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## Govt. still working, says Syria PM; Israel hits suspected weapon sites

INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS



Syria's Prime Minister Mohammed Ghazi Jalali confirmed on Monday that most Cabinet Ministers are still working from Damascus, despite the militant takeover of the capital over the weekend that ousted President Bashar al-Assad. The situation has led to a stream of refugees crossing into neighboring countries in search of safety.

The militant alliance now in control, led by Abu Mohammed al-Jolani, a former al-Qaeda figure and leader of Hayat Tahrir al-Sham, faces significant challenges in consolidating power. Al-Jolani has promised a representative government and religious tolerance.

Israel, concerned about security, has carried out airstrikes on suspected chemical weapons sites and long-range missiles to prevent extremists from gaining control of these assets. Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar emphasized that the strikes aim solely to protect Israel's security. Israel has also seized a buffer zone in Syria following the withdrawal of Syrian troops.

In northern Syria, Turkish-backed forces captured the town of Manbij from Kurdish-led groups, highlighting the ongoing fragmentation of Syria's territory, even after Assad's removal.

Russia has granted Assad political asylum, though the Kremlin has not disclosed his whereabouts and President Putin has no plans to meet him.

Jalali, who remains in office, said the government is coordinating with the militants and is open to dialogue with al-Jolani, who made a public appearance at a Damascus mosque. The militants have promised not to impose Islamic dress codes on women and have emphasized personal freedoms.

Separately, a senior aide to Assad's brother, Maher, was found dead in his office near Damascus, though it is unclear whether he was killed or died by suicide.

### India calls for inclusive political process in Syria:

India emphasized the need for a peaceful and inclusive political process in Syria following the militants' takeover of Damascus. The Ministry of External Affairs stated that India is closely monitoring the situation and urged all parties to work towards preserving Syria's unity, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. This follows the sixth round of Foreign Office Consultations between India and Syria, which took place in New Delhi on November 29.



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## Misri visits Dhaka, airs concerns over safety of minorities

### INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri expressed India's concerns over the safety and security of minorities in Bangladesh during a Foreign Office Consultation with his counterpart, Mohammad Jashim Uddin, in Dhaka. Misri urged the interim government to adopt a "constructive approach" to the issue.

This visit marks the first by a senior Indian official since the August student uprising forced Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to flee, and bilateral relations have deteriorated since the interim government took charge. In response, Uddin raised concerns about a security breach at Bangladesh's Assistant High Commission in Agartala and emphasized that minority safety is an "internal matter" for Bangladesh. He reassured that the Bangladesh government is committed to safeguarding all its citizens, regardless of their religion or ethnicity.

Misri reiterated India's desire to work closely with the interim government while addressing issues related to minority welfare.

## Reservation must not be based on religion, SC tells West Bengal

### POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

The Supreme Court observed that reservation should not be based on religion while hearing an appeal from West Bengal against a Calcutta High Court ruling that struck down the state's policy of including several Muslim-majority castes in its Other Backward Classes (OBC) list. The High Court had ruled that religion was the primary criterion for classifying these communities as OBCs.

Senior advocate Kapil Sibal, representing the state, argued that the inclusion was based on backwardness, not religion. The Supreme Court, led by Justices B.R. Gavai and K.V. Viswanathan, scheduled further hearings for January 7. The court previously asked the state to clarify the survey process used to determine the backwardness of these communities and whether adequate consultations were held with the West Bengal Backward Classes Commission.

The High Court's judgment had invalidated portions of the 2012 West Bengal Backward Classes Act, affecting about five lakh OBC certificates issued since 2010. However, it clarified that the ruling would not affect individuals who had already secured employment using these certificates.

## National Food Security Act still driven by figures from 2011 Census, lawyer tells SC

### INDIAN ECONOMY



Supreme Court noted that a long-term solution to food security requires generating employment. Advocate Prashant Bhushan, representing activists in a suo motu case on migrant workers, argued that the National Food Security Act (NFSA) still relied on outdated 2011 Census data, excluding many vulnerable groups, particularly migrant workers. He claimed that a new Census would have identified 10 crore more beneficiaries.

In response, Additional Solicitor General Aishwarya Bhati defended the NFSA's coverage of 81.35 crore beneficiaries. Justice Surya Kant stressed the need for coordination between the Centre and States to address food insecurity, ensuring States don't issue ration cards without the Centre providing the necessary food.

The Centre had informed the court that 27.45 crore unorganised workers were registered on the e-Shram portal.

### NFSA:-

The National Food Security Act (NFSA) of 2013 aims to ensure food and nutritional security by providing affordable, quality food to people for a dignified life. It covers up to 75% of the rural population and 50% of the urban population through

the Targeted Public Distribution System (TPDS), reaching about two-thirds of the population. The Act mandates the government to supply subsidized food grains monthly to eligible beneficiaries identified by state governments based on household economic status.

#### e-Shram portal :-

Launched by the Ministry of Labour and Employment in 2021, the initiative aims to register and create a comprehensive National Database of Unorganized Workers . It will ensure seamless access to various social security schemes for unorganized workers registered on it.

## UGC finalises draft guidelines promoting access to 'life-long' learning and education

### POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has finalized the 'Draft Guidelines for Recognition of Prior Learning' (RPL) in Higher Education to promote lifelong learning and broaden access to education. RPL evaluates a person's existing knowledge, skills, and experience gained through formal, non-formal, or informal learning.

UGC Chairman M. Jagadesh Kumar said the guidelines aim to address challenges faced by India's large informal workforce, providing opportunities for career advancement and formal education. RPL aligns with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, allowing individuals to gain formal recognition for skills acquired outside traditional education, improving employability and facilitating access to higher education.

The guidelines are supported by the National Credit Framework (NCrF), which credits academic, vocational, and experiential learning. RPL helps bridge the gap between real-world experience and formal qualifications, contributing to economic growth and a more skilled workforce.

The guidelines emphasize governance, quality assurance, and collaboration among policymakers, institutions, employers, and assessment bodies to ensure fairness and inclusivity. They aim to help individuals access higher education through skills gained via non-formal and informal learning.

## PM launches LIC's 'Bima Sakhi Yojana'

### POLITY AND GOVERNANCE

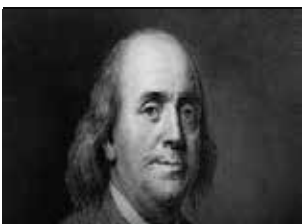


Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the 'Bima Sakhi Yojana' by LIC, aimed at appointing two lakh female insurance agents over the next three years.

The initiative, run by the state-owned Life Insurance Corporation (LIC), is designed to empower women aged 18-70 who have completed at least Class 10.

Under the scheme, the women agents will undergo specialized training and receive a stipend to promote financial literacy and insurance awareness. The stipend structure is ₹7,000 per month in the first year, ₹6,000 in the second year, and ₹5,000 in the third year. In addition, the agents will earn commissions.

The goal is to appoint two lakh 'Bima Sakhis' over the next three years.



*"If you invest more in your education, then you are likely to get more interest in it."*

*—Benjamin Franklin*

## Union govt. names Sanjay Malhotra as RBI Governor

### INDIAN ECONOMY



The Centre appointed Revenue Secretary Sanjay Malhotra as the 26th Governor of the Reserve Bank of India, just one day before Shaktikanta Das's six-year term ends on Tuesday. Malhotra will assume responsibility for the country's monetary policy framework and banking regulation at a time when inflation remains a key challenge.

#### Appointment of the RBI Governor:-

The appointment of the RBI Governor is governed by the RBI Act of 1934, which stipulates that the Chief is appointed by the Central Government.

The Financial Sector Regulatory Appointment Search Committee, comprising the Cabinet Secretary, the current RBI Governor, the Secretary of Financial Services, and two independent members, compiles a list of eligible candidates for the role. These shortlisted candidates are then interviewed before being presented to the Cabinet Committee on Appointments, led by the Prime Minister. The committee confirms the final selection of the governor.

The governor serves a term of up to five years, with the duration set by the government at the time of appointment. The central bank chief is also eligible for reappointment or an extension of their term.



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