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Priyanka Chopra poses for photographers upon arrival at the premier for the film 'Heads of State' in London

**Hong Kong govt proposes recognising same-sex couples' rights**

**HONG KONG:** The Hong Kong government said on Wednesday it will propose legislation to recognise some rights of same-sex couples whose marriages are registered abroad, to comply with a 2023 court judgement. "The government recommends legislation to allow same-sex couples to apply for registration under a newly established registration mechanism, so that their same-sex relationships can be legally recognised," the government said in a policy document, noting that only couples lawfully married abroad will be eligible. Hong Kong's top judges in a 2023 landmark decision unanimously declared marriage "confined to opposite-sex couples".

**Pakistan flash floods, heavy rain kill 64 in a week: govt**

**ISLAMABAD:** Flash floods and heavy rain in Pakistan have killed 64 people and injured 117 in a week, a government agency said Wednesday. The highest toll was in northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, with 23 dead including 10 children, the National Disaster Management Authority said. Fourteen of the victims were swept away in a flash flood in the Swat Valley last week, local media reported. Flash floods and homes collapsing in heavy rain killed 21 others in the eastern province of Punjab, including 11 children, the authority said. In the southern province of Sindh, 15 were killed, while five people died in southwestern Balochistan.

**EU presses China to stop 'harming European security'**

**BRUSSELS:** EU foreign affairs chief Kaja Kallas on Wednesday urged Beijing to stop undermining Europe's security, as China's top diplomat held talks in Brussels ahead of a leaders' summit later this month. "China is not our adversary, but on security our relationship is under increasing strain," Kallas said ahead of meeting China's Wang Yi. "Chinese companies are Moscow's lifeline to sustain its war against Ukraine. Beijing carries out cyberattacks, interferes with our democracies, and trades unfairly. These actions harm European security and jobs." Wang's visit to Brussels -- following which he will head to Berlin and Paris -- comes some three weeks ahead of a summit between Chinese President Xi Jinping and the EU's top officials in Beijing. As US President Donald Trump has rocked the major trading powers by unleashing a tariff war, the EU has opened the door to improving ties with China.

**Japanese islanders left sleepless after 900 quakes hit**

**TOKYO:** A remote island chain in southern Japan has been shaken by more than 900 quakes in the last two weeks, the weather agency said Wednesday, with residents saying they were unable to sleep. No major damage has been reported from the series of tremors, but the Japan Meteorological Agency held an emergency news conference after a magnitude 5.5 quake was registered around 3:30 pm in the Tokara island chain, south of Kyushu region. "Seismic activity has been very active in the seas around the Tokara island chain since June 21," Ayataka Ebita, director of the earthquake and tsunami observation division, told reporters. "As of 4:00 pm today, the number has exceeded 900," he said, adding the agency could not tell when quakes would end. Tokara village said on its website residents haven't been able to sleep and were tired.

**Belarus frees more political prisoners**

**WARSAW:** Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko freed another group of political prisoners in the Moscow-allyed country, his office said Wednesday, following the surprise release of a key opposition figure last month. Hundreds of regime opponents remain in prison in Belarus, five years on from Minsk's brutal crackdown of massive anti-Lukashenko protests in 2020, with rights groups increasingly worried for their health in the country's harsh and secretive jail system. "Alexander Lukashenko pardoned 16 prisoners," the Belarusian presidency said, adding that some of them had committed crimes "of an extremist nature" -- the regime's term for political prisoners.

**Turkish police seize 825 kg of heroin: Interior minister**

**ISTANBUL:** Police have seized 825 kilograms of heroin and arrested 30 people in a string of raids largely in southern Turkey, Interior Minister Ali Yerlikaya said on Wednesday. Straddling Asia and Europe, Turkey lies on several major smuggling routes and is the main entry point for heroin in the European market. "In operations across seven provinces, centred in Adana, we seized 825 kilograms of heroin and arrested 30 suspected drug traffickers," he wrote on X. In a simultaneous operation, police raided 38 different addresses in Adana, Hakkari, Hatay, Istanbul, Van, Diyarbakir, and Mersin, seizing unlicensed weapons and "a large quantity" of digital material, he said.

**Hamas mulls truce proposals after Trump Gaza ceasefire push**

**AFP, GAZA CITY:** Palestinian militant group Hamas said on Wednesday it was discussing proposals for a Gaza ceasefire received from mediators, after US President Donald Trump said Israel backed a 60-day ceasefire in the war-ravaged territory.

Nearly 21 months of war have created dire humanitarian conditions for the more than two million people in the Gaza Strip, where Israel has recently expanded its military operations against Hamas militants.

The civil defence agency said Israeli forces killed at least 33 people on Wednesday.

Trump on Tuesday urged Hamas to accept a 60-day ceasefire, saying Israel had agreed to finalise such a deal.

Hamas said in a statement Wednesday it was



Palestinian civil defence try to extinguish a fire at a building hit by an Israeli strike in Gaza City in the central Gaza Strip

"conducting national consultations to discuss" the proposals sent by mediators.

It said it aimed "to reach an agreement that guarantees ending the aggression, achieving the withdrawal

(of Israeli forces from Gaza) and urgently aiding our people in the Gaza Strip".

Trump is due to host Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House next week. Israeli Foreign Minister

Gideon Saar said he saw "some positive signs" in the process.

"We are serious in our will to reach a hostage deal and a ceasefire," he said. "Our goal is to begin proximity talks as soon as pos-

sible." He said earlier on X that any chance for a deal that would lead to hostages being freed in Gaza "must not be missed".

Out of 251 hostages seized by Palestinian militants in October 2023, 49 are still held in Gaza, including 27 the Israeli military says are dead.

A Palestinian source familiar with the negotiations told AFP "there are no fundamental changes in the new proposal" under discussion compared to previous terms presented by the United States.

The source said the new proposal "includes a 60-day truce, during which Hamas would release half of the living Israeli captives in the Gaza Strip, in exchange for Israel releasing a number of Palestinian prisoners and detainees".

**Wildfire kills 2 in Spain**

**AP, BARCELONA:** Two people died in Spain in a wildfire that spread quickly before firefighters brought it under control, authorities said, as a European heat wave sent thermometers soaring again on Wednesday.

The blaze broke out in the rural province of Lleida. It created an enormous thick plume of ash and smoke that reached 14,000 metres of altitude, making it the largest registered by firefighters in Catalonia, a northeastern region of Spain.

Firefighters said that the fire spread at 28 kph at one point, making it one of the fastest fires registered in Europe, they said.

Catalan regional president Salvador Illa announced the deaths, which occurred late Tuesday, in a social media post around midnight. Firefighters said that the two victims were found near the small village of Cosco in the county of La Segarra near a vehicle.

**IMF to provide Sri Lanka \$350 m after fourth review**

**PTI, COLOMBO:** The IMF has completed the fourth review of Sri Lanka's USD 2.9 billion bailout programme, allowing the country to draw a USD 350 million tranche from the four-year facility.

Amid the island's unprecedented economic crisis, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in March 2023 approved a nearly USD 3 billion facility to assist Sri Lanka's "efforts to durably restore macroeconomic stability by restoring fiscal and debt sustainability."

The facility helped Sri Lanka revive its bankrupt economy by building its reserves and successfully negotiating debt restructuring with external creditors.

The Executive Board

of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) completed the Fourth review under the 48-month Extended Fund Facility (EFF) Arrangement, allowing the authorities to draw SDR254 million (about USD 350 million), the global lender said in a statement.

This brings the total IMF financial support disbursed so far to SDR1.27 billion (about USD 1.74 billion).

The reforms that were imposed on the IMF's insistence have led to economic hardships, which the global lender said were a must to ensure growth and stability.

The unpopular measures led to the change of government in 2024.

**Ukraine left scrambling after US halts arms shipments**

**AFP, KYIV:** Ukraine appealed to the United States for clarity on Wednesday after it was caught off guard by a White House announcement that Washington was halting some arms shipments to the war-battered country.

The Ukrainian defence ministry, which is deeply dependent on US arms, said it had not been notified about the reduction in aid announced one day earlier.

Moscow revelled in the decision, saying it could bring the end of the war closer. Any slow down in US support could harm Kyiv's ability to fend off escalating Russian aerial bombardments or frontline gains.

Kyiv has long feared halts to US aid after Donald Trump returned to the



Ukrainian Emergency Service, emergency services personnel work to extinguish a fire following a Russian attack in Donetsk region

White House in January, having criticised the tens of billions of dollars in support and weapons sent by his predecessor, Joe Biden.

"It will even more scary, even more painful, and even more civilians will suffer," Kyiv resident Yevgenia Prysiachna told AFP, referring to an uptick in overnight

drone and missile attacks on Ukraine.

"I really hope that this is a temporary decision," the communications manager said.

John Ginkel, the deputy chief of mission at the US embassy in Kyiv, was summoned by the foreign ministry -- a rare diplomatic

move usually reserved for foes and rivals, not vital allies -- given uncertainty about what the cuts would mean for Kyiv.

"The Ukrainian side stressed that any delay or procrastination in supporting Ukraine's defence capabilities would only encourage the aggressor to continue the war," Ukraine's foreign ministry said.

The White House had said it was halting some key weapons shipments promised by the previous US administration, without elaborating.

Under Biden, Washington spearheaded Western support for Ukraine, with Congress having approved more than \$100 billion in aid, including \$43 billion in weaponry.

**Bezos-backed methane-tracking satellite lost in space**

**AFP, WELLINGTON:** A satellite backed by billionaire Amazon founder Jeff Bezos has been lost in space while carrying out an important climate change mission, New Zealand officials said Wednesday.

Designed to measure greenhouse gas emissions with "unprecedented resolution", the MethaneSAT space probe was also funded by Wellington and the US-based Environmental Defense Fund.

Plagued with technical problems, the satellite recently stopped responding to its Earth-bound controllers.

"Clearly, this is a disappointing development," said Andrew Johnson, a senior official at the New Zealand Space Agency.

"As those who work in the space sector know, space is inherently challenging, and every attempt -- successful or not -- pushes the boundaries of what we know and

what we're capable of."

The Environmental Defense Fund, which led the project, said it was "difficult news" but would not be the end of its methane-tracking efforts.

MethaneSAT was designed to measure emissions of the potent greenhouse gas, which fuels climate change by trapping heat in the planet's atmosphere.

It has proven notoriously difficult to get accurate

estimates of the methane emissions belched out by oil and gas projects around the globe.

"It was one of the most advanced methane tracking satellites in space, measuring methane emissions in oil and gas producing regions across the world," the MethaneSAT team said.

Project lead Steven Hamburg said initial data gleaned by the satellite was "remarkable".

"Recent measurements in

the Permian Basin of Texas and New Mexico revealed emissions three to five times higher than estimated by the US Environmental Protection Agency, while emissions observed in the South Caspian region are over 10 times higher than reported," Hamburg wrote on LinkedIn.

MethaneSAT was launched into space in March 2024 on the back of a SpaceX rocket fired from California.

Controllers first lost contact with the satellite on June 20, the MethaneSAT team said in a statement.

They confirmed it had lost all power on Monday this week and was "likely not recoverable".

"The engineering team is conducting a thorough investigation into the loss of communication," MethaneSAT said.

"This is expected to take time. We will share what we learn."

FROM PAGE 1

**OLD MACHINERY MAY HAVE CAUSED TELANGANA BLAST**

Adding to the concerns, the Telangana Fire Department confirmed the plant lacked a mandatory No Objection Certificate (NoC). A senior official stated the company had never applied for fire clearance and had no functional safety systems like alarms or heat sensors in place.

As investigations continue, Sigachi Industries has suspended operations at the plant for 90 days, pledging full cooperation with authorities.

**13K BOGUS BENEFICIARIES GET DOLE MEANT FOR POOR**

The minister stated that the fraudulent disbursement resulted in significant losses to the State exchequer. "Till today, over Rs 50 crore has been recovered from these people," Phal Desai said, indicating that the malpractice had continued for years. The scheme provides monthly financial assistance ranging from Rs 2,000 to Rs 3,500.

The list of ineligible recipients includes the deceased, individuals who have moved out of Goa, and those exceeding the income ceiling. As per scheme guidelines, the income limit to qualify is Rs 1.4 lakh per year.

"Once again, we carried out an extensive survey," Phal Desai said, while addressing reporters at Mantralaya in Porvorim. "During the survey, we found that there were over 13,000 bogus beneficiaries. Either it was in the name of those who had expired or he/she had moved out of the State. After the survey, over 13,000 bogus beneficiaries have been removed."

He added, "This effort has benefitted the department in saving Rs 2.5 crore every month. We have recovered the amount which was paid to the beneficiaries. Till today, over Rs 50 crore has been recovered from them. During the survey, field workers visited the houses of the beneficiaries and found out from their neighbours that the beneficiaries had passed away."

Despite the large-scale clean-up, the revelation has triggered criticism from opposition leaders and activists, who have questioned how such fraud was allowed to be carried out for so long.

The Comptroller and Auditor General (CAG) had, as early as 2018, flagged similar irregularities and criticised the State government for wasteful expenditure under DSSS. That year, the government had admitted to identifying 6,000 bogus beneficiaries.

Reacting to the current development, AamAadmi Party (AAP) Goa president Amit Palekar said, "The beneficiaries submit forms signed by MLAs. Are not those MLAs who sign the forms responsible? How do they sign forms without verifying? How do the authorities approve money to beneficiaries without them being entitled to? It means that the MLAs and the authorities are hand in gloves. What action is the government proposing against them?"

He further questioned, "How is the government going to recover the money? If money cannot be recovered from the beneficiaries, then it should be recovered from the MLAs and the government officials, and criminal action should be taken against them."

Political analyst Trajano D'Mello also raised concerns about accountability. "What action is being taken? Has the matter been investigated? Who approved it? After having officially declared, has the government or the minister or the department identified the officers responsible for allowing such a big discrepancy, which is nothing less than a fraud? Just recovering money does not solve the crime. Has any action been taken against the persons who approve the applications? Is the government sending a message that you continue defrauding the government and if caught, pay the money back?"

**CORRUPTION LENS ON MAPUSA JOINT MAMLATDAR-I**

Kamat pursued the matter further by filing complaints with both the Panjim and Ponda police stations, the Sub-Divisional Police Officers (SDPO) in both areas, and the respective Superintendents of Police (SPs). Following his complaints, the Directorate of Vigilance sought and received swift sanction from the State government to begin an official inquiry.

In a parallel development, the South Goa Additional Collector-I has also directed the Ponda Deputy Collector and the Ponda Mamlatdar to submit detailed reports re-

garding the case.

Kamat, who sourced key documents through the Right to Information (RTI) Act, has expressed concern that such misuse of the EWS certification undermines the integrity of the recruitment process and deprives genuinely eligible candidates of opportunities.

**KARNATAKA GOVT CHALLENGES CAT RELIEF TO SUSPENDED IPS OFFICER IN HC**

It termed the Tribunal's reasoning as 'perverse' and inconsistent with established legal principles concerning suspension.

According to the government, substantial supporting material -- including extracts from the Karnataka Police Manual and a detailed chronology of events from June 3 and 4 -- was submitted in a sealed cover to the Tribunal, which it alleged was not properly considered.

"Despite placing material on record justifying the suspension, the Tribunal failed to assess it in the right perspective," the state argued.

The plea also disputes the Tribunal's interpretation of inquiries underway, stating that a magisterial probe and a one-man commission were in progress, and that the state had already taken disciplinary action based on preliminary findings.

A departmental inquiry, initiated at the direction of the central government, is reportedly at an advanced stage. The government claimed this development was communicated orally to the Tribunal on June 30 but was overlooked in the final judgment.

Additionally, the petition objects to the Tribunal's remarks on four other officers -- B Dayananda, Shekar H Tekkannavar, C Balakrishna and A K Girish -- who were also suspended following the stampede.

The government pointed out that these officers had not challenged their suspension, nor were they parties to the case before the Tribunal.

It called the Tribunal's suggestion of reinstating them 'highly irregular', arguing that such observations were made without examining individual roles, service records, or factual context.

The High Court is yet to schedule a hearing on the state's plea.