

Defence Ministry signs contract worth Rs 8073 cr with HAL for acquisition of 34 advanced light helicopters

New Delhi [India].: Following the approval of the Cabinet Committee on Security (CCS), the Ministry of Defence signed two contracts for a combined value of Rs 8073.17 crore with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), Bengaluru, on Wednesday, an official statement said. The contracts were signed for the acquisition of 34 Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH) Dhruv Mk III along with Operational Role Equipment for the

Indian Army (25 ALHs) and Indian Coast Guard (09 ALHs) under the Buy (Indian-IDDM--Indigenously Designed, Developed and Manufactured) category, marking a significant move towards indigenisation in defence manufacturing. According to the Ministry of Defence, the ALH Dhruv Mk III UT (Utility), the Indian Army version, is designed for Search & Rescue, Troop Transportation, Internal Cargo, Recce/and casu-

alty evacuation, etc. It has proven its performance in high-altitude regions like Siachen Glacier and Ladakh. The ALH Mk III MR (Maritime Role), the ICG version, is designed for maritime surveillance and interdiction, search and rescue, rappelling operations, cargo and personnel transportation, pollution response using external cargo-carrying capability and medical casualty evacuation. It has proved its mettle even in adverse

atmospheric conditions over sea and land. As per the statement, the project will generate an estimated 190 lakh man-hours of employment during its duration. It will also entail a supply of equipment from more than 200 MSMEs and 70 local vendors will be involved in the indigenization process, which is likely to have a positive impact on employment generation in this sector, thus furthering the vision of 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat'.

Tata Motors to set up Rs 9,000 crore vehicle manufacturing hub in Tamil Nadu

NEW DELHI **ROYAL JOURNALISM**: Tamil Nadu Chief Minister MK Stalin and officials of Tata Motors on Wednesday inked a pact to build the company's first vehicle manufacturing facility in the state with an investment of Rs 9,000 crore. According to the state's Industries Minister TRB Rajaa, the manufacturing plant would generate 5,000 new jobs. Tata Motors CFO PB Balaji and V Vishnu, MD&CEO, Guidance Tamil Nadu, exchanged documents in the presence of Chief Minister M K Stalin. Informing about the pact, MK Stalin wrote on X, "In a landmark move, Tata Motors has inked an MoU

with the Government of Tamil Nadu to establish a vehicle manufacturing facility, investing Rs. 9000 crores and creating over 5000 jobs." "With this investment, Tamil Nadu further solidifies its position as the unrivaled automobile capital of India, reminiscent of the transformative impact of Hyundai's investment during Kalaingar's tenure," he added. Later, speaking about the development, Rajaa told India Today TV, "This is a huge reinforcer for Tamil Nadu as a state itself. It shows our growth trajectory and how there is so much more we can offer. You are going to see more investments coming into

Tamil Nadu and better jobs being created." "The talent availability tailored to the requirements of the industries is a huge plus. In Tamil Nadu, the availability of land is not an issue. The talent pool is not an issue. Ease of doing business is not an issue. The government is always open and accessible. The talent at the administration level is huge too. We tailor the incentives according to the industry. They don't see such stuff anywhere else," he added on being asked about the reason for growing investment by auto giants in the state. Notably, earlier in January this year, Vietnam-based electric vehicle



(EV) manufacturer VinFast decided to invest in Tamil Nadu to establish its manufacturing facility in Thoothukudi. This would be the company's first manufacturing facility in India.

Political past can't be basis to deny judgeship: SC collegium on Kerala HC judge appointment

NEW DELHI **ROYAL JOURNALISM**: A candidate cannot be denied judgeship because of her or his political past alone, the Supreme Court collegium has emphasised, rejecting the Centre's objection to the appointment of a Communist Party of India (Marxist) "sympathiser" as a judge in the Kerala high court. "The mere fact that the candidate has had a political background may not be a sufficient reason..." the collegium, led by Chief Justice of India Dhananjaya Y Chandrachud, stated in its resolution on Tuesday. The collegium, also comprising justices Sanjiv Khanna and BR Gavai, was considering the candidature of Manoj Pulamby Madhavan, a lawyer belonging to a Scheduled Caste who was found suitable by the Supreme Court and high court judges to be elevated as a judge in the Kerala high court, but the central government raised a red flag. The inputs provided by the Department of Justice in Madhavan's file "Manoj Pulamby Madhavan is considered to be a CPI(M) sympathiser. He was appointed as government pleader in 2010 and 2016-2021 by the LDF government." Disapproving, the col-



legium called the Centre's objection based on Madhavan's alleged political affiliation as "extremely vague". Its resolution added: "The input that the candidate is considered to be a CPI(M) sympathiser is otherwise vague and bereft of cogent grounds. Even otherwise, the mere fact that the candidate has had a political background may not be a sufficient reason in all cases." Interestingly, the collegium's resolution made hints about L Victoria Gowri, a former leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party, being appointed as a Madras high court judge in February 2023 without the government objecting at the time. Gowri spent about a year as

a member of the BJP, having joined in August 2019. Her Twitter handle then was 'Chowkidar Victoria Gowri', with her bio identifying her as the national general secretary of the BJP Mahila Morcha. "For example, in the recent past, an advocate has been appointed as a judge of the high court though she was an office-bearer of a political party prior to her elevation," said the collegium. About the second part of the government's objection, the collegium said the fact that Madhavan was appointed as a government pleader in 2010 and 2016-2021 by the LDF government does not constitute valid ground to reject his candidature. "As a matter of fact, the appointment of the candidate as a government pleader would indicate that he would have acquired sufficient experience in handling cases where the state is a party in diverse branches of law," it underscored. It further noted that Madhavan belongs to a SC community and has sufficient practice at the Bar. "His performance having been observed by the members of the collegium of the high court who had the occasion to observe his competence and conduct as a lawyer,

their opinion should be given due weightage. The collegium is, therefore, of the view that the candidate is fit and suitable for appointment as a judge of the high court. Apart from him, the collegium also recommended five other lawyers for appointment as judges in the Kerala high court - Abdul Hakim Mullaappally Abdul Aziz, Syam Kumar Vadakke Mudavakkat, Harisankar Vijayan Menon, Manu Sreedharan Nair and Easwaran Subramani. The joint resolution issued for the six candidates also highlighted that it is for the judiciary to assess the professional competence of the lawyers, given that the Centre commented about the abilities of some of them." As regards comments made in the file on professional competence of some of the candidates, the collegium has always taken a stand that it is for the judiciary to assess the same... The opinion of the collegium of the high court on the competence and suitability of the candidate would have to be given due credence since the members of the collegium of the high court have seen and observed his performance," it maintained.

BJP Asserts Dominance Over Nitish Kumar's JDU, Takes Lead in Bihar Seat-Sharing

NEW DELHI **ROYAL JOURNALISM**: The recent development in Bihar politics marks a significant shift in power dynamics within the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), with the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) asserting its dominance over its long-standing ally, the Janata Dal United (JDU), led by Chief Minister Nitish Kumar. Traditionally playing a supporting role to Nitish Kumar's leadership in Bihar, the BJP has now secured the lead position within the alliance by clinching 17 out of the state's 40 seats. This move marks a departure from the previous 50:50 seat-sharing formula between the BJP and the JDU, indicating a recalibration of power dynam-

ics within the NDA. The resolution of the impasse with Chirag Paswan's faction of the Lok Janshakti Party (LJP) further solidifies the BJP's position in the state. Despite initial tensions and claims of overtures from opposition blocs, the BJP managed to secure a deal with Chirag Paswan, who agreed to contest on five seats without allocating any to his uncle, Pashupati Paras. This strategic maneuvering by the BJP underscores its determination to assert itself as the primary force within the NDA, particularly in the context of Nitish Kumar's recent flirtation with the opposition Grand Alliance. The BJP's ability to secure a greater share of seats signals its resurgence



from the isolation imposed by Nitish Kumar's brief defection to the Grand

Alliance. Chirag Paswan's LJP Seals Lok Sabha Seat-Sharing Accord With BJP In Bihar. The BJP's insistence on contesting one additional seat compared to the JDU highlights its ambition to establish itself as the preeminent player within the Bihar coalition. This development reflects a departure from the equal footing previously enjoyed by the BJP and the JDU in the alliance. Overall, the BJP's ascendancy in Bihar's political landscape signifies a strategic shift within the NDA, with the party emerging as the dominant force and setting the agenda for the upcoming elections in the state.

US 'Should Not Interfere In Our Internal Affair,' Kyrgyz President Warns Blinken

In response to the US Secretary of State Antony Blinken's concerns about the treatment of US-funded foreign NGOs in Kyrgyzstan, the president of the Central Asian country hit back saying that Washington must not interfere in our internal affair. The spokesperson of the Kyrgyz president, Sadyr Japarov, released the full text of the diplomatic missive that their government sent to US. Blinken had previously expressed concerns about the legislation approved in the Kyrgyzstan parliament that would tighten control of the foreign funded western NGOs, banning them from participating in countries domestic political affairs. The law, passed in January 2024, would designate the NGOs that get

foreign funding as "foreign agents," unless in records of the state-run registrar. More than 30 MPs, and one third of the deputies backed the bill that aims at regulating the NGOs that receive foreign funding from abroad. The Kyrgyz government also approved amendments to the law that stiffened the financial reporting of the NGOs. Kyrgyzstan's president, Sadyr Japarov said at a state public meeting, that the state and civil society "should cooperate and work together to develop the country as partners." He iterated, "As for those NGOs that undermine statehood and political security, legal measures will be taken against them." He accused the independent nongovernmental organizations of meddling in the

politics. The bill would allow authorities to register organizations as "foreign representatives" that critics said resembles the Russian legislation on "foreign agents" passed in 2012. US based aid groups slammed the 'repressive' and 'dangerous' bill that targeted foreign-funded civil society organisations, saying that the NGO law would seriously jeopardise their humanitarian work. The Kyrgyz president said that some of the NGOs that receive money from foreign governments such as US, have been attacking the bill over a "fear of true tax control by the state." US Department of State deceived them by malign American grants, he said. "Over the past three decades, a 'layer' of non-governmental/non-profit or-

ganizations that receive funding from abroad has appeared in our country (in Kyrgyz society they are called 'grant eaters'), whose leaders have turned them, in fact, into 'family enterprises', engaged in 'sawing off' the money coming from foreign sponsors," the letter sent to Blinken by the Kyrgyz President read. He asked Blinken to audit of NGOs' finances over the past 10 years to establish how the American money was spent. He compared the bill to US' Foreign Agent Registration Act of 1938. "In this regard, the question cannot help but arise: Why is it possible for you, but not for us?" he asked. The latter told Blinken that among the thousands of NGOs working in Kyrgyzstan, just a handful were 'troublemakers.'

Amazon Buy Now button tricks users into paying more money, new report claims

NEW DELHI (ROYAL JOURNALISM): Amazon, one of the largest online marketplaces, is facing a lawsuit accusing it of misleading customers with its "Buy Now" button. This button, known as the Buy Box, appears on product pages and prompts users to make a purchase. However, the lawsuit alleges that Amazon manipulates this feature to push customers towards buying items that may actually cost more than similar products available elsewhere on the platform. The Buy Box typically displays items sold by Amazon itself or by sellers who use Amazon's Fulfillment By Amazon (FBA) service, according to a report published by Ars Technica. These sellers pay Amazon higher fees and receive special ben-

efits, such as being featured in the Buy Box. As a result, many customers assume that the items showcased in the Buy Box offer the best deals and fastest delivery options. However, according to the lawsuit, this isn't always the case. The lawsuit claims that Amazon's algorithm, which controls the Buy Box, prioritizes items that will earn the company higher fees, rather than displaying the best deals for customers. This means that customers may end up paying more than they need to for items available at lower prices from other sellers on Amazon. Authorities in the United States and the European Union have investigated Amazon's practices regarding the Buy Box and found evidence that Amazon has been favor-



ing FBA sellers since at least 2016. In response to these findings, Amazon has faced significant fines and orders to address the bias in its Buy Box algorithm. Despite Amazon's attempts to address the issue, concerns persist. European regulators continue to push Amazon to take further ac-

tion to ensure fairness and transparency in its marketplace. For customers, this means that they should be cautious when using the Buy Now button on Amazon. While it may seem convenient, it's important to compare prices and consider other sellers before making a purchase. By being aware of these potential pitfalls, customers can make more informed decisions and avoid overpaying for items on the platform. As the lawsuit progresses and regulatory pressure mounts, Amazon will need to take steps to address these allegations and regain the trust of its customers. In the meantime, shoppers should stay vigilant and look for the best deals available, rather than simply relying on the Buy Now button.

Why Bharat Ratna for P.V. Narasimha Rao is BJP's jibe at Congress, outreach to South India

NEW DELHI (ROYAL JOURNALISM): As the country's first and only full-term prime minister from South India, Pamulaparthi Venkata Narasimha Rao, for whom the Narendra Modi government has announced the Bharat Ratna, occupies a special place. A man of many parts-scholar, statesman and skillful manipulator, who was admirably likened by some to Chanakya-the low-profile polyglot was among the few Congress prime ministers from outside the Nehru-Gandhi family. He also had the dubious distinction of being the first to face criminal charges and accusations in and out of the top office. Rao, though, was cleared in all the three cases he faced trial before his death in 2004 at the age of 83. A staunch Congressman throughout his life, 'PV', as he was popularly known, had been an active freedom fighter, who forayed into politics after Independence and rose to occupy the prime ministerial office from 1991 to 1996. Impressively he managed to do it after everyone had assumed that the highs in his political career graph were long over. Making a dramatic comeback in 1991 as a consensus candidate for prime ministership after Rajiv Gandhi's assassination, Rao steered India out of economic peril. As an astute political manager, despite his government being just short of majority in Parliament, he also managed the political contradictions to push socialism back and usher in radical economic reforms. Yet, in all his humility, Rao never claimed sole credit; rather he chose to describe it as a team effort, notably with his finance minister Manmohan Singh, whom he had



given the right backing to take harsh economic decisions. Rao, as prime minister, reset India's foreign policy to improve ties with the United States, establish relations with Israel and maintain national independence by refusing to give up the country's right to pursue its own nuclear strategy. Exiting office in 1996, he left behind a polity more at ease with itself, having put India on a confident path by laying the foundations of economic liberalisation and resurgence. "His (P.V. Narasimha Rao) visionary leadership was instrumental in making India economically advanced, laying a solid foundation for the country's prosperity and growth," said Prime Minister Modi on February 9 while announcing the coveted Bharat Ratna for PV posthumously. Besides him, four others-Karpoori Thakur, L.K. Advani, Charan Singh and M.S. Swaminathan-have been conferred the highest civilian honour this year. The full list of 53 Bharat Ratna recipients till date includes many past prime ministers. The Bharat Ratna for PV has come two decades after his passing. The Congress, while in power at the Centre

between 2004 and 2014, did not consider conferring it on him. Such was the opposition, especially that of the Nehru-Gandhi family, that after PV's passing, his mortal remains were not taken for homage-paying to the Congress headquarters in New Delhi, but emplaned for Hyderabad for the final rites on the foreshore of the Hussain Sagar Lake. However, the tactful erstwhile Andhra Pradesh chief minister Y.S. Rajasekhara Reddy arranged for a public viewing and homage-paying at the Durbar Hall in the Public Gardens, adjacent to the state legislature, before the state funeral at the site-now a memorial named as P.V. Gyan Bhoomi on P.V. Narasimha Rao Marg facing the lake. Though PV spent his last 30 years in Delhi, he did not forget his roots in a farmer's family at Vangara in Karimnagar district of present-day Telangana. Nor did he forget those who went with him to school and college and participated in the Indian freedom movement. Sensing how PV is revered as a Telugu son of the soil, the Modi government's acknowledgement of his contribution just weeks before a Lok Sabha election resonates with political and social messaging. It is expected to strengthen the BJP's electoral outreach in South India, especially Andhra Pradesh and Telangana, as well as boost its efforts to present itself as a party that represents pan-Indian interests and aspirations and recognises leading achievers countrywide. It is also the BJP's jibe at the Congress, a party that is accused by critics of undermining non-Nehru-Gandhi family leaders. PV's admirers have long argued that he was not given his due

by the Congress due to his not-so-warm equation with the Nehru-Gandhi family-a point often made by BJP leaders too. Others, however, point out that PV never had charisma or a mass following and few trusted friends. His disastrous performance as Andhra Pradesh chief minister in 1971-72 and handling of the fallout of the Ram Janmabhoomi movement and the eventual demolition of the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in December 1992 are blots on a chequered career. At the same time, PV, with a striking degree of self-reflection about his actions, has in many tricky situations allowed time to play the healer. His is a journey remembered amid fading memories even by traders on Hyderabad's P.V. Narasimha Rao Marg, at one end of which is an imposing statue of the stalwart. Leaders from all Telangana parties have rejoiced over the Bharat Rata for PV. The Bharat Rashtra Samithi (BRS) is claiming that its relentless efforts to get the coveted honour for PV have finally paid off. Under BRS rule, Telangana had organised the birth centenary celebrations of the late Congress leader in 2021. It installed his statue, developed the P.V. Gyan Bhoomi and renamed what was Necklace Road as P.V. Narasimha Rao Marg. In September 2022, the then BRS government, led by K. Chandra shekar Rao (KCR), adopted a resolution in the legislative assembly urging the Union government to confer the Bharat Ratna on PV. Now, the party hopes to leverage it during the parliamentary polls, with KCR calling it an honour for Telangana. But amid fading memories of PV's stellar contribution, this could be easier said than done.

