

TAX PAYMENT

India's Congress gets breather until after polls

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's Income Tax department will not pursue a 35-billion rupee (\$420 million) payment from the main opposition Congress party until after the completion of general elections in June, the department told the country's top court yesterday.

The tax department's decision is seen as a breather for the Congress, which has been served multiple income tax notices over the past month and authorities have recovered 1.35 billion rupees in penalties from its bank accounts weeks before voting begins on April 19.

The party has called the action against it as politically motivated and an attempt to financially cripple it as it has hurt its election campaign expenses.



A woman reacts as she stands next to a wounded Palestinian lying on a bed at Al Shifa Hospital after Israeli forces withdrew from the hospital and the area around it following a two-week operation in Gaza City yesterday. PHOTO: REUTERS

Modi questions Congress about island ceded to Sri Lanka

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's half-century-old decision to end a territorial dispute with Sri Lanka over a tiny island has become a hot-button election issue, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi's party accusing the rival Congress of compromising fishermen's rights.

A 1976 agreement barred Indian fishermen from waters around the 285-acre (115 hectare) island in the Palk Strait that divides the neighbours, two years after a pact on maritime boundaries gave Colombo rights over it.

Yesterday, Foreign Minister Subrahmanya Jaishankar said Sri Lanka had detained more than 6,000 Indian fishermen and 1,175 fishing vessels over the last 20 years, following the 1976 deal on the island, located 33 km (21 miles) off India's coast.

His comments come a day after Modi accused the Congress of having "callously" given away the island, called Katchatheevu.

'Entire families dead'

Journalist describes scene at Al-Shifa Hospital after Israeli troops withdraw, ending their two-week siege

CNN ONLINE

A journalist working for CNN said the scene at Gaza City's Al-Shifa Hospital yesterday "feels like a horror movie" after Israeli forces withdrew, ending their two-week siege of the facility.

"Bulldozers crushed bodies of people everywhere around and in the yard of the hospital," said Khader Al Za'anoun, a staffer with Wafa, the Palestinian news agency.

Al Za'anoun said people had arrived at the complex to search for missing family members.

"Many families are looking for their loved ones and cannot find them. Some of them even know they were killed but their bodies are missing," he said. "We found entire families dead and their bodies are decomposed in houses around the hospital."

Al Za'anoun said survivors at the complex were malnourished.

"People who are alive inside the hospital are suffering from starvation as they were given one bottle of water a day to share for six people," he said. "I'm looking around me and I can't believe what I see."

In a statement confirming their withdrawal from the hospital, Israel's military said its troops had

killed terrorists while preventing harm to civilians.

"Injured and dead bodies fill the hospital grounds," Captain Mahmoud Bassal said yesterday. "There are bodies buried in the hospital yards."

More than 30 wounded people were transported from Al-Shifa to the Al-Ahli Baptist Hospital east of Gaza City, Bassal said.

“ People who are alive inside the hospital are suffering from starvation... ”

Images from the area showed widespread destruction with charred and pockmarked buildings inside the complex.

Meanwhile, tens of thousands of people demonstrated in Jerusalem on Sunday evening against Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government and against exemptions granted to ultra-Orthodox Jewish men from military service, in scenes reminiscent of mass street protests

last year.

Protest groups organised the rally outside parliament, the Knesset, calling for a new election to replace the government, reports Reuters.

Israel's N12 News said it appeared to be the largest demonstration since the offensive began. Haaretz and Ynet news sites said it drew tens of thousands of people.

Netanyahu's cabinet has faced widespread criticism over the security failure of the Hamas attack on southern Israel.

"This government is a complete and utter failure," said 74-year-old Nurit Robinson, at the rally. "They will lead us into the abyss."

Israel's offensive in the Palestinian enclave has aggravated a longstanding source of friction in society that is also unsettling Netanyahu's coalition government - exemptions granted to ultra-Orthodox Jewish seminary students from service in the country's conscript military.

With a March 31 deadline looming for the government to come up with legislation to resolve a decades-long standoff over the issue, Netanyahu filed a last-minute application to the Supreme Court last week or a 30-day delerment.

LANDMINE BLAST Nine children killed in Afghanistan

AFP, Kabul

Nine children were killed in a blast in southeastern Afghanistan that was caused by a landmine laid during the country's decades of conflict, a provincial official said yesterday.

The mine went off as a group of young boys and girls were playing with it in Geru district of Ghazni province on Sunday, said head of information and culture department, Hamidullah Nisar.

"An unexploded mine left over from the time of the Russian invasion went off when they were playing with it," Nisar told AFP.

"Unfortunately, it killed nine children."

Swathes of Afghanistan are littered with unexploded mines, grenades and mortars from decades of conflict, spanning from the Soviet invasion in 1979, the civil war that followed, and the 20-year Taliban insurgency against foreign-backed governments.

OUTSKIRTS OF DAMASCUS 8 dead in Israeli strikes near Iran embassy

AFP, Beirut

Israeli strikes hit an Iranian embassy annex building in Syria's capital yesterday, state media said, as a war monitor reported 8 people were killed in the building. Syria's official news agency SANA said "the Israeli attack targeted the Iranian consulate building in the Mazzeh neighbourhood of Damascus". There was no immediate comment from Israel, which has stepped up strikes on Iran-linked groups amid its Gaza offensive raging against Hamas since October 7. AFP correspondents at the site confirmed the building next to the embassy, an annex, had been levelled, in an upscale neighbourhood of Damascus. Iranian media also reported that the strikes in Damascus completely destroyed the annex building, and that the ambassador was unharmed. "Hossein Akbari, ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Damascus, and his family were not harmed in the Israeli attack," Iran's Nour news agency said. Two AFP correspondents at the site confirmed the building next to the embassy, had been razed to the ground by the strike. Britain-based group the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights said "Israeli missiles... destroyed the building of an annex to the Iranian embassy... in Damascus, killing eight people". Syria's official SANA news agency earlier reported that "our air defence systems confronted enemy targets in the vicinity of Damascus".

LOCAL ELECTION LOSS Erdogan vows to make amends

REUTERS, Istanbul

President Tayyip Erdogan yesterday vowed to correct any mistakes that led to his party's defeat in Turkey's local elections where the opposition capitalised on economic woes and alienated Islamist voters, casting uncertainty over his reform plans. Sunday's vote marked

Erdogan and his AK Party's (AKP) worst defeat in more than 20 years in power, revitalising the opposition party and strengthening Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu's standing as the president's main rival. Redrawing a political map long dominated by the AKP, the Republican People's Party (CHP) won the popular vote for the first

time in decades and swept most of the main cities, penetrating far into conservative central Turkey. Analysts said voters lost patience with both a cost-of-living crisis driven by near 70 percent inflation and Erdogan's divisive political style. The result bruised his hopes of adopting a new constitution, which could potentially extend his rule beyond 2028 when his term ends, they said. Though AKP and its allies have a majority in parliament, Erdogan would need broader support or a successful referendum for a new constitution. Erdogan delivered a sombre and introspective speech in the early hours yesterday.



Pro-Taiwan independence activists protest outside the Taoyuan International Airport as they hold a banner reading "Ma Ying-jeou don't be a traitor!" before Taiwan's ex-president Ma Ying-jeou leaves for a visit to China, in Taoyuan, Taiwan yesterday. PHOTO: AFP

UKRAINE WAR France wants 'clear message' from China to Russia

AFP, Beijing

France's top diplomat said yesterday that Paris wants China to send "clear messages" to its strategic ally Russia over its war in Ukraine, after meetings with his counterpart in Beijing.

France and China have sought to strengthen ties in recent years and, during meetings in Paris in February, Foreign Minister Wang Yi told President Emmanuel Macron that Beijing appreciated his country's "independent" stance.

But Paris has also sought to press Beijing on its ties with Moscow, which have only grown closer since the invasion of Ukraine.

While China says it is a neutral party in the Ukraine conflict, it has been criticised for refusing to condemn Moscow for its offensive.

Foreign Minister Stephane Sejourne said yesterday that Beijing "plays a key role in... the respect of international law, including on Ukraine's sovereignty, and therefore we are clearly expecting that China will send very clear messages to Russia".

Japan's royal family makes formal debut on Instagram

AFP, Tokyo

Japan's royal family is now on Instagram - but don't expect any candid selfies from its official account, which went live yesterday in a cautious social media debut for the ancient monarchy.

The first 19 posts are formally staged photos and videos of Emperor Naruhito and Empress Masako carrying out royal duties at recent public appearances.

Nonetheless, more than 160,000 users have followed the Imperial Household Agency (IHA) account, which was announced a

week ago but set to private until yesterday.

The Japanese monarchy has mythological origins stretching back more than two millennia, and any public criticism of the emperor remains taboo in the country.

By joining social media, the institution hopes to spark interest among younger generations. But, perhaps predictably, the posts under the Instagram handle kunaicho.jp contain no behind-the-scenes juice.

Strictly factual captions explain what the emperor did on what day.

| Microcredit Regulatory Authority (MRA) | | | | | | | | | |
|---|---|-------------|----------------|--------------|--------------------------|--------------|-----------------------|--------------|---------------|
| Gulfeshan Plaza (6th Floor), 8 Shahid Sangbadik Selina Parvin Sarak, Baro Mogbazar, Ramna, Dhaka-1217. | | | | | | | | | |
| Expressions of Interest (EOI) | | | | | | | | | |
| 1 Ministry/Division | Financial Institution Division, Ministry of Finance. | | | | | | | | |
| 2 Agency | Microcredit Regulatory Authority (MRA) | | | | | | | | |
| 3 Procuring Entity Name | Executive Vice Chairman, Microcredit Regulatory Authority | | | | | | | | |
| 4 Title of Service | Selection of Consulting Firm For MRA E-AUDIT Software (Development, Installation, Update and Maintenance) | | | | | | | | |
| 5 Procuring Entity District | Dhaka | | | | | | | | |
| 6 Expressions of Interest for Selection of | Selection of Consulting Firm | | | | | | | | |
| 7 EOI Ref. No | 53.04.0000.002.07.011.24- ৳৳৳ | | | | | | | | |
| 8 Date | 31/03/2024 | | | | | | | | |
| KEY INFORMATION | | | | | | | | | |
| 9 Procurement Sub-Method | Least Cost Selection Method (LCS) | | | | | | | | |
| FUNDING INFORMATION | | | | | | | | | |
| 10 Budget and Source of Funds | MRA Own Fund | | | | | | | | |
| PARTICULAR INFORMATION | | | | | | | | | |
| 11 EOI Closing Date and Time | 22/04/2024; Time: 12:00PM | | | | | | | | |
| INFORMATION FOR APPLICANT | | | | | | | | | |
| 12 Brief Description of Assignment | Selection of Consulting Firm ; To design developed & implementation of an integrated and collaborated dashboard and building online framework for external monitoring system for MFIs & data management system for data analysis of different financial years for MRA. Basically the system Software consists of following modules: <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Component A</td> <td>e-audit system</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Components B</td> <td>Budget management system</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Components C</td> <td>Ranking module system</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Components D</td> <td>Report Module</td> </tr> </table> | Component A | e-audit system | Components B | Budget management system | Components C | Ranking module system | Components D | Report Module |
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| Components B | Budget management system | | | | | | | | |
| Components C | Ranking module system | | | | | | | | |
| Components D | Report Module | | | | | | | | |
| 13 Company details Information for Eligible, Experience, Resources & Delivery Capacity Required details | See Full Expressions of Interest (EOI) Please visit https://mra.gov.bd/site/view/notices The procuring entity reserves the right to accept or reject all tenders | | | | | | | | |
| Md. Fashiullah Executive Vice Chairman Microcredit Regulatory Authority | | | | | | | | | |