

Seven coal gasification project to come up with Rs 64K cr investment: G Kishan Reddy

NEW DELHI, MAR 23

Coal and Mines Minister G Kishan Reddy on Monday informed the Rajya Sabha that seven coal gasification projects will come up with an investment of Rs 64,000 crore in Maharashtra, Odisha and West Bengal and said this will help in reducing imports of energy products. Replying to supplementary queries during Question Hour, the minister highlighted that the Modi-government during the last 12 years has brought several reforms in the coal sector. Reddy said the coal blocks are being allotted through a transparent auction process, without any complaints and allegations. "There is no shortage of power in the country," he said, adding that 73-74 per cent of electricity is being generated through coal-based thermal plants. The minister said 80 per cent of coal production is being supplied to the power sector and the remaining to other sectors. Reddy highlighted that India is the second largest producer and consumer of coal. He said the country has the fifth largest coal reserve, which could last at least 70 years, and hence the gov-



ernment has increased exploration activities. Reddy said the government has also started coal gasification activities. "Seven projects are about to start. The ground breaking ceremony of four projects have been initiated. Rs 64,000 crore is the total investment," the minister said, adding that the Centre is giving incentives to these projects. Out of the seven projects, four are in Maharashtra, two in Odisha and one in West Bengal. He said coal gasification converts coal into syngas, which can be further used to produce methanol, ammonia, urea, hydrogen, synthetic natural gas (SNG), petrochemicals and liquid fuels. "Through gasifica-

tion, we can reduce import dependence," Reddy said, adding that it will save foreign currency exchange and boost employment. In a written reply, the minister said that out of the 131 coal blocks allocated under the Commercial Coal Mining Policy, 21 coal blocks have obtained mine opening permission and 12 coal blocks have commenced production as on February 28, 2026. Coal and Mines Minister G Kishan Reddy on Monday informed the Rajya Sabha that seven coal gasification projects will come up with an investment of Rs 64,000 crore in Maharashtra, Odisha and West Bengal and said this will help in reducing imports of energy

products. Replying to supplementary queries during Question Hour, the minister highlighted that the Modi-government during the last 12 years has brought several reforms in the coal sector. Reddy said the coal blocks are being allotted through a transparent auction process, without any complaints and allegations. "There is no shortage of power in the country," he said, adding that 73-74 per cent of electricity is being generated through coal-based thermal plants. The minister said 80 per cent of coal production is being supplied to the power sector and the remaining to other sectors. Reddy highlighted that India is the second largest producer and consumer of coal. He said the country has the fifth largest coal reserve, which could last at least 70 years, and hence the government has increased exploration activities. Reddy said the government has also started coal gasification activities. "Seven projects are about to start. The ground breaking ceremony of four projects have been initiated. Rs 64,000 crore is the total investment," the minister said, adding that the Centre is giving incentives

Woman dies during surgery in UP's Ballia; 5 doctors booked for murder

BALLIA (UP), MAR 23

A 24-year-old woman died allegedly during a surgical procedure at a private hospital in Uttar Pradesh's Ballia, triggering protests by her family members who claimed negligence and demanded strict action against the doctors, police said on Monday. The incident occurred on Sunday at a private facility in the Kotwali area of Ballia city. The deceased, identified as Anisha Rai of Devkali village under the Sukhpura police station limits, was undergoing a surgery for kidney stones when she allegedly died due to excessive bleeding, the police said. Following the incident, angry relatives created a ruckus at the hospital and staged a sit-in protest outside the hospital's premises, demanding that the hospital be sealed and an FIR be lodged against those responsible. Senior administrative and police officials, including Additional District Magistrate Anil Kumar and Additional Superintendent of Police Kripa Shankar, reached the spot and pacified the protesters late Sunday night after assuring them of legal action against the accused.

PM did not say anything new, discussion on West Asia should happen in Parl: Priyanka

NEW DELHI, MAR 23

Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not say anything new in his statement on the West Asia situation in the Lok Sabha, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra asserted on Monday and demanded a Parliament discussion so all sides can put forward their views in the matter. The prime minister said in his statement that the security of Indians has been the government's biggest priority in times of conflict, and the Centre is sensitive, vigilant and also ready to extend every assistance. He also termed the situation "worrying" with an adverse impact on the global economy and the livelihoods of people. Asked about the prime minister's remarks, Priyanka Gandhi told reporters in Parliament House complex, "He informed the country about the situation, did not say anything new." "The notice we have given for discussion should happen so that we can also reply and all sides can put forward their views. It would be good that a discussion happens in Parliament," the Congress general secretary said. In his remarks, Modi said India imports 60 per cent of its LPG needs. Due to uncertain supply, the government is prioritising domestic supply. LPG production in the country is also being increased," he said. The prime minister also said the conflict has created unexpected challenges, including economic, humanitarian and those related to national security. The prime minister said in his statement that the security of Indians has been the government's biggest priority in times of conflict, and the Centre is sensitive, vigilant and also ready to extend every assistance. He also termed the situation "worrying" with an adverse impact on the global economy and the livelihoods of



people. Asked about the beginning of the war, yet the government is ensuring that gas and fuel supplies remain the least affected. "We all know that India imports 60 per cent of its LPG needs. Due to uncertain supply, the government is prioritising domestic supply. LPG production in the country is also being increased," he said. The prime minister also said the conflict has created unexpected challenges, including economic, humanitarian and those related to national security. The prime minister said in his statement that the security of Indians has been the government's biggest priority in times of conflict, and the Centre is sensitive, vigilant and also ready to extend every assistance. He also termed the situation "worrying" with an adverse impact on the global economy and the livelihoods of

Opposition attacks Owaisi-Humayun Kabir poll tie-up; says it may split votes in W Bengal

NEW DELHI, MAR 23

Opposition leaders on Monday criticised the alliance between the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen (AIMIM) and suspended Trinamool Congress (TMC) MLA Humayun Kabir, saying such moves could divide votes and weaken "secular parties" ahead of the West Bengal Assembly elections. AIMIM's Asaduddin Owaisi has tied up with Humayun Kabir's Aam Janata Unnayan Party (AJUP) for the high-stakes West Bengal Assembly polls. Polling for the 294-member Assembly is scheduled on April 23 and 29, with counting of votes on May 4.

TMC MP Saugata Roy called it a "bad development" and said it may "isolate Muslim masses".

"Owaisi's outfit is actually helping the BJP. But it will not have any impact. They do not have strength and will not get votes," Roy told reporters in the Parliament House complex.

Congress MP Manickam Tagore alleged that "some people have taken a contract to weaken the secular forces". Another Congress



MP Ujjwal Raman Singh said forming alliances is a political choice but stressed that the focus should remain on defeating communal forces.

"Whether someone forms an alliance with someone else is their own matter. But defeating communal forces is our goal, and for this the Congress party will continue to work consistently," he said. Shiv Sena (UBT) MP Priyanka

Chaturvedi alleged that AIMIM often ends up helping the BJP.

"Whenever the BJP is in crisis, it calls the AIMIM, which is on its speed dial. The party invites them to come and participate and help it win," she claimed.

Jharkhand Mukti Morcha MP Mahua Maji labelled the AIMIM as the BJP's "B-team", alleging that it participates in elections only to benefit the saffron party by divid-

ing the opposition's vote share.

"This has been happening everywhere. You have seen that wherever they (AIMIM) have fielded their candidates, it has ended up benefiting the BJP. That is why, in many states, people from their own community choose not to support them and instead vote for the party that is more likely to win and defeat the BJP," she told reporters in the Parliament House complex. "In Bengal, people chose Mamata Banerjee and even people from the Muslim community supported her because she could win and defeat the BJP. But by doing this, AIMIM ends up cutting votes, which in turn benefits the BJP significantly. Because of this, we see AIMIM as the BJP's 'B team'." "This has been happening everywhere. You have seen that wherever they (AIMIM) have fielded their candidates, it has ended up benefiting the BJP. That is why, in many states, people from their own community choose not to support them and instead vote for the party that is more likely to win and defeat the BJP," she told reporters in the Parliament House com-

Ayush Ministry introduces 5 min smart yoga routine for air travellers

NEW DELHI, MAR 23

At 35,000 feet above the ground, time seems to slow down, and so does the body. Hours spent in a confined seat can leave even the most seasoned traveller feeling stiff, fatigued, and mentally drained. Addressing this travel challenge, a simple yet powerful solution is taking flight: Yoga for Air Travel - a thoughtfully designed 5-minute in-flight wellness protocol. Launched during the Yoga Mahotsav 2026 recently by Union Health Minister Prataprao

Jadhav, this innovative initiative brings the timeless knowledge of yoga into the cabin, transforming your seat into a space for rejuvenation. Developed by the Morarji Desai National Institute of Yoga, the protocol is tailored for today's frequent flyers - offering a quick, safe, and effective way to stay refreshed mid-air. Highlighting the vision behind the initiative, Jadhav said, "Yoga is a powerful tool for preventive health and well-being. This in-flight yoga protocol reflects our com-

mitment to making yoga accessible in every setting - even at 35,000 feet - so that individuals can stay active, relaxed, and balanced during travel." Air travel, particularly long-haul journeys, often leads to prolonged immobility. This can result in muscle stiffness, poor circulation, fatigue, jet lag, and, in some cases, more serious concerns such as deep vein thrombosis (DVT), officials said. Coupled with travel-related stress and cabin pressure changes, the need for a simple wellness intervention becomes evident.

Two more Indian-flagged LPG tankers set to cross Strait of Hormuz

NEW DELHI, MAR 23

Two more Indian-flagged LPG tankers have started their journey from the Persian Gulf and are expected to cross the war-hit Strait of Hormuz before heading to Indian ports, ship tracking data showed. LPG tankers Pine Gas and Jag Vasant, sailing close to each other, on Monday afternoon, were near the waters between Iran's Larak and Qeshm islands - possibly to make their identity clear to Iranian authorities before they cross the Strait. The two ships were among the 22 Indian flagged vessels that were stranded in the Persian Gulf after the war in the Middle East nearly closed the Strait of Hormuz - the narrow waterway between Iran and Oman that connects the oil and gas-producing Gulf countries to the rest of the world. Ship tracking data showed the two ships could cross the strait sometime on Monday before heading to Indian ports. Previously, MT Shivalik and MT Nanda Devi, carrying about 92,712 tonnes of LPG or

roughly a day's cooking gas consumption of the country, had safely reached the Indian shore. Originally, there were 28 Indian-flagged vessels in the Strait of Hormuz when the war in West Asia broke out following US-Israel attacks on Iran. Of these, 24 were on the West side of the Strait and four on the East side. In the last few days, two vessels from each side have managed to sail to safety. LPG carrier Shivalik reached Mundra in Gujarat on March 16, while another LPG tanker, Nanda Devi, reached Kandla port in Gujarat the next day. Two LPG carriers had started their journey on March 13 and crossed the Strait of Hormuz early on March 14. Indian-flagged oil tanker Jag Laadki, with 80,886 tonnes of crude oil from the UAE, reached Mundra on March 18. Another tanker, Jag Prakash, carrying gasoline from Oman to Africa, had previously safely crossed the strait and is en route to Tanzania. Of the 24 remaining Indian-flagged vessels in the war

zone, 22 are on the West side of the Strait with 611 seafarers onboard, while two are on the East side. Six of the 22 remaining Indian-flagged vessels on the West side were LPG carriers - two of these have set sail for India. Of the remaining, one is a liquefied natural gas (LNG) tanker, four are crude oil tankers, one is transporting chemical products, three are container ships, and two are bulk carriers. Additionally, one vessel is a dredger, another is empty, and three are in dry dock undergoing routine maintenance. Overall, close to 500 tanker vessels remain confined within the Persian (Arabian) Gulf. These include 108 crude oil tankers, 166 oil product tankers, 104 chemical/product tankers, 52 chemical tankers and 53 other tanker types. Analysts say Iran may be allowing select vessels to transit the strait after verification. A few vessels have transited outbound through the Strait with a short diversion via the Larak-Qeshm Channel.

15 Maoists active in Kandhamal-Kalahandi-Rayagada region: Odisha CM

BHUBANESWAR, MAR 23

Around 15 Maoists are active in the areas along the borders of Kandhamal, Kalahandi and Rayagada districts in Odisha, Chief Minister Mohan Charan Majhi informed the state assembly on Monday. As per the Security Related Expenditure (SRE) scheme of the central government, at present, only Kandhamal district is considered Left-wing Extremism (LWE) affected in the state, he said, while replying to a question from Congress MLA Taraprasad Bahinipati.

Eight other districts - Boudh, Bolangir, Kalahandi, Koraput, Malkangiri, Nabarangpur, Nuapada and Rayagada - are considered legacy and thrust (L&T) districts, he said.

"But in reality, barring 15 Maoists in the Kandhamal-Kalahandi-Rayagada border areas, there is no Maoist presence in any other part of the state," Majhi, who is also in charge of the home department, said. During the period from



2024 to March 15 of this year, a total of 96 Maoists have surrendered in the state, he said.

To bring them back to the mainstream of society, the government is providing financial assistance, housing, monthly stipends, along with vocational training for a maximum of 36 months, besides marriage assistance, and health and ration cards under the surrender and rehabilitation policy, he said. "Our goal is to make

Odisha completely Maoist-free by March 31, 2026," he added. To bring them back to the mainstream of society, the government is providing financial assistance, housing, monthly stipends, along with vocational training for a maximum of 36 months, besides marriage assistance, and health and ration cards under the surrender and rehabilitation policy, he said. "Our goal is to make Odisha completely Maoist-free

BJP, Cong, AAP candidates file nomination for Ponda assembly bypoll in Goa

PANAJI, MAR 23

Candidates from the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party as well as the Opposition Congress and the Aam Aadmi Party filed their nominations on Monday for the upcoming Ponda assembly by-election in Goa. The BJP has fielded Ritesh Naik, the Congress has given a ticket to Dr Ketan Bhatikar, while the AAP has nominated Gitesh Naik for the April 9 bypoll to the Ponda assembly seat in South Goa district.

The bypoll was necessitated due to the death of sitting BJP MLA and then Agriculture Minister Ravi Naik. The BJP has fielded his son from the seat. Chief Minister Dr Pramod Sawant and some members of his cabinet, including Digambar Kamat, accompanied BJP candidate Ritesh Naik as he filed his nomination papers in Ponda. Speaking to reporters, Sawant said the BJP is confident of winning the Ponda byelection as people have seen the way the state is being developed by the party-led government. The people of Ponda supported the BJP in 2022 by voting for Ravi Naik, and the same will be repeated this year, he said. Leader of Opposition Yuri Alemao and Congress MLAs Altone D'Costa and Carlos Ferreira