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POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

Soren walks out of jail as HC grants bail in land scam case

CONTEXT: The Jharkhand High Court granted bail to Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) leader and former Chief Minister Hemant Soren in a money laundering case linked to an alleged land scam. The court cited insufficient evidence to prove his involvement in acquiring and possessing the disputed land.

Case Background

- The ED arrested Soren on January 31 after questioning him for over seven hours.
- The case involved forging land documents for 8.86 acres in the Badgai area of Ranchi.

Bail Granted

- The Jharkhand High Court granted bail to Jharkhand Mukti Morcha (JMM) leader and former Chief Minister Hemant Soren on Friday.
- The bail is related to a money laundering case linked to an alleged land scam.

Court's Rationale

- Justice Rongon Mukhopadhyay stated that "there is reason to believe that petitioner is not guilty of the offence as alleged," satisfying a condition for bail under the Prevention of Money Laundering Act.
- The court reserved its order on June 13 after hearing arguments from Soren's advocate and Additional Solicitor-General (ASG) S.V. Raju representing the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

Release from Jail

- Hemant Soren stepped out of the Birsa Munda Central Jail around 4 p.m.
- He was accompanied by his wife, Kalpana Murmu Soren.
- They went directly to the residence of his father, Shibu Soren.
- Supporters greeted him with slogans, saying, "Jail ka tala tut gaya, Hemant Soren chut gaya (The jail lock is broken and Hemant Soren is released)."

Statement to the Media

- Soren expressed concern over the five months he spent in jail, emphasizing the worry it caused for the people of Jharkhand and tribals.
- He respected the court but criticized the systematic suppression of politicians, writers, journalists, and social workers.
- Soren claimed he was jailed based on false and concocted stories.
- He pointed out that many honest people, including the Delhi CM, face long waits for justice.

- He vowed to continue fighting for the cause of the people and tribals, asserting that his release demonstrated a conspiracy against him.

Defense Argument

- Soren's lawyer, Kapil Sibal, argued that the case was civil in nature.
- The land in question was Bhuinhari (non-saleable under the Chota Nagpur Tenancy Act) and could not be transferred, making money laundering impossible.

Court Order Details

- The court order, obtained by The Hindu, stated that the overall case did not specifically or indirectly link Soren to the acquisition and possession or concealment of the 8.86 acres of land connected to the "proceeds of crime."
- None of the register/revenue records showed Soren's direct involvement in the acquisition and possession of the land.
- The court concluded that there was reason to believe Soren was not guilty as alleged, satisfying Section 45 of the PMLA, 2002.

CONCLUSION: The Jharkhand High Court's decision to grant bail to Hemant Soren in the money laundering case, citing insufficient evidence, underscores the complexity and contentious nature of the allegations. Soren's release highlights broader concerns about the suppression of political and social voices, as well as the challenges faced by individuals in proving their innocence amidst such accusations.

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INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

India slams 'deeply biased' U.S. report on religious freedom

CONTEXT: The US criticized India's religious freedom record in a report. India called the report biased and questioned the US's own human rights record.

US Report Criticizes India's Religious Freedom

- **US Accusations:**
 - The US State Department's report on religious freedom for 2023 criticizes India.
 - It claims India has a one-sided approach to religious freedom and questions the integrity of Indian legal judgements.
 - The report points to violence against religious minorities, anti-conversion laws, and the demolition of religious sites.
- **India's Response:**
 - India calls the report "deeply biased" and questions the US's own human rights record.
 - India claims the US report uses selective facts and ignores its efforts to protect religious freedom.
 - India criticizes the US for hate crimes and violence against minorities.
 - India defends its right to enact its own laws.

CONCLUSION: The exchange highlights tensions between the US and India on religious freedom. Both sides criticize each other's records and defend their own approaches.

CONCLUSION: While the recent measures offer welcome relief, the Council must prioritise long-term reforms like GST rate rationalisation and integrating excluded items for a truly streamlined system.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Debt trap

CONTEXT: Kenya's government imposed new taxes to pay its massive debt, sparking protests.

Kenya's Debt Crisis: A Difficult Balancing Act

- **Failed Tax Hike and Public Backlash:**
 - Kenyan President attempted to raise taxes through an IMF-backed bill.
 - The bill included taxes on basic necessities, sparking protests and violence.
 - The high death toll forced the president to withdraw the bill.
- **Kenya's Debt Burden:**
 - Kenya struggles with a massive domestic and foreign debt of \$80 billion.
 - Servicing this debt consumes over half of the government's revenue.
 - The country relies on loans from institutions like the IMF and World Bank, as well as China, to finance infrastructure projects.
- **Causes of the Crisis:**
 - Kenya's economic growth slowed during the pandemic.
 - Rising global food and energy prices due to the Ukraine war worsened the situation.
 - Increased interest rates by developed nations further burdened debt payments.
- **Looking Ahead:**
 - President Ruto lacks a clear plan to address the debt crisis.
 - He must find a way to balance the needs of the people with debt repayment obligations.
 - The lenders to help Kenya find a solution that doesn't punish the population.

CONCLUSION: Kenya's debt crisis requires a balanced approach, addressing the needs of the populace while managing debt repayment, with lender support crucial for sustainable solutions.

POLITY & GOVERNANCE

A fresh start

CONTEXT: The Goods and Services Tax (GST) Council was convened last week for the first time in nearly nine months

GST Council Meeting: A Fresh Start?

- **Recent Meeting and Focus:**
 - The GST Council met for the first time in nearly nine months.
 - The focus was on simplifying the GST regime through clarifications, tweaks, and procedural changes.
 - Decisions aimed to ease taxpayer burden, reduce litigation, and provide tax relief.
 - Examples include exempting student hostels (up to ₹20,000/month) and standardising tax rates for certain items.
- **Beyond Immediate Measures:**
 - The Council plans to revisit the 2021 GST rate rationalisation plan.
 - This includes potentially bringing petroleum and electricity under the GST net.
- **Looking Ahead:**
 - The Council needs to focus on broader reforms, not just procedural changes.
 - GST rate reforms and including excluded items are crucial for a more efficient system.



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INTERNAL SECURITY

52-day Amarnath Yatra begins today, security tightened in Kashmir Valley

CONTEXT: The annual Amarnath Yatra pilgrimage begins today in Kashmir. Security is tight after a recent militant attack on pilgrims.

Amarnath Yatra Begins

- The 52-day annual Amarnath Yatra began on Saturday.
- The first batch of pilgrims arrived in the Kashmir Valley on Friday.

Flag-Off Ceremony

- J&K Lieutenant-Governor Manoj Sinha flagged off the first batch of 4,603 pilgrims from Yatri Niwas at Bhagwati Nagar in Jammu.
- Devotees raised slogans and sang hymns during the ceremony.

Security Arrangements

- Elaborate security measures are in place for the smooth conduct of the pilgrimage.
- Special Quick Reaction Teams have been constituted.
- A three-tier security set-up is in place at the base camp in the Bhagwati Nagar area in Jammu.

Pilgrimage Route

- Pilgrims will trek from twin base camps located in Pahalgam and Sonmarg, south and central Kashmir's tourist places.

Security Concerns

- The pilgrimage is under the shadow of militant threat following the June 9 attack in Reasi, which killed nine pilgrims and injured 33 others.
- J&K Director-General of Police R.R. Swain emphasised the importance of following cut-off timings for vehicles carrying pilgrims.
- Security agencies have been directed to remain vigilant, adhere to standard operating procedures, and conduct regular training and drills.

CONCLUSION: With tight security measures in place, authorities aim for a peaceful pilgrimage despite the recent attack. The scenic routes of Pahalgam and Sonmarg await the pilgrims for the next 52 days.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Deputy NSA Vikram Misri is next Foreign Secretary

Appointment Announcement

- The government announced on Friday that Deputy National Security Adviser Vikram Misri will take charge as the Foreign Secretary on July 15.
- Mr. Misri will succeed the current Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra.

Official Statement

- The Personnel Ministry stated: "Appointment of Vikram Misri, IFS (1989), Deputy National Security Advisor in the National Security Council Secretariat to the post of Foreign Secretary w.e.f. 15th July 2024 vice Shri Vinay Kwatra."

Background and Expertise

- Vikram Misri is a former Ambassador to China.
- He is known for his specialization in India-China relations.

Focus on India-China Relations

- Mr. Misri is expected to bring a special focus on the ongoing tension between New Delhi and Beijing.

ECONOMY

India achieves 'outstanding outcome' in FATF evaluation

CONTEXT: India has achieved an outstanding outcome in the 2023-24 FATF mutual evaluation, marking a significant milestone in combating money laundering and terrorist financing, as announced by the government.

Achievement Announcement

- India has achieved an outstanding outcome in the mutual evaluation conducted during 2023-24 by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF).
- The evaluation results were announced by the government on Friday.

Mutual Evaluation Report

- The Mutual Evaluation Report of India was adopted at the FATF plenary held in Singapore from June 26 to 28.
- India is placed in the "regular follow-up" category, a distinction shared by only four other G-20 countries.

Significance of the Achievement

- This marks a significant milestone in India's efforts to combat money laundering (ML) and terrorist financing (TF).
- The Press Information Bureau release highlighted this achievement.

FATF Statement

- The FATF plenary concluded that India had reached a high level of technical compliance with its requirements.
- India's anti-money laundering (AML), countering the financing of terrorism (CFT), and counter-proliferation financing (CPF)



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regimes are achieving good results.

- The regime includes effective international cooperation, access to beneficial ownership information, use of financial intelligence, and depriving criminals of their assets.

Areas for Improvement

- The FATF observed that improvements are needed to strengthen supervision and implementation of preventive measures in some non-financial sectors.
- India needs to address delays in concluding ML and TF prosecutions.
- CFT measures aimed at preventing the non-profit sector from being abused for TF should be implemented in line with the risk-based approach, including outreach to NPOs on their TF risks.

Recognised Efforts

- The FATF has recognised India's efforts in mitigating risks arising from ML/TF, including laundering of proceeds from corruption, fraud, and organised crime.
- Effective measures implemented by India to transition from a cash-based to a digital economy to reduce ML/TF risks have been acknowledged.

Government Statement

- The government stated that this recognition is a testament to the rigorous measures implemented over the last 10 years to safeguard the financial system from ML/TF threats.

CONCLUSION: India's exceptional outcome in the FATF evaluation underscores its robust measures against money laundering and terrorism financing, marking a pivotal achievement for national financial security.

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

U.S. Supreme Court order curbs power of federal agencies

CONTEXT: India's exceptional outcome in the FATF evaluation underscores its robust measures against money laundering and terrorism financing, marking a pivotal achievement for national financial security.

Achievement Announcement:

- India achieved outstanding results in the 2023-24 FATF mutual evaluation.
- The government announced the evaluation results on Friday.

Mutual Evaluation Report:

- Adopted at the FATF plenary in Singapore from June 26 to 28.
- India placed in the "regular follow-up" category, along with four other G-20 countries.

Significance of the Achievement:

- Marks a significant milestone in India's fight against money laundering (ML) and terrorist financing (TF).
- Highlighted as a major accomplishment in a Press Information Bureau release.

FATF Statement:

- FATF concluded India reached high technical compliance.
- India's AML, CFT, and CPF regimes showing effective results.
- Includes strong international cooperation, beneficial ownership access, financial intelligence use, and asset deprivation.

Areas for Improvement:

- FATF noted the need for stronger supervision and implementation in non-financial sectors.
- India urged to address delays in ML and TF prosecutions.
- Recommended implementing risk-based CFT measures, including NPO outreach.

Recognized Efforts:

- FATF acknowledged India's efforts in mitigating ML/TF risks, including proceeds from corruption, fraud, and organized crime.
- Recognized India's effective transition to a digital economy to reduce ML/TF risks.

Government Statement:

- Government views recognition as validation of 10 years of rigorous financial system safeguarding against ML/TF threats.

CONCLUSION: India's outstanding FATF evaluation outcome signals robust measures against money laundering and terrorism financing. It underscores India's commitment and achievements in enhancing national financial security and global cooperation.

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