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Mandaviya invites tips from trade unions on ELI



New Delhi: The Union Labour Ministry on Wednesday invited suggestions from the central trade unions on the formulation of the proposed Employment Linked Incentive (ELI) scheme, which was announced in recent Union Budget. Minister Mansukh Mandaviya said the scheme has been designed to encourage businesses to generate more employment. **OUR BUREAU**

GAIL to import LNG from 2026, adds one more ship

New Delhi: State-owned gas utility GAIL (India) Ltd will start importing LNG under two new contracts from 2026 and has added one more ship to transport the fuel, its Chairman Sandeep Kumar Gupta said on Wednesday. The company had in January this year signed back-to-back deals to import liquefied natural gas (LNG). **PTI**

BJP's 12-hour strike in West Bengal partially affects life in some parts

SPORADIC VIOLENCE. Protesters block train tracks, halt buses and clash with the police in several places

Our Bureau
 Kolkata

The 12-hour strike called by the Opposition BJP in West Bengal evoked a mixed response as party workers and protesters blocked train tracks, halted buses on national highways and clashed with the police at several places across the State on Wednesday.

The BJP called for the general strike in the State to protest against the "brutal repression" by the police on those who took part in the march towards the State Secretariat on Tuesday, called by *Paschim Banga Chhatra Samaj*.

The police resorted to lathi-charge and used water cannons and tear gas to disperse protesters who tried to march towards *Nabanna*, the State Secretariat, demanding justice for the RG Kar hospital rape and murder case and resignation of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee.



COME TO A HALT. BJP workers and supporters block railway tracks at Shantipur station in Nadia district, West Bengal during the party's 12-hour general strike in Bengal to protest the police action against participants of Tuesday's '*Nabanna Abhijan*' rally **PTI**

Amid rising tensions over the rape and murder of a 31-year-old woman doctor, BJP workers clashed with the police at several places across Bengal as they tried to enforce the 12-hour shutdown, which partially affected daily life in the State with many people choosing to remain indoors apprehending

trouble on the roads. A lesser number of buses, taxis and private vehicles were seen plying on the roads compared with normal weekdays. BJP workers and protesters blocked train tracks and halted buses on national highways at different places.

During the day, police detained several BJP leaders, for blocking roads and train tracks. Markets and shops mostly remained open. Also, banking services were unaffected across the State.

ensure capital punishment for those convicted of rape. "I will tell the Speaker to call an Assembly session next week. We will bring in a Bill that will ensure capital punishment for rape," Banerjee said. The Chief Minister accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the BJP of attempting to destabilise her government. "We have the right to stop any move to destabilise the State government," she said, issuing a strong warning, "Remember if Bengal is burned, then Assam, Bihar, Jharkhand, Odisha and Delhi will also be burned."

Banerjee's warning, however, received backlash from BJP leaders. Union Minister and West Bengal BJP President Sukanta Majumdar wrote to Home Minister Amit Shah against Banerjee for "advocating violence" in the State. Majumdar urged the Union Home Minister to take cognisance of the matter and initiate "appropriate actions."

'Gas demand to grow by 5 bcm in 2024 driven by industry, transport'

Rishi Ranjan Kala
 New Delhi

The demand for natural gas in India is expected to grow by more than 7 per cent year-on-year (y-o-y) in the current calendar year on the back of rising consumption from the sectors of industry and transport, the International Gas Union (IGU) said. IGU, in the 2024 edition of the global gas report, said India will continue to be the second largest growth market for natural gas after China, albeit at a slightly slower pace.

Gas consumption by the world's fourth largest liquefied natural gas (LNG) importer is expected to grow 7.1 per cent y-o-y, or around 5 billion cubic meters (bcm), in 2024. The world's fastest emerging economy's consumption rose by 12.7 per cent y-o-y, or around 7 bcm, in 2023. "In India, industrial and transport demand will largely continue to drive growth in gas demand, balancing a slower pace of residential and commercial natural gas demand growth," it added.

Industry and trade sources said that demand for gas from the industry has been robust and is expected to continue in the short to medium term fuelled by the green energy transition. Besides, the growth in vehicles running on compressed natural gas (CNG) is also pushing up consumption.

In India, gas demand growth was driven by industry, growing by 16.3 per cent, or 6 bcm y-o-y in 2023. The fertiliser sector was particularly one of key gas consumers in India, as increasing domestic urea production led to a one-fifth reduction in imports of the material, boosting demand for natural gas as a feedstock, the IGU report pointed out.

Quoting Indian government data, the report said that CNG vehicles, including three-wheelers and cars, grew 53 per cent y-o-y to 1,80,000 in India from 2022 to 2023.

Centre sanctions ₹12,000 crore for Polavaram project: AP CM

Our Bureau
 Hyderabad

Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu has announced that the Union Cabinet sanctioned ₹12,127 crore for taking up phase-1 works of the Polavaram project. The phase-1 will be completed by March 2027, he said.



Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu

Addressing a press conference at Amaravati on Wednesday, he said the Centre has agreed to give ₹6,000 crore for 2024-25 and the remaining amount in 2025-26.

Stating that the project faced several challenges over the last four decades, he said the decisions taken by former Chief Ministers YS Rajasekhara Reddy and his son YS Jagan Mohan Reddy caused a huge damage. "It would have been completed by 2021. But the Jagan government's decision to stall the works and call for reverse tendering stalled the progress. We lost precious time and money in the process," Chandrababu Naidu said.

"Barring Kerala, the four southern States confront severe water scarcity. Fortunately, we (Andhra Pradesh) have Godavari and Krishna rivers. We have abundant water in Godavari which we can tap to meet our drinking water and irrigation needs," he said.

'Maharashtra, M.P. and Rajasthan are most polluted States in India'

Richa Mishra
 Hyderabad

Pollution's impact on life expectancy is higher than the other large health threats is a known fact, but it becomes more relevant when cleverly substantiated by arguments.

The Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago's annual Air Quality Life Index (AQLI) report reveals that South Asia remains the world's most polluted region, accounting for 45 per cent of the total life years lost globally due to high pollution, despite having cleaner air compared to previous years.



TOXIC AIR. The report said Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan are among the most polluted countries in the world

People living in the most polluted places are breathing air that is six times more polluted than the air breathed by those living in the least polluted areas and this contributes to lifetimes that are shorter by 2.7 years, it shows.

The report points out that Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan — where 23.2 per cent of the global population lives — are among the most polluted countries in the world.

"In each of these four countries, the impact of particulate pollution on life expectancy is substantially higher than that of other large health threats. Tobacco use, for instance, reduces life expectancy in these countries by as much as 2 years; unsafe water and sanitation by as much as 1 year; and alcohol use by half a year. The average resident of Bangladesh, India, Nepal and Pakistan is exposed to particulate pollution levels that are 22.3 per cent higher than at the turn of the century," it revealed.

not the 3.5 years that they stand to lose in 2022, the report has revealed. India faces the highest health burden of air pollution on account of the large population that is exposed to it.

Developed by the University of Chicago's Milton Friedman Distinguished Service Professor in Economics Michael Greenstone and his team at the Energy Policy Institute at the University of Chicago, the AQLI is rooted in recent research that quantifies the causal relationship between long-term human exposure to air pollution and life expectancy.

Karnataka's Semicon Accelerator Lab 'has incubated 43 start-ups'

Sanjana B
 Bengaluru

The Semiconductor Fabless Accelerator Lab (SFAL), a Centre of Excellence (CoE) for fabless semiconductors, which is an initiative towards developing the fabless semiconductor and electronic systems ecosystem in India, has benefited over 90 companies and incubated 43 companies in the last five years, said Karnataka IT/BI Minister Priyank Kharge.

Addressing the media at the Vikasa Soudha on Wednesday, Kharge said, "Karnataka is going to be the leader in semiconductors, both in skill and innovation, and more importantly, products. Generally, we have been known as a services nation. The Karnataka government intends for India to become a product nation, because ultimately, we are one of the biggest consumers of anything globally," adding that India is serious about becoming a product nation, the only State that can propel this movement is Karnataka. "We are making Karnataka future-ready by concentrating on two things necessary for semiconductors - skill and incubation for innovation," he said. In the past 5 years, Kharge said the State has spent around ₹21.56 crore cumulatively on the CoE.

Walking with comrade: Will Kulgam be a cakewalk for Tarigami?

Gulzar Bhat
 Kulgam

Zulm ki baat ko, jahl ki raat ko

Main nahi maanta, mai nahi jaanta

(This talk of tyranny, the night of ignorance)

I refuse to accept, I refuse to acknowledge

This couplet from poet Habib Jalib's celebrated poem *Dastur* was inscribed on the campaign vehicle of senior CPI(M) leader Mohammad Yousuf Tarigami, who filed his nomination papers from the Kulgam Assembly constituency on Tuesday.

streets of the town during a rally. The rally culminated at a local playground where hundreds of his supporters were eagerly waiting for him.

As Tarigami's modest cavalcade of three vehicles followed by a stream of motorbikes and cars ferrying his supporters showed up near the playground, the slogans like *Zulm ab aur nahi and Inqilab Zindabad* filled the air for quite some time. Soon he held the microphone and began addressing his supporters.

"I have no doors to knock on, but that of yours," said Tarigami while his supporters were in all ears. Tarigami has represented the area for four terms in a row and is now seeking a fifth term from the constituency.

which has traditionally been the hotbed of religio-political outfit, the Jamaat-e-Islamia. In 1972, when the Jamaat, for the first time, decided to participate in electoral politics, it won five seats including the Kulgam Assembly constituency, which sent the headline leader Abdul Razak Mir to the Assembly. The organisation again contested in 1977, which is considered as the first free and fair elections in Jammu and Kashmir. In this election, the Jamaat won only two seats. During these elections, the organisation had allied with the BJP's predecessor, the Bharatiya Jan Sangh.

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JAMAAT HOTBED

It is curious that a communist should represent Kulgam

elections, the Jamaat stayed away from the electoral process. However, its cadre, if reports are to be believed, lent support to the other parties in opposition to the CPI(M) candidate.

The alliance could win only four seats, including one from Kulgam, reflecting the strong base of the organisation in these parts.

Apart from Mir, many prominent Jamaat leaders, including former *Amirs* (chiefs) of the radical organisation hailed from the district. The influence of Jamaat in several pockets of neighboring Shopian and Anantnag districts is also notable.

However, in the 1996 Assembly polls, which were held after more than six years following the eruption of militancy in Jammu and Kashmir, the seat was won by Tarigami and he continued to retain it in the subsequent elections of 2002, 2008 and 2014. Even in 2002, the CPI (M) won another seat from Shopian's Zainapora constituency. During all these