

Death toll in earthquakes in Türkiye, Syria reaches nearly 8,000 as rescuers rush against time to find survivors



In Türkiye and Syria, the death toll due to massive earthquakes has soared to nearly 8,000 as rescue operations continue to find survivors. Türkiye's Vice President Fuat Oktay has said that more than 34,800 people were injured in the earthquakes. Search teams and international aid are pouring into Türkiye and Syria as rescuers work in freezing temperatures to pull out survivors and victims. The 7.8 magnitude quake that hit the region on Monday toppled thousands of buildings.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said 13 million of the country's 85 million people were affected due to the earthquake. Erdogan has already declared a state of emergency in 10 provinces.

Peru: Around 585 sea lions, 55,000 wild birds died due to H5N1 bird flu virus



In Peru, around 585 sea lions and 55,000 wild birds have died due to the H5N1 bird flu virus in recent weeks. The Sernanp natural areas protection agency said that following the discovery of dead birds in eight protected coastal areas, rangers found the bird flu that killed them and had also claimed sea lions in seven protected marine areas. It said, the dead birds included pelicans, various types of gulls, and penguins. Laboratory tests also confirmed the presence of H5N1 in the dead sea lions, prompting the authorities to announce a biological vigilance protocol.

Since late 2021, Europe has been gripped by its worst-ever outbreak of bird flu, while North and South America are also experiencing severe outbreaks.

Australian govt to roll out 5th dose of COVID-19 vaccine to all citizens aged 18 & above



The Australian government will roll out the fifth dose of COVID-19 vaccine later this month to all citizens aged 18 and above. Australian Health Minister said that the decision expands eligibility for the booster shot to include about 14 million people. The health minister said, all adults who have not had a booster or a confirmed case of Covid-19 in the past six months will be eligible for another dose from 20th of February.

Only severely immuno-compromised people had been recommended to take a fifth dose until now, the advice being to receive the booster three months after their fourth shot. Australia, which is among the most heavily vaccinated countries against the coronavirus, has so far administered two vaccine doses to 95 percent of people above 16.

Sri Lanka's PM Dinesh Gunawardena says India is the biggest friend of island nation in times of crisis



Sri Lanka's Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena has said that India is the biggest friend of the island nation in times of crisis. Addressing a function in Colombo, Mr. Gunawardena called on Indian companies to invest further in Sri Lanka. Speaking at the event, High Commissioner Gopal Baglay said that the driving force behind the spirit of engagement in the Indian government and Indian Corporates was the community-centred business practices and philosophy of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.

EESL inks MoU with Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Business Council to promote energy efficiency



Energy Efficiency Services (EESL), a joint venture of public sector undertakings under the Ministry of Power, signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle Joint Business Council (IMT-GT JBC) Malaysia at India Energy Week (IEW). The MoU aims to promote the adoption of energy efficiency and sustainable practices in the region. Under this partnership, EESL will implement Rooftop Solar, LED Street Light Project, Electric Mobility, UJALA, and Building Energy Efficiency Programme in Indonesia, Malaysia, and Thailand.

As part of this strategic partnership, EESL will provide technical advisory, project management support, contracting and implementation support to execute select energy efficiency programmes from its portfolio with proven track records of successful implementation.

PPAC signs Sol with IEA to strengthen cooperation in field of data and research in energy sector



The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas Ministry signed a Statement of Intent (Sol) with International Energy Agency (IEA) to strengthen cooperation in the field of data and research in the energy sector to enhance global energy security. According to the statement the Ministry said, the Sol will initiate cooperation in the energy sector between Petroleum Planning & Analysis Cell PPAC and IEA.

The Sol will also provide information on global oil and gas markets and technologies relevant to the oil and gas sector.

India sent four C-17 planeloads of relief material, equipment & personnel, weighing over 108 tons to earthquake hit Turkiye as humanitarian assistance



India has sent four C-17 planeloads of relief material, equipment and personnel, weighing over 108 tons to earthquake hit Turkiye as humanitarian assistance. These include self-contained search and rescue units of NDRF numbering over 100 personnel, with their equipment, vehicles and dog squads. These units have specialized equipment for detection, location, access and extrication. They are able to conduct collapsed structure search and rescue (CSSR) operations. The Personnel comprise of medical specialists in various fields. The medical equipment includes x-ray machines, ventilators, operation theater, vehicles, ambulances, and generators.

India has also sent humanitarian assistance to Syria aboard a C130J.

Yuva Sangam registration portal launched



The Yuva Sangam registration portal was launched in New Delhi. The Yuva Sangam is an initiative of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to build close ties between the youth of the North East Region and rest of India under the spirit of Ek Bharat Shreshtha Bharat. Under the initiative over 20 thousand youth will travel across the country and gain a unique opportunity of cross-cultural learning. Minister of DoNER, Culture and Tourism G. Kishan Reddy said that the Yuva Sangam program will work to connect the youth of the Northeast with the whole country.

Govt forms Commission to explore possibility of according SC status to Dalit Christians & Muslims



The Union Government has constituted a Commission to explore the possibility of according Scheduled Caste status to Dalit Christians and Muslims. This information was given by Social Justice and Empowerment Minister Dr Virendra Kumar in a written reply in the Lok Sabha. He said the Commission was constituted in October last year. He said, the Commission has already started working and has been provided all necessary secretarial assistance.

Bilkis Bano case: SC says new Bench will be formed soon



The Supreme Court of India has assured Bilkis Bano, who has challenged the premature release of 11 convicts who gang-raped her and murdered her family members during the 2002 Godhra riots, that her plea against the remission would be heard soon after the constitution of a new Bench. A Bench of Chief Justice D.Y. Chandrachud and Justices P.S. Narasimha and J.B. Pardiwala said that the new Bench would be formed at the earliest. Supreme Court judge Justice Bela M Trivedi had recused herself from hearing a batch of pleas challenging the remission of sentence.

Virginity test on woman accused sexist, unconstitutional: Delhi HC



The Delhi High Court ruled that conducting a virginity test on a woman accused is “sexist and is in violation of human right to dignity”. Justice Swarana Kanta Sharma, in a significant judgment, said, “The virginity test conducted on a woman detainee, accused under investigation, or in custody, whether judicial or police, is declared unconstitutional and in violation of Article 21 of the Constitution.” The ruling came on a 14-year-old petition filed by Sister Sephy, one of the two convicts in the Sister Abhaya murder case.

Advocate Romy Chacko, representing Sister Sephy, contended that she was forcibly subjected to undergo virginity test by the Central Bureau of Investigation on November 25, 2008, against her consent.

Sitharaman signals readiness to review 28% GST on cement



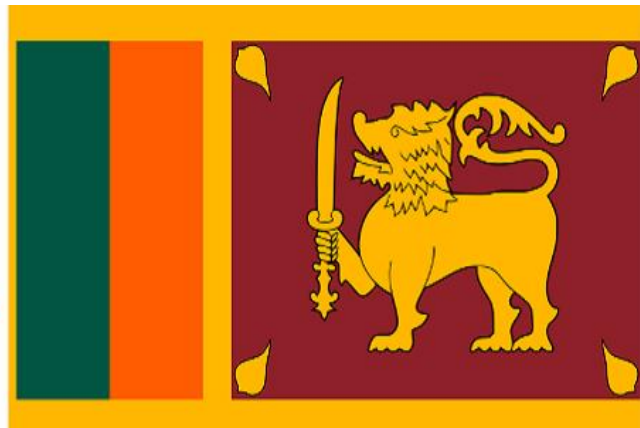
Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman has indicated that the central government could be open to considering a reduction in the goods and services tax (GST) on cement, a long-standing demand of the infrastructure sector, if the GST Council agrees. At a session with members of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) in New Delhi, the finance minister, responding to a recommendation, said she would have a fitment committee look into the existing 28 per cent GST rate on cement – a critical input in construction of everything from houses to bridges.

Centre decides to refund performance security, bid security & liquidated damages deducted from MSMEs during Covid-19 pandemic



In a major relief to Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), the Centre has issued an order to the Ministries to refund performance security, bid security and liquidated damages forfeited, deducted during the Covid-19 pandemic. The order issued by the Finance Ministry is a follow-up to the “Vivad se Vishwas-I” scheme announced in the budget speech 2023-24 by Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman. In cases of failure by MSMEs to execute contracts during the COVID period, 95 per cent of the forfeited amount relating to bid or performance security will be returned to them by Government and Government undertakings. She said, this will provide relief to MSMEs.

Paris Club members express commitment towards debt restructuring with Sri Lanka



Paris Club members have expressed their commitment towards debt restructuring with Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka's President's Media Division tweeted that the assurance is in accordance with the comparability of treatment principle and with the goal of restoring debt sustainability. China is the largest bilateral creditor and accounts for a debt of over 7 billion dollars which is over 19 percent of the total external debt of Sri Lanka. China has been under criticism for several of white elephant projects in Sri Lanka including the Hambantota port.

India had been the only major bilateral creditor to have given financing assurances to the IMF towards restructuring the debt earlier last month.

Bharti's Q3 ARPU helps net almost double to ₹1,588 cr.



Bharti Airtel reported a 91.5% year-on-year rise in third quarter consolidated net profit to ₹1,588 crore, helped by a jump in average revenue per user (ARPU) for its mobile services that lifted profit margin. Total revenue rose almost 20% to ₹35,804 crore in the December quarter (Q3FY23) backed by strong and consistent performance delivery across the portfolio. Consolidated net income (after exceptional items) almost doubled to ₹1,588 crore in the October-December quarter.

SAFF U-20: India loses 1-3 to Nepal, Bangladesh thrashes Bhutan 5-0 in Dhaka



In the South Asian Football Federation (SAFF) Under 20 Women's Championship, in Dhaka, Bangladesh thrashed Bhutan, 5-0 to set up a summit clash with Nepal. Earlier in the day, Nepal defeated India 3-1 at the same venue to reach the final. India were the defending champions, having won the 2022 edition, going into the tournament.

Siraj and Gill shortlisted for ICC POTM Award



Mohammed Siraj and Shubman Gill were nominated for the ICC Player of the Month (POTM) Award for their stellar show in January. New Zealand opener Devon Conway is the third contender for the award. Gill displayed his batting prowess in both the white-ball formats last month while Siraj led India's fast-bowling attack with distinction in ODIs in recent times.