



**Astronaut Anne McClain makes a heart sign to family members before heading for a mission to the International Space Station, in Florida**



**Russia's Prez Vladimir Putin and Belarus' Prez Alexander Lukashenko exchange documents during a signing ceremony following their meeting, in Moscow**



**President of the European Council Antonio Costa attends a press meet following the 8th South Africa-European Union Summit in Cape Town**



**Indonesia's Education Minister Abdul Mu'ti after the launch of a direct transfer system of allowances to public school teachers' bank accounts, in Jakarta**

# Russia says it has retaken Kursk's biggest town from Ukraine

**AP, MOSCOW:** Russian forces have driven the Ukrainian army out of the biggest town in Russia's Kursk border region, officials claimed Thursday, as US officials sought the Kremlin's response to a proposed 30-day ceasefire in the three-year war that Ukraine has endorsed.

## UKRAINE CONFLICT

The Russian Defence Ministry's claim that it recaptured the town of Sudzha, hours after President Vladimir Putin visited his commanders in Kursk and wore military fatigues, could not be independently verified. Ukrainian officials made no immediate comment on the claim.

The renewed Russian

## Agree in principle with US proposal for 30-day ceasefire, says Putin

**AP, MOSCOW:** Russian President Vladimir Putin said Thursday that he agrees in principle with a US proposal for a 30-day ceasefire in Ukraine, but the terms need to be worked out, and he emphasised that it should pave the way to lasting peace.

"So the idea itself is correct, and we certainly support it," Putin said in Moscow. "But there are issues that we need to discuss, and I think that we need to discuss it with our American colleagues and partners."

He noted the need to develop a mechanism to control possible breaches of the truce. Another issue, he said, is whether Ukraine could use the 30-day ceasefire to continue mobilization and rearmament.

"We agree with the proposals to halt

the fighting, but we proceed from the assumption that the ceasefire should lead to lasting peace and remove the root causes of the crisis," Putin said.

Putin noted that while it appeared that the US persuaded Ukraine to accept a ceasefire, Ukraine is interested in that because of the battlefield situation, noting that Ukrainian troops that launched an incursion into Russia's Kursk region would be fully blocked in the coming days.

"In these conditions, I believe it would be good for the Ukrainian side to secure a ceasefire for at least 30 days," he said.

Referring to the Ukrainian troops in Kursk, he said: "Will all those who are there come out without a fight?"

military push and Putin's high-profile visit to his troops came as US President Donald Trump presses for a diplomatic end to the war. The US Tuesday lifted its

March 3 suspension of military aid for Kyiv after senior US and Ukrainian officials made progress on how to stop the fighting during talks held in Saudi Arabia.

Trump said Wednesday that "it's up to Russia now" as his administration presses Moscow to agree to the ceasefire. The US president has made veiled threats to



**Russian emergency specialists evacuate residents from the Sudzha district of the Kursk region amid the ongoing Russian-Ukrainian conflict, on Thursday**

hit Russia with new sanctions if it won't engage with peace efforts.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Thursday that US negotiators were on their way to Russia.

"Before the talks start, and they haven't started yet, it would be wrong to talk about it in public," he told reporters.

Senior US officials say they hope to see Russia stop attacks on Ukraine within the next few days.

White House press secretary Karoline Leavitt told Fox News that national security adviser Mike Waltz spoke Wednesday with his Russian counterpart. She also confirmed that Trump's special envoy, Steve Witkoff, will head to Moscow for talks with Russian officials, possibly including Putin.

By signalling its openness to a ceasefire, Ukraine

has presented the Kremlin with a dilemma at a time when the Russian military has the upper hand in the war — whether to accept a truce and abandon hopes of making new gains, or reject the offer and risk derailing a cautious rapprochement with Washington.

The Ukrainian army's foothold inside Russia has been under intense pressure for months from a renewed effort by Russian forces, backed by North Korean troops. Ukraine's daring incursion last August led to the first occupation of Russian soil by foreign troops since World War II and embarrassed the Kremlin.

Speaking to commanders Wednesday, Putin said he expected the military "to completely free the Kursk region from the enemy in the nearest future."

## FROM PAGE 1

## TCP ACT: HC STRIKES DOWN CONTROVERSIAL SECTION

"That is why Section 39 A has been brought in for taking objections and suggestions from the people for zone changes. The High Court has suggested tweaking the rules, regulation and guidelines. We will study the suggestions and after studying them, we will submit them before the Supreme Court," Rane added.

Rane stressed that Section 17(2) has not been scrapped and after the Supreme Court hears the matter, the government will do the necessary tweaking.

Earlier, the Court order came in response to the several public interest litigation (PIL) petitions filed by the Goa Foundation, the Khazan Society of Goa and the Goa Bachao Abhiyan (GBA) and three public-spirited citizens Pravin Singh Shetgaonkar of Betim, Mayur Shetgaonkar of Morjim and Swapnesh Sherlekar of Mulgao-Bicholim; Pilerne Citizen Forum, Sanjay Shinde of Navelim and the miscellaneous civil application by the Federation of Rainbow Warriors.

The petitioners had challenged the constitutional validity and vires of Section 17 (2) of the TCP Act, 1974, which enabled the State government to correct errors in the Goa Regional Plan 2021.

They had also challenged the Goa Town and Country Planning (Alteration/Modification in the Regional Plan for Rectification of Inconsistent/Inadvertent Zoning Proposals) Rules, 2023, on the grounds that they are violation of Article 14 and Article 21 of the Constitution of India.

The petitioners had further contested the re-zoning of individual plots in establishing zoning areas, arguing that this process violates the principles of planned development under the TCP Act.

The Court stated that it had only considered the challenge to Section 17(2) of the Act and the 2023 Rules. The matter has now been posted for further consideration after four weeks.

After the order, senior advocate Devitre, representing the State requested for stay of the order. Considering the nature of the challenge the Court stayed the operation of this order for six weeks. But the Court made it clear that there shall be no consideration of the applications for approvals made under Section 17 (2) of the TCP Act.

As regards Section 17(2) itself, the Court has decided that this section has to be read down which means that any proposal which comes has to be considered in the light of the Regional Plan 2021 only and not independently, not by themselves, not for reasons of inconsistencies and incoherency, informed petitioners counsel senior advocate Norma Alvares.

The Court has said that no further approvals can be granted at present when the State government sought a stay of the operation of Section 17 (2) for six weeks, she added.

The Court struck down the Goa Town and Country Planning (Alteration/Modification in the Regional Plan for Rectification of Inconsistent/Inadvertent Zoning Proposals) Rules, 2023, being ultra vires the provisions of the Constitution and the TCP Act, thereby rendering the guidelines for the alteration/modification to be carried out under Section 17(2) issued by the TCP Department vide circular dated 27.03.2023 null and void.

"This is a good victory for people, because, we were opposed to the zoning which was being changed spot by spot in different places changing the entire context of the landscape of Goa and literally casting aside the Regional Plan 2021, which is still valid and holds good for people of Goa, protecting Goa's ecology and environment while also allowing for development in certain areas," senior advocate said further.

When queried about the future of land conversions made thus far using provisions under Section 17(2) of TCP Act, senior Adv Alvares said, "We will have to read the judgment and consider each individual case because many cases were done on the basis of inconsistencies and incoherency and not error. Error has to be shown vis-a-vis the original proposal in the Regional Plan. So each of the approvals that have been granted zone change permissions will have to be reconsidered in the light of what they were in the original Regional Plan and only if they can show that there was some error in the Regional Plan then only a zone change could be considered and not because some people find that this is not a correct zone or this is not a good zone. I want to develop my property. That is all cancelled by the High Court," she informed.

The PIL writ petitions had challenged the first 24 change of zone approvals. "Most of them were spot zoning," sen-

ior Adv Alvares said. Incidentally, the PIL writ petition has still not been disposed of and will come for hearing after four weeks.

The Section 17 (2) of the TCP Act was inserted by way of an amendment to the Act on March 1, 2023. The rules framed under Section 17(2) enabled private individuals to file applications to seek correction or rectification of inadvertent error and correction of inconsistent/incoherent zoning proposal in the Regional Plan 2021.

Reacting to the judgment, Director of Goa Foundation Dr Claude Alvares said, "The High Court has given relief which it normally does when there is a constitutional matter. The government which is supposed to protect the eco-zones has become an enemy of it. So citizens of the State had no recourse but to approach the High Court."

He said, "The High Court has struck down guidelines and rules and once it is done then everything done under that is going to be set aside. It is the great victory of the people of Goa because everybody in the State has been agitated over Section 17 (2) of TCP Act, except of course beneficiaries, most of whom are parties from Delhi who were able to pay huge amounts of money required for the zone changes."

Alvares said, "Some Goans were also there but they were acting as front agencies for the Delhi parties. All the NGO groups will fight to see that Goa's environment and greenery is maintained. The High Court has given us great motivation through the judgment."

Goa Bachao Abhiyan co-convenor Sabina Martins said, "We are very happy that the High Court put a stop to land conversions via Section 17 (2) amendment of TCP Act. GBA has been fighting to protect eco-sensitive zones like fields, hills, sand dunes, mangroves, and water bodies. The High Court also upheld the participation of people in planning which Section 17 (2) did not allow and struck down the rules and guidelines."

She said, "This is people's victory. So many people worked very hard to get facts as information sought under RTI Act was not given properly. The information on the TCP Department website was not uploaded from August 2024 despite the High Court order. The matter had to be argued twice as the bench changed. Also many other similar petitions were clubbed together. All the lawyers did their best to protect Goa's land. More importantly the High Court bench understood the gravity of destruction Goa is subjected to and put a halt to some extent. There are many more violations that are currently in court and we are hopeful justice will be done. The government should not waste public money by going to the Supreme Court."

Environmentalist Swapnesh Sherlekar said, "TCP Minister and the Chief Town Planner should take responsibility and resign from their positions if they have a sense of accountability and responsibility. The government spent crores of rupees on hiring external lawyers to defend the ill-conceived rules and guidelines of the amended TCP Act." Expressing his disappointment over the judgment, Federation of Rainbow Warriors founder Abhijeet Prabhu-desai said, "My immediate reaction is of disappointment because we are firm in our opinion that Section 17 (2) is unconstitutional and has to be quashed."

"Our position is that 17 (2) is for unplanned development. We do not see this order as a victory but as a challenge. We will fight against it until we get justice for Goa. We want that Section 17 (2) as a whole should be struck down because tomorrow the government can come up with new rules and guidelines. Our demand is firm that 17 (2) has to be struck down and there is no two-way," he said.

"To put it briefly, the Regional Plan is for rural Goa and Outline Development Plan (ODP) for urban planning. In rural Goa, the need is for sustainable development. It has nothing to do with urban development. The corrections which can be done in ODP cannot be done in Regional Plan. The Regional Plan is restricted to broad demarcation."

## BHUTANI SEEKS FRESH EC, PETITIONERS RAISE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE OLD ONE

The Parmesh Construction Company Ltd had purchased 35,050 square metres of land at Savorfond, Sancoale from the ANS Construction Pvt Ltd on July 14, 2023. It has conceptualised construction of multifamily dwellings and vil-

lages. The villagers of Sancoale are vehemently opposing the "controversial" housing project proposed by the Bhutani Infra as it would destroy the environment and the local community.

## 25 bodies retrieved after Pak train siege

**AFP, MACH, PAKISTAN:** The bodies of at least 25 people, including 21 hostages, killed in a train siege by separatist gunmen in Pakistan were retrieved from the site on Thursday ahead of the first funerals, officials said.

Security forces said they freed more than 340 train passengers in a two-day rescue operation that ended late on Wednesday after a separatist group bombed a remote railway track in mountainous southwest Balochistan and stormed a train with around 450 passengers on board.

The assault was claimed by the Baloch Liberation Army (BLA), one of a number of separatist groups that accuse outsiders of plundering natural resources in Balochistan near the borders with Afghanistan and Iran.

Death tolls have varied, with the military saying in an official statement that "21 innocent hostages" were killed by the militants as well as four soldiers in the rescue operation.

A railway official in Balochistan said the bodies of 25 people were transported by train away from the hostage site to the nearby town of Mach on Thursday morning.

"Deceased were identified as 19 military passengers, one police and one railway official, while four bodies are yet to be identified," the official, who spoke on condition of anonymity, told AFP.

A senior local military official overseeing operations confirmed the details.

An army official, speaking to AFP on condition of

## Trump threatens retaliatory 200% tariff on European wine

**AP, WASHINGTON:** President Donald Trump on Thursday threatened a 200 per cent tariff on European wine, champagne and spirits if the European Union goes forward with a planned tariff on American whiskey.

The European tariff, which was unveiled in response to steel and aluminum tariffs by the US administration, was expected to go into effect on April 1.

But Trump, in a morning social media post, vowed

a new escalation in his trade war if the EU pushes ahead with the planned 50 per cent tariff on American whiskey.

"If this Tariff is not removed immediately, the U.S. will shortly place a 200% Tariff on all WINES, CHAMPAGNES, & ALCOHOLIC PRODUCTS COMING OUT OF FRANCE AND OTHER EU REPRESENTED COUNTRIES," Trump wrote. "This will be great for the Wine and Champagne businesses in the US."

## MORE OBITS ON PG 12

**DEATH**  
**PERPET PIRES VAZ**  
(Agassaim-Goa)  
Born: 10th May 1961 | Died: 13th March 2025  
Beloved wife of Late Paulo Vaz. Daughter of late Luis Pires and late Maria Josefa Fernandes. Daughter-in-law of Late Santan/Ruzaria Vas. Sister of Sebastiao Pires and Rosa Maria Pires. Sister-in-law of late Caitano and Rosy Vas.  
Funeral Cortège will leave her residence Today, 14th March 2025 at 3:15 p.m. to St. Lawrence Church, Agassaim for Eucharistic Celebration followed by burial.  
Relatives Neighbours & Friends Kindly accept this as the only intimation.

**LORD I'M COMING HOME**  
We, The Sisters of the **CROSS OF CHAVANOD (REMANSO)** Deeply mourn the sad demise of  
**SR. MARYLA ISIDUR MONTEIRO**  
Date of birth: 25-06-1930  
Date of death: 13-03-2025  
Eucharistic celebration on 14th March 2025 (TODAY) at 4.00 p.m. at Remanso Hospital Chapel, Mapusa and thereafter burial at Tropa Cemetery.

**LORD I'M COMING HOME**  
**JULIA PIRES LUIS**  
Born: 04/08/1940 | Died: 12/03/2025  
Margao - Goa  
Beloved Wife of late Diogo Vincent Luis. Beloved Mother/Mother-in-law of Victor/Severina, Arthur/Arcanja, late Edwin/Sandhya, James/Doreen, late Richard, Anna/Felix. Beloved Grandmother of Daryn, Jewellayn/Dwayne, late Mark, Aldridge, Jane, Amanda, Deanne & Kate.  
Funeral cortege will leave her residence on Friday, 14th March 2025 at 3:45 pm to Grace Church, Margao, for Eucharistic Celebration at 4:00 pm, followed by burial at Holy Spirit Church Cemetery, Margao.  
Relatives & friends kindly accept this as the only intimation  
Rebelto Publicity & Funeral Services Margao 9822383992

**THREE YEARS IN HEAVEN**  
**OSCAR RODRIGUES**  
Dabolim / Bogmalo  
"Three years have passed, yet his love and warmth remain in our hearts. He was a blessing in our lives."  
We miss him deeply and cherish his memory forever.  
Rest in Peace dear Oscar.  
There will be a Eucharistic Celebration for the soul of our beloved OSCAR on Saturday 15th March 2025 (tomorrow) at 8.00 am at S.S. Cosme & Damiao Church Bogmalo followed by prayers and blessing of the grave offered by his sorrowful wife Emma, Children Stephanie/Desville, Nisha/Kim, Grandchildren Darius, Ayden, Lara and family.  
RELATIVES & FRIENDS KINDLY ACCEPT THIS AS THE ONLY INTIMATION

## FIRST DEATH ANNIVERSARY

In Loving Memory Of



24-7-1942 - 15-3-2024

## MARIA CRISTINA DA COSTA FERNANDES

Kamat Retreat Colony, Durgawadi - Taleigao - Goa

There will be an Eucharistic Celebration for the soul of our beloved Maria Cristina (tomorrow) 15th March 2025 at 4pm at the Saint Michael Church, Taleigao followed by prayer and blessing of the grave.

Offered by her sorrowful husband Athos Fernandes and daughters/sons-in-law Dinak/Andre, Precilla/Antonio, late Michelle/Mohandas, Natasha/Brian and her grand children.

Relatives, friends and neighbors kindly accept this as the only intimation

Confidant9881711706Panjim