











# Iran blames 'sabotage' for gas pipeline explosions

Two blasts hit Iran's main gas pipeline in what the government called a "terrorist act." Iranian officials did not immediately point the finger at the attackers. Iran's Oil Minister Javad Owji said two explosions along Iran's main south-north gas pipeline network were caused by sabotage. But his televised statement made no mention of possible suspects. "This terrorist act of sabotage occurred at 1 a.m. local time on Wednesday morning (2130 GMT Tuesday evening) in the network of national gas transmission pipelines in two regions of the country," Owji on Thursday. He added that only the villages near the damaged pipeline were experiencing gas outages and that those would be fixed later today. Iranian authorities denied reports that the incident caused gas cuts to industrial plants and offices. Owji pointed to a similar incident in

2011, which he called an act of sabotage, that temporarily cut gas to four different regions of the country. What do we know about explosions? According to the National Iranian Gas Company, the saboteurs attacked pipelines in the cities of Borujen in the southwestern provinces of Chahar Mahal and Bakhtiari, and Safashahr in the southern province of Fars. Company manager Saeed Aghli said there were no casualties. Authorities said

the ensuing fires were under control in both cases. No group claimed responsibility for the attacks, and Iranian officials did not immediately assign blame. In 2017, Iranian Arab separatists claimed to have bombed two oil pipelines in coordinated attacks in the western Khuzestan region. Iran has also generally blamed agents of its arch-foe Israel for similar acts of sabotage in the past. dh/dj (AFP, dpa, Reuters)

# SC strikes down Electoral Bonds scheme as violative of RTI and Article 19(1)(a)

New Delhi [India]: A five-judge bench of Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud, Justices Sanjiv Khanna, BR Gavai, JB Pardiwala and Manoj Misra delivered a unanimous verdict on Thursday, striking down the Electoral Bonds scheme as unconstitutional. The bench was ruling on a batch of pleas challenging the legal validity of the Central government's Electoral Bonds Scheme, which allows for anonymous funding to political parties. At the start of the judgement, CJI Chandrachud said there are two opinions, one by himself and another by Justice Sanjiv Khanna and both arrive at same conclusion. The bench said that the petitions raised two main issues; whether amendments are violative of right to information under Article 19(1)(a) and whether unlimited corporate funding violated free and fair elections. The CJI while reading out his judgement said that the Supreme Court holds that anonymous



electoral bonds are violative of Right to Information and Article 19(1)(a). The Supreme Court said that information about corporate contributors through Electoral Bonds must be disclosed as the donations by companies are purely for quid pro quo purposes. The court held that amendments in the Companies Act permitting unlimited political contributions by companies is arbitrary and unconstitutional. The Supreme Court said infringement to the Right to In-

formation is not justified for the purpose of curbing black money. The Apex Court ordered banks to forthwith stop issuing Electoral Bonds and that the State Bank of India (SBI) shall furnish the details of Electoral Bonds encashed by the political parties. The court said that SBI should submit the details to the Election Commission of India and ECI shall publish these details on the website. A five-judge Constitution bench headed by Chief Justice Chandrachud had on November 2 last year reserved its verdict in the matter. The scheme, which was notified by the government on January 2, 2018, was pitched as an alternative to cash donations made to political parties as part of efforts to bring in transparency in political funding. According to the provisions of the scheme, only the political parties registered under Section 29A of the Representation of the People Act, 1951 and which secured not less than 1 per cent of the votes

polled in the last elections to the Lok Sabha or a state legislative assembly are eligible to receive electoral bonds. An Electoral Bond is an instrument in the nature of a promissory note or bearer bond which can be purchased by any individual, company, firm or association of persons provided the person or body is a citizen of India or incorporated or established in India. The bonds are issued specifically for the purpose of contribution of funds to political parties. The Centre in an affidavit had said that the methodology of the Electoral Bonds scheme are "completely transparent" mode of political funding and it is impossible to get black money or unaccounted money. Various petitions had been pending before the top court challenging amendments made to different statutes through Finance Act 2017 and Finance Act 2016 on the ground that they have opened doors to unlimited, unchecked funding of political parties.

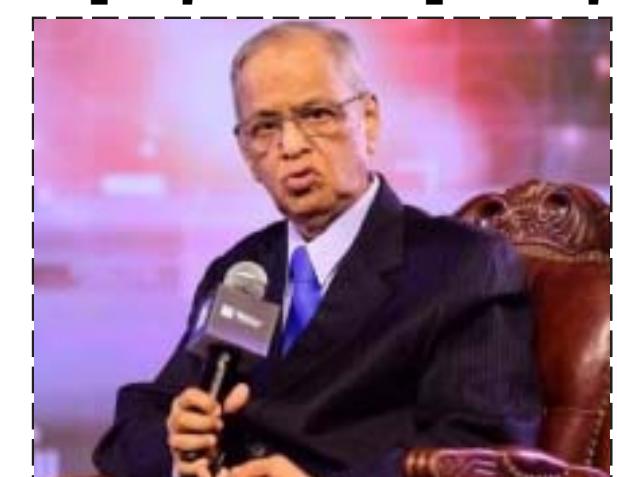
# Narayana Murthy expresses regret over not rewarding early Infosys employees adequately

**NEW DELHI ROYAL JOURNALISM:** Infosys founder Narayana Murthy has expressed regret for not rewarding many of the tech firm's early employees whose contributions he said were more than his. During a book launch event, the tech pioneer said there were several "extremely smart early adopters" of Infosys to whom he could not award the kind of stock he gave to his co-founders. "Their contribution was more or as much as mine," said Murthy, who founded Infosys along with six engineers in 1981. The veteran entrepreneur said he should have thought about it carefully. "Those extraordinary people too would have benefitted," he said. This came over a month after Murthy said he regretted his decision to keep his family out of Infosys. Murthy co-founded Infosys with Rs 10,000, which was given by his wife Sudha Murty. But when she expressed her desire to join Infosys, Murthy said

no. "I think what I was doing those days was wrong. I was wrongly idealistic. And in some way, I was influenced a lot by the environment of those days," Murthy said last month while speaking with CNBC-TV18's Shereen Bhan. Infosys was founded in Pune, but two years later in 1983, its headquarters was relocated to Bengaluru. A decade later, Infosys launched Employee Stock Options (ESOP), under which the co-founders were given company stocks. The other co-founders were Nandan Nilekani, Kris Gopalakrishnan, SD Shibulal, K Dinesh, NS Raghavan, and Ashok Arora. In November 1999, India Today Magazine reported that Murthy and the five other Infosys founder-directors held between themselves about 30 per cent of the company's shares, which were then valued at Rs 7,425 crore. The wealth was percolating down to the army of young employees through a series of

employees' stock option plans since 1994. Of the 4,782 employees, lovingly addressed as "Infoscions", 1,667 held ESOP. Of them, 1,376 had stock valued at over Rs 10 lakh each. Among them, the total number of the jeans-clad "crorepatis" was a staggering 412. And 97 of them had left the Rs 1 crore milestone far behind, having become dollar millionaires (Rs 4.3 crore-plus) by age 30-35. No other company in India, not even Infosys' software rivals Wipro Ltd and Satyam Computers, had shared its wealth with such a large number of employees. In October last year, Infosys co-founder SD Shibulal's son and daughter-in-law sold Infy shares worth Rs 436 crore. Shreyas Shibulal sold 23,70,435 shares at Rs 1,433.51 apiece, amounting to Rs 339.80 crore. He owned 2,37,04,350 shares or 0.64 per cent stake in Infosys before the stake sale. The shares he sold accounted for 0.06 per cent stake in the

company. Post the stake sale, Shreyas is left with 0.58 per cent stake, or 2,13,33,915 shares, in the company. In November 2022, Capital, which tracks the market, shared a list of the largest shareholders of Infosys among insiders. As per the list, Nandan Nilekani the list with 100,461,168 shares, followed by Salil Parekh (770,481 shares), Mohit Joshi (304,353 shares), Inderpreet Sawhney (149,673 shares), and Krishna Murthy (113,869 shares).



# Deadline for installing HSRP extended by 3 months: Minister

Bengaluru: The deadline for motorists to install high security registration plates (HSRP) has been extended by three months due to a low uptake in Karnataka, said state transport minister Ramalinga Reddy. "The deadline for the installation of high-security number plates is set to expire on February 17, 2024. However, the installation progress has not met our expectations. Therefore, we will be ex-



tending the deadline for vehicles," Reddy said in the legislative council

session on Wednesday while responding to a query by Congress MLC Madhu G. Madegowda. This is the second extension granted to owners of older vehicles to comply with the HSRP requirement. Originally slated for November 2023, the deadline was first extended to February 17, 2024. "As of now, only 1,832,787 vehicles in the state have been equipped with high security number

plates, accounting for a mere 9.16% of the total vehicles. Progress in other states has been comparatively faster," he said. During the session, Madegowda raised concerns regarding fake websites that are exploiting the online registration process for installation of HSRP. Reddy said, though the government has not received any such reports, a probe would be launched

# CID officials will lose their lives if they question Shahjahan Sheikh: Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury

Murshidabad : Amid reports that Sandeshkhali prime accused Sheikh Shahjahan is not cooperating with the West Bengal Criminal Investigation Department ( CID ), state Congress chief Adhir Ranjan Chowdhury said that officers from the CID will lose their lives if they question the Trinamool Congress strongman."The Trinamool has enslaved the CID. How can the CID question Shahjahan? Does a master answer the slave? Shahjahan is their master. If they question him they will lose their lives. Do they want to risk their jobs?" Chowdhury said speaking at a press conference in West Bengal's Murshidabad on Friday.Hitting out at the ruling Trinamool Congress government in the state, the senior Congress leader said that Shahjahan has been arrested so that he can take rest for a few days till the election."They (CID) will treat him with mutton, pulao, biriyani. Has he gone there to

answer them? He has gone there to rest. Didi (Mamata Banerjee) has asked him to take rest. When elections come, he can get back to action," Chowdhury said.Chowdhury even claimed that Shahjahan will be operating from beyond bars for some time and he will control the coercive electoral strategies from there."He can operate everything from jail now whether it is Sandeshkhali, Diamond Harbour, places from where Khoka babu (Abhishek Banerjee) will contest the election. The jail will now turn into his operating center. It will be his election command office," Chowdhury said.Advocating for rapid deployment of central armed forces in the state to keep the Trinamool Congress hooligans in check, Chowdhury said that he will be visiting the Election Commission on March 4 to keep his request."The force should come here fast. They will put the hooligans of Trinamool



in check. I am not speaking against all the workers of Trinamool but those who have turned the party into an oppressive one. We have demanded for central armed forces to assist people in this fight against them. I have gone to the Election Commission in this regard and I will go again on March 4," the senior Congress leader said.Chowdhury also warned that the ruling Trinamool Congress will try to influence the central armed forces' personnel by all means."They have no dearth of money. They will try to influence Trinamool members

who are in the forces. This is because they still have control of the police," he said.Speaking on Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visits to West Bengal in this week, Chowdhury said, "Prime Minister is coming on election tourism. His list of campaigns here will increase day by day. With changing time he will change his speech, promises...he has a number of qualities."The West Bengal Congress chief also warned of resurfacing of talks about Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) and the National Register of Citizens (NRC) before the Lok Sabha elections to flare up communal tensions in the state in order to reap political benefits."There will be rise of communal forces in Bengal again. Talks of CAA, NRC will come up again. After the Bengal Assembly polls these talks were in slumber. Now since winter has gone, these talks will again come up in the market," Chowdhury said.

## Narendra Modi's Sandeshkhali attack on Mamata, INDIA bloc: 'Country is enraged'



The whole country is angry. The soul of Raja Ram Mohan Roy must have been pained by what happened in Sandeshkhali...the party was protecting the TMC leader and the police had to arrest him yesterday after the BJP leaders exerted pressure on the government," PM Modi said.

### 'Blew the trumpet of ma mati manush'

Attacking the Trinamool over its slogan 'ma mati manush (mother, soil, people), Narendra Modi said the soul of Raja Rammohan Roy, wherever it is, must be crying seeing the situation of the women in Bengal. "A Trinamool leader crossed all limits...when the mothers and the sisters of Sandeshkhali made their protest louder, sought help from Mamata didi, what did they get in return? Didi and the government did everything to shield the Trinamool leader," PM Modi said. Turning to the back of the dais and pointing to the BJP leaders present on the stage, Modi said, "These BJP leaders put pressure on the

government and finally yesterday Bengal Police bowed in front of your strength and arrested the accused." "This TMC criminal was absconding for two months under the TMC rule. There must be someone who was sheltering him. Will you ever forgive this? Won't you take revenge for what happened to the mothers and sisters?" Modi said.

### 'Have some shame'

"The people of West Bengal are today asking Mamata didi whether the votes of some people have become so dear to her that the suffering of the women meant nothing. Have some shame," Narendra Modi said.PM Modi's dig at Mallikarjun Kharge over SandeshkhaliThe leaders of the INDIA bloc have shut their eyes, ears, and mouth like the three monkeys of Gandhi, Modi said. "They hold meetings in Patna, Bengaluru, Mumbai and where not. But the Congress and the Left have no courage to question the Trinamool government in Bengal. They did not even turn their face towards

Sandeshkhali," PM Modi said."And have you heard what Congress president said? The translator must translate and explain this to the mothers and sisters here. 'Arre chhodo, Bangal mein ye sab kuch chalta rahta hai. Isn't it an insult to Bengal, its culture and tradition?' Modi said. "This is the truth of INDIA bloc. They shield the corrupt, the dynasts and those who believe in appeasement politics. TMC has set a new model of corruption...have you seen the bundles of notes found in TMC leaders' houses? Have you ever seen that much of money even in movies?" Modi asked.'Chalte rahta hai' comment from Mallikarjun Kharge came in the context of West Bengal politics where Congress, CPM and Trinamool -- the allies in INDIA -- are rivals. At a media conclave, Kharge was asked to comment on the Sandeshkhali case to which Kharge explained the political scene between the Congress and the Trinamool in the state and denied to comment on it at a national level.

## Ministry of Defence signs 5 major capital acquisition contracts worth over Rs 30,000 cr



New Delhi : In a major boost to the 'Make-in-India' initiative as part of 'Aatmanirbharta in Defence', the Ministry of Defence (MoD) signed five major capital acquisition contracts worth Rs 39,125.39 crore on Friday in Delhi.The contracts were exchanged in the presence of Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Defence Secretary Giridhar Aramane.Out of the five contracts, one was with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited for procurement of Aero-engines for MiG-29 aircraft, second with Larsen and Toubro Limited for

procurement of Close-in Weapon System (CIWS) and procurement of High-Power Radar (HPR) and two with BrahMos Aerospace Private Limited (BAPL) for procurement of BrahMos missiles and procurement of Ship borne BrahMos system for the Indian Defence Forces.These deals will further strengthen indigenous capabilities, save foreign exchange and reduce dependency on foreign-origin equipment manufacturers in the future.The contract for RD-33 Aero Engines for MiG-29 aircraft has been signed with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) at a cost of Rs 5,249.72 crore. These aeroengines will be produced by the Koraput Division of HAL.These Aero Engines are expected to fulfil the need of the Indian Air Force (IAF) to sustain the operational capability of the MiG-29 fleet for its residual service life. The aeroengines will be manufactured under a Transfer of Technology (TOT) licence from the Russian OEM. The programme will focus on the indigenisation of several

high-value critical components, which would help increase the indigenous content of future Repair and Overhaul (ROH) tasks for RD-33 aero-engines.The contract for procurement of CIWS has been signed with Larsen and Toubro Limited at a cost of Rs 7,668.82 crore.CIWS will provide terminal air defence to select locations in the country. The project will boost and encourage the active participation of Indian aerospace, defence, and associated industries, including MSMEs. The direct and indirect employment generated by this project would be approximately 2,400 persons per year over the course of five years.The contract for procurement of HPR has also been signed with Larsen and Toubro Limited at a cost of Rs 5,700.13 crore. It will replace existing long-range radars of IAF with modern Active Aperture Phased Array based HPR with advanced surveillance features.It will significantly enhance the terrestrial Air Defence capabilities of IAF with integration of sophisticated

sensors capable of detection of small Radar Cross Section targets. It will boost to indigenous radar manufacturing technology as it would be first of its kind radar built by the private sector in India. The direct and indirect employment generated by this project would be approximately average of 1,000 people per year over the course of five years.The contract for procurement of BrahMos missiles has been signed with BrahMos Aerospace Private Limited (BAPL) at a cost of Rs 19,518.65 crore. These missiles would be utilized to meet combat outfit and training requirements of the Indian Navy. This project is likely to generate employment for nine lakh man-days in Joint Venture entity and around 135 lakh man-days in ancillary industries (including MSMEs) in the country.The contract for Procurement of Ship borne BrahMos system has also been signed with BrahMos Aerospace Private Limited (BAPL) at a cost of Rs 988.07 crore.

