

Protests sweep Bangladesh

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



At least 97 people, 14 of them policemen, were killed and hundreds injured across Bangladesh on Sunday as clashes broke out in the morning between protesters attending a non-cooperation programme under the banner of the Students Against Discrimination with the one-point demand of the government's resignation over a job quota system and supporters of the

Awami League, Chhatra League, and Jubo League activists. The protests were joined by unidentified people and activists of right-wing Islami Shashontantra Andolon, which erected barricades on several major highways and within the capital city.

The fresh round of clashes erupted days after over 200 people were killed in violent clashes between the police and mostly student protesters demanding an end to the controversial quota system that reserved 30% of government jobs for relatives of veterans who fought in Bangladesh's War of Independence in 1971.

Authorities ordered a curfew in major cities and small towns across Bangladesh for an indefinite period from 6 p.m. on Sunday, mobilising troops, paramilitary border guards BGB, and the elite anti-crime Rapid Action Battalion alongside police. The Government ordered the shutdown of Meta platforms Facebook, Messenger, WhatsApp and Instagram. Mobile operators were ordered to shut down 4G mobile Internet.

According to the police headquarters, more than 300 policemen were injured across the country. Officials said that protesters attacked police stations and boxes, ruling party offices and residences of their leaders and burnt several vehicles.

Ms. Hasina called a meeting of the National Committee on Security Affairs — the highest policy-making authority of national security — at Ganabhaban. The meeting was attended by the chiefs of the Army, Navy, Air Force, police, RAB, BGB, and other top security officers. The meeting came as renewed violence spread to several parts of the country.

Kerala asks Centre to declare landslides a 'national disaster'

DISASTER MANAGEMENT

The Kerala government has requested the Centre to declare the landslide that devastated at least three villages in Wayanad a national disaster. Suresh Gopi, Union Minister of State for Tourism toured the disaster zone on Sunday.

The State government has put the official death toll at 221. It could rise as more than 200 people have been missing, and rescue workers have been retrieving bodies and dismembered body parts. At least 9,000 persons displaced by the disaster have sought refuge in government-run relief camps.

The Centre had sought a report from the Kerala government. The declaration of the landslide a natural disaster would allow the Union government to channel more resources for rehabilitation and climate change mitigation activities, including relocation of communities living in disaster-prone zones. The State government has announced plans for a township for the landslide survivors.

IRCTC plugs passenger data vulnerability on insurance site

CYBER SECURITY

The Indian Railway Catering and Tourism Corporation (IRCTC) has addressed a critical vulnerability on its insurance portal that previously allowed unauthorised access to passengers' travel details and enabled changes to nominee information in the insurance policy.

After booking tickets on the IRCTC website and opting for travel insurance, a link would be received through SMS that, upon entering the PNR and registered mobile number, opened the travel insurance policy provided by United India Insurance Co Ltd. The link included an option to update nominee details. The portal revealed passengers' travel details, and insurance policy information upon entering random PNRs and fictitious mobile numbers. The portal also allowed modification of nominee details without requiring an OTP or security question. Although the issue was found on the insurance portal managed by a third party, the data security and privacy concerns affected IRCTC as the custodian.



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Railways freight revenue growing in low single digits: Budget document

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

Freight accounts for 65 % of Indian Railways' revenue. In FY24, loading volumes stood at 1,580 million tonnes. Freight volumes are growing slower than expected, in the low single digits rather than the anticipated high single digits. Freight earnings are increasing YoY, but not at the anticipated level with stiff competition from roadways and inland waterway routes emerging as strong contenders. The mismatch between actual and expected freight earnings was visible in the previous years too.

Coal loading remains the biggest revenue source in the Railway freight segment, contributing about 50%, or ₹ 82,905 crore. Other key cargo include cement, pig iron, iron ore, food-grains, fertilizers, petroleum and other lubricants, and containers. The share of these items is expected to remain unchanged during FY25.

Historically, Indian Railways has used the profit-making freight segment to cross-subsidise passenger fares. For a, say, ₹100 ticket, it is said to charge ₹40–50 through the cross-subsidy. The introduction of premium trains such as Vande Bharat and the dynamic pricing mechanism have led to an rise in the share of passenger revenue to the overall pie, although annual passenger count is yet to the reach the pre-COVID level of 720 crore.

FREIGHT EARNINGS



FIGURE: Column chart representation of freight earnings.

At least 44 killed as Israeli air strikes hit Gaza schools, hospital compound

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



An Israeli airstrike hit two schools in Gaza City on Sunday, killing at least 25 people, while the Israeli military said it struck a Hamas military compound embedded in the schools. An Israeli air strike hit a tent camp inside a hospital in central Gaza earlier in the day. Gaza health officials said at least 44 Palestinians were killed on Sunday, the day after a round of talks in Cairo ended without

result. Footage circulated on Palestinian media showed bodies scattered inside the yard of one of two blast-wrecked schools as residents rushed to carry casualties, including children, and loaded them into ambulance vehicles that took them to at least two nearby hospitals.

‘Attack on Hamas’

The Israeli military accuse Hamas of operating from within civilian property. Hamas denies using civilian institutions for military purposes. Israel had struck 172 designated shelters, mostly schools, housing thousands of displaced families since October 7. Earlier in the day, an Israeli strike inside the al-Aqsa Hospital compound started a fire, and wounded at least 18 persons as well as killing five, medical authorities said. The hospital compound is in Deir Al-Balah, an area crowded with thousands of people displaced by fighting in other parts of the enclave. Elsewhere in Deir Al-Balah, three Palestinians were killed when an Israeli missile struck a house. Separate Israeli strikes killed eight others inside their home in Jabalia camp in northern Gaza City and three inside a car.

“Doing nothing is very hard to do. You never know when you’re finished.”—Leslie Nielsen

SC asks banks to find MSME stress before accounts turn to NPA

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

The Supreme Court held that banks or creditors require identify the incipient stress in the accounts of Micro, Small, And Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) before their accounts turn into non-performing assets. A Bench headed by Justice Bela Trivedi pronounced the recent order on a batch of appeals filed by MSMEs, represented by advocate Mathews J. Nedumpara, focusing on a notification — “Instructions for the Framework for Revival and Rehabilitation of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises” — issued on May 29, 2015 under Section 9 of the MSMED Act, revised by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in March 2016 in exercise of the powers conferred by Section 21 and 35(A) of the Banking Regulation Act.

The MSMEs had challenged a Bombay High Court decision of January 11, which dismissed their writ petitions. The High Court had held that banks and Non-Banking Financial Companies were not obliged to adopt the restructuring process as contemplated in the May 2015 notification without any specific applications for the purpose from MSMEs. The court held that the May 2015 notification has “statutory force binding to all Scheduled commercial banks, licensed to operate in India by the RBI”.

The banks i.e. secured creditors would be entitled to take the recourse to Chapter III of The Securitisation and Reconstruction of Financial Assets and Enforcement of Security Interest Act, 2002 (SARFAESI) Act for the enforcement of the security interest, once the account is classified as NPA.

The Bench directed the incumbent on the part of the MSMEs concerned to produce authenticated and verifiable documents/material for substantiating its claim of being MSME before its account is classified as NPA.



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Election overhang

ECONOMICS AND DEVELOPMENT

In June, production in India's eight core infrastructure sectors was significantly impacted by a slowdown in state spending following the recent general elections and by severe heatwaves that affected economic activity, particularly in the northern and western regions. Provisional data from the Commerce and Industry Ministry showed that five sectors experienced either sharp declines in growth or contractions compared to the previous year, leading to an overall core sector growth rate of just 4 %, the lowest in 20 months. The extreme heat, recorded as a 14-year high by the India Meteorological Department, also diminished demand for steel, hindering construction activities.

The HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) for July indicates a slight easing in manufacturing activity, with the PMI dropping to 58.1 from 58.3 in June due to slower increases in new orders and output. More concerning is the significant rise in input costs, prompting manufacturers to raise selling prices at the highest rate in nearly 11 years, driven by higher costs for coal, packaging, paper, rubber, and steel. This trend raises concerns about broader inflation at both wholesale and retail levels. As the Reserve Bank of India's Monetary Policy Committee prepares to review interest rates, there are clear signals that price pressures are extending beyond food, emphasizing the need for vigilance in managing inflation.

Amendments to UP Anti-conversion Bill

POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

The Uttar Pradesh Assembly passed amendments to the Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion Act, 2021 that aims at penalising people who convert or try to convert others by 'fraudulent means' or by marriage. The amendments adopted by the Uttar Pradesh Assembly make laws more stringent to ease of its misuse as its principal aim. The original law, enacted in 2021, led to the registration of over 400 cases by 2023.

Uttar Pradesh Prohibition of Unlawful Conversion of Religion (Amendment) Bill, 2024

- Imprisonment up to 20 years and even for life for conversion of minors, women or "certain communities" through use of force, threat or coercion;
- Stiff sentence and fine for receiving funds from foreign organisations for the purpose of unlawful conversion.
- A person accused under the Act cannot be granted bail, unless the public prosecutor has been given an opportunity to oppose it, and that there should be reason to believe that the accused is not guilty of the offence, and is unlikely to repeat it while out on bail.

- Allow any individual, not necessarily the aggrieved individual - victim or a close family member to file a complaint against supposedly forcible or fraudulent conversions.

Foreign nationals told to leave Lebanon as fears surge

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



France, Canada and Jordan were among the latest governments to call for their citizens to leave Lebanon as Iran and its allies ready their response to high-profile killings blamed on Israel. The United States and Britain have issued similar warnings.

Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah movement, which has traded near-daily fire with Israeli forces since the Gaza war broke out in October announced a barrage of rockets fired at Israel's north overnight. The Israeli military claimed to have intercepted most of 30 projectiles launched from Lebanon.



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