

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

'Cowardly and compromised': Cong slams Govt after US 'gave India permission' remark

NEW DELHI, MAR 7: The Congress on Saturday doubled down on its attack on the Modi government over US officials' remarks on India's Russian oil purchase and accused it of being "cowardly and compromised".

The opposition party's jibe came after the US said it has given "permission" to India to buy Russian oil that is on ships already floating on waterways with a view to easing supplies around the world amid the West Asia conflict.

Congress general secretary in-charge communications Jairam Ramesh said US Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent has given the Modi government its certificate for faithfully following President Trump's orders.

"Does anything more need to be said about how cowardly and compromised the self-proclaimed 56-inch chest has become?" Ramesh said on X, posting a video clip of Bessent, in which the US treasury secretary says that the US has let India buy Russian oil "to ease the temporary gap of oil around the world".

Dismissing opposition charges, a senior government functionary on Friday said India has never been dependent on permission from any nation to buy Russian oil and though the US sanctions' waiver allowing refiners to purchase it removes friction, it does not define the country's policy.

Russian oil continued to flow into India even after the US objected to it and imposed sanctions, the functionary said, citing a 2013 adjustment done by the then Congress government in oil imports under US sanctions.

After the US announced that it is issuing a temporary 30-day waiver to allow Indian refiners to purchase



Russian oil, the BJP on Friday had termed the development a success of the strategic oil diplomacy under Prime Minister Modi, and said it's a "big egg on the face of anti-India Rahul Gandhi and the Congress".

In an interview to Fox Business on Friday, Bessent said, "The world is very well supplied in oil. Yesterday, the Treasury (Department) agreed to let our allies in India start buying Russian oil that was already on the water."

"The Indians had been very good actors. We had asked them to stop buying sanctioned Russian oil this fall. They did. They were going to substitute it with US oil. But to ease the temporary gap of oil around the world, we have given them permission to accept Russian oil. We may unsanction other Russian oil," he said.

Bessent added that there are hundreds of millions of sanctioned barrels of crude on the water, and in essence, by unsanctioning them, the Treasury can create supply.

"And we are looking at that. We are going to keep a cadence of announcing measures to bring relief to the market during this conflict," he said.

Several other Trump administration officials have also been saying that the US

storage that's around Southern Asia, it's China just backed up, China does not treat their suppliers well, so there's a bunch of floating barrels just sitting there.

"We've reached out to our friends in India and said, 'Buy that oil. Bring it into your refineries'. That pulls stored oil immediately into Indian refineries and releases the pressure on other refineries around the world to buy oil that they're no longer competing with the Indians for in that marketplace," Wright said.

On Thursday, amid the escalating conflict with Iran, the US had said it was issuing a temporary 30-day waiver to allow Indian refiners to purchase Russian oil.

"President Trump's energy agenda has resulted in oil and gas production reaching the highest levels ever recorded. To enable oil to keep flowing into the global market, the Treasury Department is issuing a temporary 30-day waiver to allow Indian refiners to purchase Russian oil," Bessent had said.

Trump had imposed the 25 per cent punitive tariffs on India for buying Russian oil, with the administration asserting that Delhi's purchases were helping fuel Russia's war machine against Ukraine.

Last month, the US and India announced that they had reached a framework for an Interim Agreement on trade, and Trump had issued an Executive Order removing the 25 per cent punitive tariffs on India, noting the commitment by New Delhi to stop directly or indirectly importing energy from Moscow and purchasing American energy products. (PTI)

"We have implemented short term measures to help keep oil prices down. We are allowing our friends in India to take oil that is already on ships, refine it, and move those barrels into the market quickly. A practical way to get supply flowing and ease pressure," Wright said.

In an interview to ABC News Live, Wright said that long-term oil supplies are abundant and there are no worries regarding that, but in the short term, there is a need to get oil on the market.

"But as oil gets bid up a little bit because of those constraints coming out of the Strait of Hormuz, we're taking a short-term action to say all this floating Russian oil

coming elections.

Given by its numerical strength in the 288-member assembly, the MVA is in the position to win only one Raja Sabha seat, which has been allocated to NCP (SP) president Sharad Pawar.

All seven candidates are set to be elected unopposed to the Raja Sabha.

The biennial elections to the Raja Sabha from Maharashtra are being held for seven seats. With numbers heavily stacked in favour of the ruling BJP-led Mahayuti. The last day for withdrawal of nominations is March 13.

On Saturday, Sena (UBT) MLA Aaditya Thackeray obliquely expressed disappointment over the party not getting to field its candidate for the RS polls, despite numerical supremacy.

"Going by the number of MLAs, we had the maximum strength in the House, but the seat was given to the party (NCP-SP) with the lowest number of MLAs," he said. (PTI)

try through the civil services. Whether I secure an IAS cadre or another service, my commitment to public service remains firm," Dahariya said, crediting his success to the unwavering support of his family and mentors during his illness.

Mahasamund Collector Vinay Kumar Langleh and District Education Officer Vijay Kumar Lahare congratulated Dahariya, hailing his achievement, which serves as an example for courage and perseverance. (PTI)

Mamata calls incoming Bengal Gov R N Ravi 'BJP cadre', alleges Bose was forced out

KOLKATA, MAR 7: West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday alleged that incoming Governor R N Ravi is a "BJP cadre" and claimed that the sudden exit of C V Ananda Bose from Lok Bhavan was the result of pressure from the Centre.

Addressing supporters at her ongoing dharna against deletions in voter rolls, Banerjee accused the BJP-led central government of attempting to convert Lok Bhavan into a political outpost in the run-up to the assembly elections in the state.

"Have you seen how C V Ananda Bose was removed? I know everything. He was threatened. They want to distribute money from Lok Bhavan. They want Lok Bhavan to be converted into a BJP party office. But everybody may not agree to such whims and fancies of Delhi," she alleged.

Without citing specific instances, the Trinamool Congress supremo also took a swipe at Ravi's tenure in Tamil Nadu, claiming that the governor had faced "many comments" from the Supreme Court.

"The person who is coming to West Bengal now, I heard that he had to face many comments from the Supreme Court. He is a cadre of the BJP. But remember, West Bengal is a different place. You may have done whatever you wanted in Tamil Nadu, but here you can't do that," Banerjee said.

Escalating her attack on the BJP-led Centre, the chief minister accused it of undermining constitutional institutions and not allowing governors to complete their tenures.

"The Centre is not letting anyone finish their term. You did the same thing with Jagdeep Dhankhar," she

said, referring to the former West Bengal governor who later became vice president.

Banerjee said those ruling at the Centre were behaving "worse than Muhammad bin Tughlaq", invoking a phrase often used in the Indian political discourse to describe arbitrary or whimsical governance decisions.

"If you try to threaten us, we will ensure the fall of the BJP government at the Centre," she said.

Banerjee's remarks come amid a fresh political storm triggered by Bose's sudden resignation earlier this week, just days before the Election Commission is expected to announce the schedule for the West Bengal assembly polls. In a dramatic development on Thursday evening, Bose stepped down from his post in New Delhi, setting off intense political speculation in the state.

Soon after the resignation,

Banerjee said Union Home Minister Amit Shah had informed her that Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi would take over as the governor of West Bengal.

Ravi, however, is yet to assume charge.

The developments have added fuel to the already tense political climate in the state, where the Trinamool Congress and the BJP are locked in a fierce battle ahead of the assembly elections, with the Lok Bhavan often emerging as a flashpoint during Banerjee's confrontations with the Centre.

Banerjee's latest remarks also signal a renewed attempt by the ruling TMC to frame the upcoming polls as a fight to "protect West Bengal's autonomy" from what it calls interference by the BJP-led central government, a narrative the party has repeatedly deployed in past electoral contests. (Agencies)

'They can't hear AAP's achievements', CM Mann slams Cong MLAs for stormy start to Budget session

CHANDIGARH, MAR 7: Punjab Chief Minister Bhagwant Mann on Saturday slammed Congress MLAs for staging a walkout from the Punjab Assembly during the governor's address on Friday, claiming they did so because they couldn't hear the achievements of the AAP government.

"The Congress MLAs don't have any issue to raise. What else could they do? People do not like them," Mann said while speaking to reporters after seeing off a batch of school principals for a training programme in Singapore.

"When they (Congress MLAs) are sitting in the House, they cannot hear the government's achievements,

such as how many schools and hospitals have been built, etc. That is why they walked out of the House," Mann alleged.

The Budget session of the Punjab Assembly got off to a stormy start on Friday after Congress MLAs raised slogans against the AAP government and staged a walkout when Governor Gulab Chand Kataria was addressing the House.

Despite Kataria requesting the opposition MLAs to raise their issues at the right time, the Congress legislators continued sloganeering against the government and later walked out of the House.

Asked about the Rs 1,000 monthly allowance for women, a key pre-poll promise of the AAP that is yet

to be fulfilled, Mann said he cannot reveal anything on it before the presentation of the state Budget.

"The Budget will be presented on International Women's Day (March 8), so you can make your guess," Mann told reporters.

According to sources, Finance Minister Harpal Singh Cheema is likely to announce the Rs 1,000 monthly allowance for women when he presents the state Budget on Sunday, nearly four years after the AAP came to power in Punjab.

On people from the state stuck in the Middle East amid the raging conflict between Iran and the US-Israel combine, Mann said the state government has shared details of 385 people, mostly

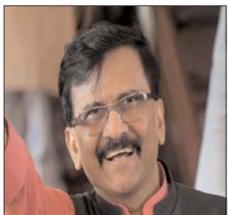
tourists, with the ministries of external affairs and civil aviation.

Some flights are landing from Oman and Dubai, and passengers are coming in batches, the chief minister said.

On the opposition criticising the government for painting state-owned PRTC buses blue and yellow — a colour combination associated with the AAP — Mann said the buses are private and they come under the Punjab Kilometre Scheme.

The scheme is a public-private partnership that aims to allow private operators to manage bus services, including providing buses, drivers and maintenance, while the state provides routes and fuel. (PTI)

All senior Opposition leaders believe Uddhav's re-election to legislative council is important: Raut



MUMBAI, MAR 7: Forced to announce its support to Sharad Pawar for the lone winnable Raja Sabha seat owing to coalition politics, the Shiv Sena (UBT) has now virtually staked its claim for the "sure-shot" seat the MVA can win in the legislative council polls for Uddhav Thackeray.

Thackeray is a strong opposition voice in the legislature, and it is important that he is re-elected, said Sena (UBT) MP Sanjay Raut, citing the wishes of all senior leaders of opposition parties for his reelection.

Asserting that the Maha Vikas Aghadi (MVA) can win one seat in the legislative council polls, Raut called for

an unopposed contest.

With 20 MLAs, the Shiv Sena (UBT) is the largest constituent in the Maha Vikas Aghadi, followed by Congress (16 MLAs) and Sharad Pawar's NCP (SP), which has 10 members in the assembly.

"Uddhav Thackeray is a strong voice in the legislature and council. We all wish, and all senior opposition party leaders desire, that it is important that Uddhav Thackeray go to the legislature again," Raut told reporters.

He, however, emphasised that all decisions will be taken by MVA constituents unitedly at an appropriate time when the elections to the upper house of the state legislature are announced.

MVA MLAs will not take any wrong decision, Raut added. Elections to nine MLC seats are expected to be held in April, necessitated by the retirement of Thackeray, four legislators of the BJP and one each from Eknath Shinde-led Shiv Sena, NCP, Congress, and NCP (SP).

"If one looks at the quota (of votes by MLAs who elect MLCs), we can win two seats in the council if planned properly. One seat can surely be won. The government must first agree that there should be an Opposition voice in the council," he said.

In the legislative council, the opposition can only win one seat due to its depleted numerical strength if there is a contest.

When asked whether the council polls will be held unopposed, Raut said the government is arrogant and is addicted to horse-trading.

The government is sitting on huge amounts of money earned through corruption and hawala, he alleged.

The fresh push by the Sena (UBT) for its candidate ahead of the legislative council polls can potentially ruffle the feathers of the NCP (SP) and Congress.

The Uddhav Thackeray-led party is already upset over not being able to send its nominee to the Raja Sabha in the up-

After six-year cancer battle, Chhattisgarh man cracks UPSC exam in third attempt

MAHASAMUND, Feb 7: Overcoming a six-year battle with cancer and resigning from three jobs, Sanjay Dahariya from Chhattisgarh's Mahasamund district has secured the 946th rank in the UPSC Civil Services Examination 2025 in his third attempt.

The 38-year-old son of a farmer from Beltukri has brought immense pride and joy to his family and the people of his village.

Dahariya's academic journey began at a local govern-

ment school, but it took a significant turn when he was selected for Jawahar Navodaya Vidyalaya, Mana (Raipur), in Class 5.

The path to the civil services was fraught with professional and personal hurdles for Dahariya.

After a stint with the State Bank of India in West Bengal from 2009 to 2011, he resigned to focus on higher goals.

However, in 2012, he was diagnosed with cancer in the salivary glands, leading to a

gruelling treatment that lasted six years.

Undeterred, Dahariya, who also suffers from a minor vision impairment, continued his pursuit of civil services and kept his career on track with another stint at a bank in Raipur and at the Mahasamund Post Office.

He began appearing for the UPSC Civil Services Examination in 2022, dedicating himself entirely towards his goal, striking gold in the third attempt in 2025.

"I hope to serve the coun-

Comm min assures of restoration of full RoDTEP benefits to exporters from Apr 1: FIEO

NEW DELHI, MAR 7: The commerce ministry has assured that full benefits under the export support scheme RoDTEP will be restored from April 1 this year, providing major relief to exporters facing challenges due to the West Asian crisis, FIEO said on Saturday.

Barring agri and processed food products, the government on February 23 halved the rate of duty benefits under the Remission of Duties and Taxes on Exported Products (RoDTEP) Scheme.

"Good news for exporters. The current 50 per cent RoDTEP rates are applicable only up to 31st March 2026. The full restoration of RoDTEP rates will take effect from 1st April 2026, which should provide much-needed support to the exporting community," Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) President SC Ralhan said.

The assurance was given by the Directorate General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) in a meeting with FIEO.

The exporting community had expressed disappointment over the cut in the rates and had urged the commerce ministry to reconsider the decision.

The budget allocation under the scheme for 2025-26 was Rs 18,232 crore. It was proposed to increase to Rs 21,709 crore in 2026-27. But



The RoDTEP scheme, launched in 2021, provides for a refund of taxes, duties and levies that are incurred by exporters in the process of manufacturing and distribution of goods, and are not being reimbursed under any other mechanism at the Centre, state or local level.

Refunds under the scheme range from 0.3 per cent to 3.9 per cent.

The budget allocation under the scheme for 2025-26 was Rs 18,232 crore. It was proposed to increase to Rs 21,709 crore in 2026-27. But

the budget allocated was Rs 10,000 crore.

According to sources, a note to the expenditure finance committee (EFC) has been sent by the commerce ministry to the Department of Expenditure for enhanced allocations.

The exporting community was earlier grappling with the high US tariffs and is now facing challenges from the West Asian crisis triggered by the joint attack of the US and Israel on Iran last month.

The conflict has pushed up

sea and air freight rates, while insurance premiums are also rising. If the situation persists, it could affect the price competitiveness of Indian goods in global markets.

In price-sensitive sectors, even a 1-2 per cent increase in costs can decide whether orders are won or lost.

The country's exports rose marginally by 0.61 per cent to USD 36.56 billion in January, while the trade deficit widened to a three-month high of USD 34.68 billion. (PTI)

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