

# Centre eases access to defence testing facilities for companies, waives charges for key projects

**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has approved a revised Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for utilisation of Defence Ministry proof ranges, field firing ranges, and laboratory testing facilities by the Indian defence industry, with proof and testing charges waived for several government-backed developmental projects.

According to the Defence Ministry, the revised SOP aims to simplify and streamline access to testing infrastructure for indigenous defence companies, start-ups and innovators, and is expected to support the government's push for "*atmanirbharta*" (self-reliance) in defence, innovation and defence exports.

Under the revised pro-



Rajnath Singh

cedure, proof and testing charges have been waived for iDEX, Technology Development Fund (TDF), Make and other developmental projects of the Defence Ministry.

A three-day slot every quarter has also been reserved at proof ranges for proof firing of government-sponsored developmental projects, including iDEX, TDF and Make projects.

The reserved slots will also cover developmental projects undertaken by in-

digenuous defence firms on their own initiative, according to the revised SOP.

The SOP provides a list of proof ranges, field firing ranges and laboratory test facilities available with the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Government Quality Assurance agencies and the three Services for use by Indian defence companies.

The revised SOP intends to simplify documentation and make the process more transparent and predictable for industry.

Another significant change is the replacement of the arbitration provision in the existing SOP with a conciliation agreement clause to facilitate faster resolution of issues that may arise between the industry and the authorities while using the testing and proof facilities.

# Organisations engaged in religious conversion shall be denied FCRA registration: Madras HC

**The Hindu Bureau**  
MADURAI

The Madurai Bench of the Madras High Court has said religious organisations engaged in conversions shall be denied Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act (FCRA) registration, and that only organisations whose activities do not affect the nation's secular fabric and social amity are entitled to registration.

The court was hearing a Civil Miscellaneous Appeal filed by Kanzeon Public Charitable Trust – founded by a Christian priest in Kodaikanal – after its application for registration under the FCRA was rejected.

The appellant said the trust had established a Zen Meditation Centre at Kodaikanal and that its activities could not be labelled as religious. The centre contended that the govern-



We are a pluralist nation. Unlike the USA, we are not a melting pot but a salad bowl, a beautiful metaphor credited to Justice Ruma Pal. This status quo would be upset if one religious group gains ascendancy

**MADURAI BENCH OF THE  
MADRAS HIGH COURT**

ment's policy was to check the inflow of foreign funds that might be used for conversion and other activities detrimental to the country's secular fabric.

The Division Bench of Justices G.R. Swaminathan and M.D. Sumathi said, "One cannot forget the fact that Christianity is a messianic religion. Their theological and religious mis-

sion is to bring everyone within the fold of Jesus Christ. There is a saying 'a leopard will not change its spots'. Unlike Hinduism, which is inclusive, the Abrahamic religions are inherently exclusive."

Rule 9 of the FCRA Rules, 2011, states that the application must be in Form FC-3A. Form FC-3A requires the applicant to disclose the nature of the organisation.

"The appellant trust claims to subscribe to Zen Buddhist philosophy. On its own showing, the appellant is a religious organisation. The authority rightly states that Zen Buddhism is a variant of the Mahayana Buddhist School. Every Buddhist school will come under the broad umbrella of Buddhism. Zen can be no exception. Since the appellant's application did not correctly identify its

nature as religious, the application was rightly negatived," the court said.

The judges said the appellant need not have been so coy. Section 12 of the FCRA bars only an unregistered religious organisation from accepting foreign contributions. An organisation having a definite religious programme is entitled to apply for a certificate of registration from the Central government under Sections 11 and 12 of the Act.

"We are a pluralist nation. Unlike the USA, we are not a melting pot but a salad bowl, a beautiful metaphor credited to Justice Ruma Pal. This status quo would be upset if one religious group gains ascendancy," the court said, adding, "One cannot keep any card up one's sleeve. This is no game of hide and seek."

# Youth groups issue joint call for Oct. 10 agitation

CJP says protest will continue till electoral system is 'reformed', urges youth to 'book tickets to Delhi'; Neha Bora says protest is a fight by 'we the people of India' against BJP to 'save democracy'

**Suruchi Kumari**  
**Lavpreet Kaur**  
NEW DELHI

**Y**outh organisations on Wednesday urged youngsters from across the country to join a protest on October 10 at Jantar Mantar in Delhi demanding the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar and a rollback of the ongoing special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls.

The All India Students Association (AISA), the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP), the All India Students' Federation (AISF), the Student Federation of India (SFI), and the Association of Students of Alternative Politics (ASAP) addressed a joint press conference here.

"The call of 10 October is a united call of the 'we the people of India' versus the BJP. The call is not by one organisation, it is by all of us - the CJP, INDIA opposition, and the student wings of all the opposition parties," said AISA president Neha Bora.

Ms. Bora said that while the protest over NEET irregularities in June ended



AISA leader Neha Bora, CJP leader Saurav Das, and others at the Press Club of India in New Delhi on Wednesday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

with the resignation of a Cabinet Minister, Dharmendra Pradhan, this time it will lead to the CEC's ouster. "This is a fight to save democracy. We will not tolerate isolated detentions by the Delhi Police. All of us will come together when even one of us is threatened in the protest," she added.

Mr. Das reiterated that the CJP, along with all student organisations and civil society groups, will hit the streets on October 10 and go back only when the electoral system is reformed.

should book their tickets of train or flights, or book a cab and come to Delhi. This is going to be a long fight to change the broken system. The right to vote is the only way to change the system, and to protect that, only youth can put up the fight. Only Gen Z can put up this fight. This is why the government is scared of us."

Mr. Das said that the government should initiate talks with the youth delegation about reforming the system instead of using force against the protesters.

"We have received information that the government is mobilising their extremist groups against us to derail the protest and create a hostile and violent atmosphere," he said.

Earlier in the day, Mr. Das formally intimated the Delhi Police about the October 10 protest.

The police "acknowledged" the intimation letter, following which the organisers completed the paperwork and gave an undertaking in connection with the proposed demonstration. The police are yet to give a permission.

"We will not stop at the resignation of Gyanesh Kumar. We will have to ensure that people who take illegal decisions are arrested and (that) there are criminal proceedings against them. We will not stop till SIR is rolled back, the voter rolls are restored to January 2025 and (the) law to appoint the Election Commissioners is reformed," he said.

## 'Buy tickets to Delhi'

Giving the slogan of "Dilli Chalo", Mr. Das said, "People who have not booked their train tickets, they

# RBI raises repo rate to 5.5% amid 'calibrated tightening'

**Lalatendu Mishra**

MUMBAI

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) of the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday raised the policy repo rate under the liquidity adjustment facility (LAF) by 25 basis points to 5.5% and shifted its stance from neutral to calibrated tightening, signalling that rate cuts are off the table in the near term.

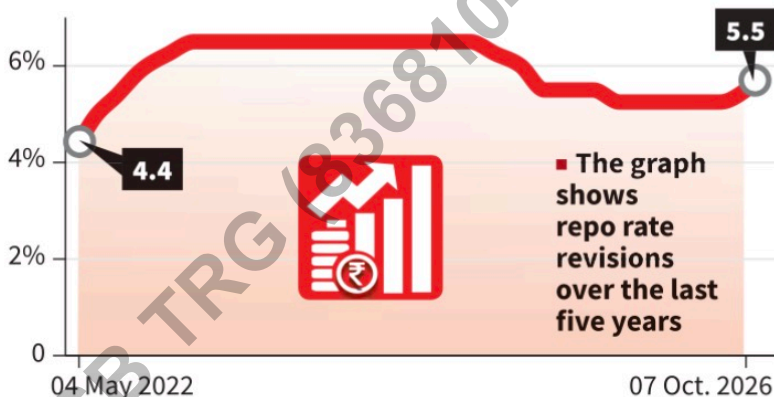
Consequently, the standing deposit facility (SDF) rate stands adjusted to 5.25%, and the marginal standing facility (MSF) rate and the bank rate to 5.75%.

The policy repo rate, which was cut to 5.25% in December 2025, had been kept on hold at the next four MPC meetings. In the easing cycle, the MPC had cut the rate by 125 basis points in phases, from 6.5% to 5.25%, before increasing it on Wednesday.

The sudden re-escalation of the West Asia conflict in September and the

## Tighter grip

The shift in policy stance amid a sour global economic sentiment indicates that rate cuts are off the table in the near term, and policy action ahead can only be a rate hike or a pause



consequent hardening and volatility in global crude prices soured global economic sentiment and unsettled financial markets, RBI Governor Sanjay Malhotra said in the Governor's statement.

"It [the shifted policy stance] underscored that given the current conditions, rate cuts are off the table in the near term and policy action ahead can only be a rate hike or a pause, depending on the

evolving conditions and the outlook," the Governor stated.

Further tightening of global financial conditions, uncertainty about fair valuation of AI stocks, and an elusive resolution of the West Asia conflict pose significant downside risks to the global economic outlook, Mr. Malhotra highlighted in his statement.

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# Former First Lady of Sri Lanka, Shiranthi Rajapaksa, arrested over graft allegations

**Meera Srinivasan**

COLOMBO

Sri Lanka's anti-corruption body on Wednesday arrested former First Lady Shiranthi Rajapaksa, wife of former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, over alleged financial irregularities. She has been remanded until October 13.

The Commission to Investigate Allegations of Bribery or Corruption (CIABOC) said it was arresting Ms. Rajapaksa in connection with an investigation into the alleged misuse of funds at her charity Siriliya Saviya Foundation.

Ms. Rajapaksa, who travelled to Singapore on September 16 for medical



Shiranthi Rajapaksa, wife of Sri Lanka's former President Mahinda Rajapaksa, being taken to prison in Colombo on Wednesday. AFP

treatment, was served with a summons at Colombo airport to provide a statement to police in connection with allegations of financial irregularities at her charity.

**Ms. Rajapaksa flew back**

on Monday after filing a court petition seeking to prevent her arrest, but the hearing for anticipatory bail was fixed for October 12, news agency AFP reported.

**Ms. Rajapaksa's eldest**

son and Opposition lawmaker, Namal Rajapaksa, is also in remand custody after being arrested by the CIABOC last month over corruption allegations. The Rajapaksa family has denied any wrongdoing and accused the government of pursuing a political witch-hunt.

The arrests come as part of the ruling National People's Power government's ongoing anti-corruption drive, in which many politicians, bureaucrats, and businessmen are being investigated over graft charges. Authorities appear to be expediting long-dragging investigations.

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# Houthis claim new strikes on Saudi capital as fighting rages in Yemen

The group claims it attacked Riyadh's King Khalid International Airport with missiles and drones; Saudi forces say they intercepted a missile north of capital, with flights disrupted briefly; fighting in Yemen focused around Dhubbab, Waziyah

**Associated Press**  
CAIRO

**T**hree people were killed in attacks on two airports in Saudi Arabia, the Saudi General Authority for Civil Aviation said on Wednesday.

The Saudi authorities did not blame any party for the attacks at Abha and Riyadh's King Khalid international airports, but Houthi (Ansar Allah) rebels in Yemen earlier claimed they carried out attacks against the two airports.

The attack on Abha airport killed Moroccan and Algerian residents and wounded 28 other people, while the attack on King Khalid airport killed a Su-



Houthi supporters gather in solidarity as fighting escalates across several fronts, in Sanaa, Yemen on Wednesday. REUTERS

danese national and wounded eight others, officials said.

Earlier on Wednesday, Houthi rebels in Yemen claimed new attacks on airports and military facilities

in neighbouring Saudi Arabia on Wednesday as the kingdom is pulled deeper into the latest front in the Iran war, which also threatens a crucial shipping alternative to the Strait of

**Hormuz.** As the Saudi capital is targeted again, new cage-like fences have been erected this week around fuel tanks and other equipment of the Saudi state-run Aramco oil company near the Riyadh airport.

The Houthis' military spokesperson, Brigadier General Yahya Saree, said that the rebels launched ballistic missiles and drones against King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh. The spokesperson for the Saudi-led coalition fighting the Houthis, Major General Turki al-Malki, said they intercepted a ballistic missile north of Riyadh. Flights were briefly disrupted, according to FlightRadar24.

Inside Yemen, fighting has centred in and around the crucial town of Dhubbab, some 54 km south of the port city of Mokha that the rebels seized last month, according to both the Houthis and Yemen's internationally recognised government.

Clashes were also reported in Waziyah district in southwestern Taiz province, which links Yemen's highlands to the Red Sea and overlooks roads to the Bab el-Mandeb Strait.

Mr. Al-Malki has vowed "full operational support" to Yemeni government forces until the Houthis are "eliminated". The coalition has said 100 fighter jets were providing support.

# Scars from Oct 7 fuel divisions over Netanyahu ahead of Israel election

**Associated Press**

*Jerusalem, October 7*

AS ISRAEL gears up for its first elections since Hamas' October 7, 2023, attack, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his opponents are putting it at the heart of their campaigns.

Nearly every poster, stump speech or televised debate seems to reference the attack, which has scarred the country and remains fresh in the minds of voters. Three years on, the worst security failure in Israel's history now threatens to end the career of its longest-serving prime minister.

"October 7 is kind of a framework for the entire political discussion that is going on," said Tamar Hermann, an expert on Israeli public opinion at the Israel Democracy Institute, a Jerusalem think tank. "All of us are post-traumatic in a way."

Netanyahu's opponents want him to pay for the failures that led to the deadliest day in Israel's 78-year history and plunged the country into a series of inconclusive wars. His defenders say Netanyahu was betrayed by the military establishment and that he has led Israel through a dramatic re-

bound from its darkest hour.

A loss in the October 27 election would likely end the career of the soon-to-be 77-year-old Netanyahu. A victory would mark the greatest turnaround yet for a man who has defied naysayers for three decades.

On the morning of October 7, Hamas militants fired several thousand rockets into Israel and thousands of militants attacked through holes blown in the border fence or with boats or motorized paragliders. Some 1,200 people were killed and 251 taken hostage.

Israel responded with a military offensive that has killed over 74,000 Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, according to local health authorities, left the territory in ruins and sparked an ongoing humanitarian catastrophe. Israel later went to war against Hezbollah militants in Lebanon, seized a chunk of Syria, attacked targets in Yemen and joined US in two wars against Iran.

Hundreds of Israelis, mostly young soldiers, have died, and nearly every household has been touched by the violence. Netanyahu promised "total victory," but Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran's theocratic government all remain intact.

Israel's international stand-

ing has plummeted, a number of foreign governments have accused it of genocide — a charge it vehemently rejects — and Netanyahu is now wanted by the International Criminal Court.

After a string of resignations by top security officials, Netanyahu is the only senior figure from October 7 still in office, making this month's election in many ways a referendum on his leadership.

Netanyahu and his opponents have put October 7 at the forefront of their campaigns — for different reasons. His opponents — from across the political spectrum — call his outgoing coalition "the massacre government." Netanyahu says he has led a "war of redemption."

His chief rival is Gadi Eisenkot, a former military chief whose son and nephew were killed in battle in Gaza. The opponents have pledged to form a government of "repair and reconstruction" — beginning with the formation of an official commission of inquiry into October 7.

They also have vowed to end draft exemptions for ultra-Orthodox religious men, a long-standing policy that has outraged the secular majority at a time of war, and accuse Netanyahu of threatening Israel's democratic institutions.



# US proposes \$70K work fee for foreign students

Associated Press

Washington, October 7

THE DEPARTMENT of Homeland Security on Wednesday proposed a \$70,000 fee for international students seeking to work in the United States, the latest effort from the Trump administration to crack down on foreign enrolment.

A proposed rule would require schools to pay the fee for every student who participates in the optional practice training programme, known as OPT, which allows students to work in jobs related to their major during or after their time in school. Students are generally eligible for one year of work post-graduation, though certain science, technology, engineering and math majors are eligible for an additional two years.

Schools would be required to pay the \$70,000 for each new student's initial application to the program, and a \$30,000 fee for each renewal.

The change would represent



US President Donald Trump

a blow to American colleges and universities that recruit students from overseas as a source of tuition revenue, as well as tech companies and other industries that hire many international students for technical roles.

In a statement, DHS described the fee as a response to fraud and abuse of the visa program, which it called a "pipeline for cheap foreign labor."

President Donald Trump's administration has been putting pressure on international students in many ways as part of its wider efforts to crack down on immigration and reshape higher education.