey veered towards the latter option. In line with this thinking, in March this year, the Union cabinet approved changes to the FDI policy for investment from countries that share a land border with India in order to facilitate greater inflows. The approval of the joint venture between Dixon Technologies and Vivo Mobile and the waiver of customs duty on 85 goods used in manufacturing batteries, display assemblies and others comes only days after four Chinese power equipment manufacturing companies were reportedly allowed to take part in government tenders for critical power projects.

China is inextricably linked to the global manufacturing supply chain. That reality cannot be wished away. China is also a large source of FDI. As per the World Investment Report by UNCTAD, its outward investment “has become more targeted, with greater emphasis on greenfield projects, manufacturing, energy, infrastructure and critical raw materials, often in developing economies and along South-South investment corridors”. While India has legitimate strategic and security concerns, there are also economic imperatives. A balance must be struck. The domestic manufacturing ecosystem must be deepened, and efforts stepped up to increase value addition and pursue closer integration with global supply chains. A careful and calibrated approach is needed.

# Burnham on the verge of becoming U.K. PM

**Sriram Lakshman**

LONDON

Former Greater Manchester Mayor Andy Burnham is all but certain to be U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer's successor after he secured the support of 322 of 403 Labour MPs to become the next occupant of No. 10 Downing Street and Labour Party leader.

The support of 81 MPs is needed to contest any internal election; Mr. Burnham was officially one MP short, as of Friday afternoon, of ensuring that he would be the only candidate in the fray. Four other MPs had declared support for the former Mayor but had not officially nominated him, as per Labour List, a website that tracks news from the party. Mr. Burnham is expected to be ap-



Andy Burnham being greeted as he arrives to deliver a speech at the People's History Museum in Manchester, Britain. REUTERS

pointed Labour leader by the end of next week and Prime Minister on July 20.

Mr. Burnham, who is from Labour's 'soft left' and was elected three times to run Manchester, won a byelection in Makerfield on June 18 in order to return to Westminster, as support for Mr. Starmer within his party continued

to evaporate. Mr. Burnham thanked MPs for their support, saying it was indicative of a desire for a new approach to politics.

"That is the circuit breaker I am offering: power out of Westminster, an economy rewired for ordinary people, and good growth in every postcode," he said in a statement on

Thursday. Mr. Burnham also released a video message on Gaza on the same day. "The unbearable suffering in Gaza is a scar on our collective conscience," Mr. Burnham said, noting there was still a humanitarian crisis under way. He condemned Israel's military for expanding the area it controls in Gaza. He also "strongly" condemned Hamas for the attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, as well as condemning the increase in antisemitic attacks in the U.K.

"Labour's initial response to the treatment of Gaza caused huge hurt. We got it wrong and I am sorry for that," he said.

Mr. Burnham acknowledged that the Labour government had taken important steps such as recognising the Palestinian

state, sanctioning some Israeli ministers and violent Israeli settlers, and had placed restrictions on arms exports. However, the U.K. was too slow to call for a ceasefire, he said.

The government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was "clearly attempting to make a 'two-state solution' impossible", Mr. Burnham said, calling for further responses from the U.K.

There is increasing evidence that war crimes were committed in Gaza, he said, adding that the international courts – and not politicians – should make a determination on this. "There is no contradiction between a zero tolerance approach to antisemitism and holding the Netanyahu government to account."

# Ukrainian drones hit southern Russian refineries and Azov port

Firefighters working to extinguish burning petroleum products at the seaport, say Russian officials; Moscow's Defence Ministry says it downed more than 370 Ukrainian drones; Kyiv's army chief says war not yet at decisive 'turning point'

**Agence France-Presse**  
MOSCOW

**U**krainian drone strikes on Friday hit southern Russian oil refineries and the port of Taganrog on the Azov Sea, where authorities declared an emergency and evacuated some residents, officials said.

Kyiv has beefed up its efforts in recent months to hinder Moscow's financial capabilities in its war against Ukraine, targeting energy infrastructure in retaliatory strikes and causing a nationwide fuel shortage.

Russia's Defence Ministry said its forces downed

over 370 Ukrainian drones, including over the Moscow region.

In the port of Taganrog, near occupied Ukraine, social media videos showed plumes of smoke rising over the city. Local governor Yuri Slyusar said he visited the port after "massive" night-time strikes. "Efforts to extinguish the fire of petroleum products at the seaport are ongoing."

In the neighbouring Krasnodar region, authorities said drones caused a fire at the Ilsky oil refinery. Authorities reported no casualties.

Russian leader Vladimir Putin has acknowledged that the Ukrainian strikes



People queue to refuel their cars at a petrol station in Moscow on Friday as Ukrainian strikes on refineries crimp domestic supply. AFP

are causing a fuel shortage and said they are aimed at dividing Russians.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's commander-in-chief Oleksandr Syrsky said that a

the Russian advance across much of the front line in recent months, and delivered a string of major long-range attacks on Russian oil refineries. Many in Ukraine and among their backers abroad are saying Kyiv's troops are on the front foot in the more than four-year war.

In a social media post summarising the first half of the year, Mr. Syrsky noted a decrease in the number of "active offensive fronts", and said Russia's assaults had dropped by half.

"At the same time, we are still far from a turning point in the war," he added.

turning point in the war with Russia was "still a long way off", despite hailing a string of recent successes for his troops.

Kyiv's army has halted