

'Minimum support price' to remain

Says Modi, renews offer for talks with protesting farmers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Indian Prime Minister Nawwreindra Modi yesterday made a fervent appeal to protesting farmers to end their agitation against the three new farm laws, renewing an offer of talks to resolve their concerns.

"We are ready for talks and I am inviting you from this House. Minimum support price was there, is there now and will remain. No one should spread misinformation," Modi said in the Rajya Sabha, upper House of the Indian Parliament, in his reply to a debate on the President's Budget session speech.

Modi hit out at those behind the protests, saying a new "breed" of agitators has emerged in the country who cannot live without an agitation and the country should be beware of them.

Termining the new "breed" as FDI (foreign destructive ideology), he said "we need to be more aware to save the country from such ideology".

The PM also stressed that India is very proud of the contribution of Sikhs. He alleged some people are also trying to defame Sikhs.

Most of the farmers who are agitating on the borders of Delhi for more than two months are mainly from Punjab, where Sikhs are in majority, and adjacent Haryana.

Reaching out to Sikhs, Modi said "this is a community that has done so much for the nation. The country takes pride in the contribution of Sikhs, but some people are trying to defame them...The language used by some for them will not benefit the country," he said, replying to the motion of thanks on the President's address.



People join a rally to protest against the military coup and to demand the release of elected leader Aung San Suu Kyi, in Yangon, Myanmar, yesterday. Inset, police remove a sticker from a police vehicle during a protest against the military coup in Naypyitaw.

PHOTO: REUTERS

NEWS IN brief

US to re-engage with UNHRC

REUTERS, Geneva

The United States will participate as an observer in the UN Human Rights Council, which it quit in June 2018 under the Trump administration, while seeking reforms, a US envoy told the Geneva forum yesterday. Mark Cassare, US charge d'affaires at the US mission to the UN in Geneva, told a council organisational meeting: "I am pleased to inform you that this morning, Secretary (Antony) Blinken will announce that the United States will reengage with the United Nations Human Rights Council as an observer." The forum, set up in 2006, has a permanent standing agenda item on suspected violations committed by Israel in the occupied Palestinian territories, which Washington has long wanted removed.

Trump's trial set to kick off today

CNN ONLINE

The second Senate impeachment trial of former President Donald Trump is scheduled to kick off today with some of the key questions about the trial itself -- including how long it will go and whether any witnesses will be called -- still unanswered. The ultimate outcome of the trial does not appear to be in doubt: Trump will be acquitted by the Senate for the second time, falling well short of the two-thirds votes needed for conviction. But that doesn't mean the next week -- and possibly two -- will be without drama as the House impeachment managers recount the destruction caused in the deadly January 6 riot and argue that Trump was the one who incited the insurrectionists to ransack the US Capitol.

Netanyahu pleads not guilty to graft as trial resumes

AFP, Jerusalem

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denied corruption charges against him in a brief court appearance yesterday, as his graft trial resumed weeks before a fourth national election inside two years.

Netanyahu, the first Israeli premier to be indicted in office, was formally charged last year over allegations that he accepted improper gifts and sought to trade regulatory favour with media moguls in exchange for positive coverage.

He had been compelled to appear to deliver an in-person response to the charges, after last month formally submitting his innocent plea in writing.

"I confirm the written answer submitted in my name," Israel's longest-serving premier said, after Jerusalem court judge Rivka Feldman Friedman read

out the charges against him.

Netanyahu was referring to a January 18 court filing from his defence team which said "the prime minister denies all charges" in each of the three separate cases against him.

The combative 71-year-old premier, who has previously blasted the charges as "fabricated and ludicrous", spent just 20 minutes inside the courtroom yesterday, entering and exiting amid a heavy security deployment and dozens of protesters.

The hearing continued in his absence for several hours, with Netanyahu's lawyers Boaz Ben Zur and Amit Hadad accusing Israel's Attorney General Avichai Mandelblit -- a Netanyahu appointee -- of mishandling the case.

They argued that elements of the investigation into the premier were opened without required authorisations.

US won't lift sanctions

Says Biden in connection with Iran nuke deal standoff, foresees 'extreme competition' with China

AGENCIES

US President Joe Biden has made clear he will not unilaterally lift sanctions against Iran, saying it must first adhere to its nuclear deal commitments despite demands on Sunday from the Islamic Republic's supreme leader.

The exchange underscored the thorny diplomatic challenge ahead as Biden seeks to revive -- without showing weakness -- a key accord rejected by his predecessor Donald Trump.

Asked in a CBS interview aired Sunday night whether he would halt sanctions to convince Iran to return to the bargaining table, Biden offered a clear reply: "No."

The journalist then asked if the Iranians would first have to stop



enriching uranium, which drew an affirmative nod from Biden.

The landmark deal was reached in 2015 by the United States and other powers (China, Russia, Germany, France and Britain) following long negotiations with Iran aimed at preventing it from developing nuclear weapons.

The deal has been hanging by a thread since Trump's decision to withdraw from it in 2018 and

reimpose sanctions on Tehran.

In the CBS interview, Biden anticipated the US rivalry with China will take the form of "extreme competition" rather than conflict between the two world powers.

Biden said he has not spoken with Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping since he became US president.

"He's very tough. He doesn't have -- and I don't mean it as a criticism, just the reality -- he doesn't have a democratic, small D, bone in his body," Biden said.

"I've said to him all along, that we need not have a conflict. But there's going to be extreme competition," Biden said.

"I'm not going to do it the way (Donald) Trump did. We're going to focus on international rules of the road."



Pupils are welcomed by Denmark's Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen as schools reopen after lockdown due to the coronavirus disease outbreak at Allerslev Skole in Lejre on the island of Sealand, Denmark yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Survivor recounts escape from Himalayan tunnel in India

AFP, Tapovan

A whistle turned into a roar of water that trapped a dozen men in a Himalayan tunnel after a glacier burst in northern India, but Rajesh Kumar lived to tell the tale.

Eighteen people were confirmed dead yesterday and at least 200 others missing after the glacier broke off a mountainside, triggering a flash flood through a valley in the northern state of Uttarakhand.

Floodwaters swamped a nearby hydro complex where Kumar and his colleagues were working 300 metres (984 feet) inside a tunnel.

"We didn't think we were going to make it," the 28-year-old told AFP from his hospital bed.

"Suddenly there was a sound of whistling... there was shouting, people were telling us to come out. We thought it was a fire. We started running but the water gushed in. It was like a Hollywood movie."

The men clung to scaffolding rods in the tunnel for four hours, keeping their heads above water and debris, trying to reassure each other.



"We just kept telling each other -- come what may, we must not let go of the rods. Thank god our hands did not lose their grip," said Kumar.

"We climbed across the rock debris and forced our way to the mouth of the tunnel." There they found a small opening but they were not sure where it led. Eventually, they saw some light coming through and one of the men got a phone signal and called for rescue.

There were emotional scenes as Kumar and his colleagues were pulled out of a tiny hole at the surface.

STATE SECRETS LEAK



Aussie journo arrested in China

REUTERS, Sydney

An Australian journalist who has been detained for nearly six months in China where she worked for a state-television channel has been formally arrested on suspicion of illegally supplying state secrets overseas, the two countries said yesterday.


The announcement came as the family of Cheng Lei, 49, pleaded with authorities to grant the former high-profile news anchor access to her two school-age children.

"We are absolutely convinced of her innocence," a family representative said in an emailed statement to Reuters.





Welcome

H.E. Mr. Abdulla Shahid
Hon'ble Minister
Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Maldives



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Bangladesh - Maldives
Friendship**



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