

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

Over 550 Indian peacekeepers in South Sudan awarded UN Medal of Honour

UNITED NATIONS, JUNE 2: Over 550 Indian peacekeepers, including 53 women, serving with the UN Mission in South Sudan (UNMISS) were honoured for their dedication and commitment to protecting civilians and supporting peacebuilding efforts in the conflict-affected country.

A total of 565 Indian Blue Helmets and 464 Rwandan peacekeepers received the UN Medal of Honour at a ceremony in South Sudan's Malakal city, UNMISS said on Monday.

There were 53 women among the 565 Indian Blue Helmets, it said.

Blue Helmets refers to military personnel, police officers, and civilian experts serving under the operational command of the United Nations peacekeeping forces. The peacekeepers were recognised for their efforts in "protecting civilians through patrols, community engagement, veterinary camps, women's self-defence training, combating gender violence, and improving humanitarian access", the UN body said.

UN Mission in South Sudan Force Commander Major-General Junhui Wu said every medal awarded celebrates the "courage and resilience of our brave peacekeepers, who demonstrate the highest standards of discipline, operational effectiveness, and teamwork in a challenging environment".



Reacting to the honour, the Permanent Mission of India to the United Nations congratulated the Indian contingent. "Indian Blue Helmets have consistently upheld the highest standards of professionalism in all their spheres of operation," the mission said in a social media post.

India is the second largest contributor of uniformed personnel to UN peacekeeping operations, after Nepal.

It currently contributes more than 4,200 military and police personnel, including 155 women, across missions in Abyei, the Central African Republic, Cyprus, Congo, Lebanon, the Middle East, Somalia, South Sudan and Western Sahara. Nearly 180 Indian

peacekeepers have lost their lives in the line of duty, the highest number among troop-contributing countries.

Last week, on the occasion of the International Day of UN Peacekeepers, Lance Havildar Harbhajan Singh, who served with the United Nations Organisation Stabilisation Mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (MONUSCO), and Naib Subedar Sujit Kumar Pradhan, who served with UNMISS, were posthumously awarded the Dag Hammarskjöld Medal for their sacrifice in the line of duty. The Dag Hammarskjöld Medal is the highest official honour awarded by the United Nations. It is given posthumously to mil-

itary, police, and civilian personnel who have made the ultimate sacrifice while serving in UN peacekeeping operations.

In another recognition for India, Major Abhilasha Barak was named the recipient of the 2025 Military Gender Advocate of the Year Award.

Serving with the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), Barak was honoured for her outreach work with women and girls during her deployment in the West Asian nation.

Barak is serving with the Indian Battalion as Commander of the Female Engagement Team in UNIFIL and is also the first woman combat helicopter pilot in the Indian Army. (PTI)

Any temporary understanding between US and Iran must be followed by deeper talks: Kallas

ISLAMABAD, JUN 2: Any temporary understanding between the US and Iran must be followed by deeper talks about Tehran's nuclear stockpile and other critical issues, a top European Union official said on Monday while offering the 27-member bloc's contribution to a sustainable and peaceful resolution in West Asia.

Kaja Kallas, European Union High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, also said that Pakistan has been the main mediator between the US and Iran, and Islamabad's diplomatic efforts have helped prevent a return to full-blown war.

Speaking at a joint press briefing after her talks with Deputy Prime Minister/Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar here, Kallas said her visit came at an important moment amid global and regional changes, noting that both sides had reaffirmed their commitment to strengthening cooperation.

She said both sides also discussed global developments, including the West Asia situation.

The US and Israel launched coordinated attacks on Iran on Feb 28, killing Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Syed Ali Khamenei and several top commanders. Iran tightened its grip on the crucial Strait of Hormuz and made use of it to build pressure on the US to end the war against it.

Kallas said that there is a



"tenuous diplomatic opening to extend" the fragile ceasefire between Tehran and Washington, and to reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

"Yet any temporary understanding between the US and Iran must be followed by deeper talks about Iran's nuclear stockpile and other critical issues," she said.

She said that the EU was ready to contribute to a sustainable and peaceful resolution. "We bring economic leverage, hard-won nuclear expertise, longstanding relationships with Gulf partners, and direct engagement with Iran itself," she added.

She also talked about the Pakistan and Afghanistan tension, warning that recent fighting had "grave humanitarian consequences" and could fuel instability and radicalisation. She urged both

sides to exercise restraint and seek de-escalation.

Kallas said that Pakistan is a major regional power and an important partner for the EU, and added that the strategic dialogue had underlined a shared resolve to deepen ties further.

She said that the EU and Pakistan had seen strong momentum in trade relations, stressing that the EU remains Pakistan's largest export destination, "larger than China and the US combined." She also said that Pakistan was a leading beneficiary of the EU's GSP+ scheme, but added that continued access depends on progress in implementing several international conventions.

Pakistan was accorded the status in 2014, which has now been extended until

2027. The country enjoys duty-free or minimal duty on exports to the European market.

Kallas also said that both sides were expanding cooperation in "climate resilience, digital infrastructure, clean energy, migration and mobility".

On his part, Dar called for more structured engagement between Pakistan and the EU while acknowledging bilateral communication channels during the Pakistan-India tensions last year and the ongoing US-Iran situation.

He said both sides were reviewing progress under the Pakistan-EU Strategic Engagement Plan 2019, covering "trade, investment and development, human rights and rule of law, migration and mobility, and security and counter-terrorism".

Dar also referred to what he described as "unprovoked Indian aggression" last year and raised the Kashmir issue. Referring to security concerns, he highlighted militant activity from Afghan territory, saying such attacks remain a "top concern" for Pakistan.

Earlier at the delegation-level meeting, the two sides sought to deepen ties.

Kallas said the EU and Pakistan should work towards strengthening ties in the coming year. "The momentum of 2026 is to develop EU-Pakistan relations into a more forward-looking footing," she said.

EU strikes migration deal for more deportations, detention centres abroad

BRUSSELS, JUNE 2: The European Union has moved forward with a vast overhaul of its migration policy, aiming to ramp up deportations and ink controversial deals to build detention centres abroad, in what rights groups compare to the Trump administration's aggressive immigration policies.

"The new regulation will speed up the return process and increase returns of persons who have no legal right to stay in the EU," said Nicholas Ioannides, deputy migration minister for Cyprus, which holds the rotating presidency of the 27-nation bloc.

The deal was struck between the EU's three main institutions - the European Commission, the European Council and European Parliament - during a so-called "trilogue" Monday evening.

Critics compared the regulation to the immigration strategy of the Trump administration, which has struck a series of secretive agreements with nations around the world to deport thousands of people to countries that are not their own.

The United Kingdom also planned to deport migrants to Rwanda, but the plan was bogged down in legal red tape and the new government dropped the plan as soon as it came into power.

"The Regulation is going to create a draconian detention and deportation machine,"



said Silvia Carter, spokesperson for the Brussels-based Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants.

"Across the Atlantic, we see the violence and fear created by ICE's brutal immigration enforcement. Europe should be learning from the harms of that model, not building its own version of it." The provisional agreement will now head to the EU lawmakers and heads of state, where approval will likely be swift.

EU member nations will soon be able to set up bilateral deals with countries outside the bloc to build deportation centres. At least five EU nations - Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Denmark and Greece - are already in talks with third countries, mostly in Africa, to host "return hubs" on the model of Italy's detention deal with Al-

bania. The EU has continually tightened migration policies after right-wing parties took power in some countries in 2024.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, from the centre-right European People's Party coalition, has said that the new measures will prevent a repeat of the 2015 crisis caused by Syria's civil war, when about 1 million people arrived to seek asylum.

Fuelled by people fleeing conflict and poverty across Africa and the Middle East, the 2015 refugee crisis and successive years of irregular migration to Europe have driven a rightward shift in the bloc's politics not unlike the anti-immigrant sentiment that buoyed a "red wave" in the 2024 election in the United States.

Centre-right political groups allied with the far-

right to overcome opposition from centrist and left-wing parties, said Melissa Camara, a French lawmaker and member of the Greens who called the deal "a historic setback" for human rights in the bloc.

"The legalisation of return hubs outside the European Union, the green light for the detention of minors, home visits inspired by ICE practices: the legal arsenal serving a xenophobic ideology is now complete," she said.

Activist groups warned the legislation would cut deep into the protections granted by the EU fundamental charter on human rights and expose people to risks outside the bloc. "This deal will give governments much broader powers to detain and deport people," said Marta Welandar, a spokesperson for the International Rescue Committee.

Prominent US Congressman backs resolution condemning Hinduphobia, temple attacks

WASHINGTON, JUNE 2: A prominent US Congressman has endorsed a House resolution that celebrates the contributions of the Hindu-American community to the economy of the United States and condemns Hinduphobia, anti-Hindu bigotry and attacks on the community's places of worship. The resolution, endorsed by Ro Khanna on Monday, was introduced by Indian-American Congressman Shri Thanedar, a Democrat from Michigan.

The resolution, moved on January 24 last year, has now been co-sponsored by 32 lawmakers, including Raja Krishnamoorthi and Suhas Subramanyam.

Khanna, a Democrat lawmaker who represents California, announced his support for the measure in a social media post.

"I'm proud to cosponsor @RepShriThanedar's bill H.Res.69 that celebrates the continued contributions and vibrant diversity of the Hindu-American community in the United States as we work to strengthen our nation's multiracial democracy," said Khanna, who is



also of Indian descent.

The resolution noted that Hinduism is one of the world's largest and oldest religions, with over 1.2 billion adherents across over 100 countries.

It highlighted that Hinduism encompasses an array of diverse traditions and belief systems enshrining universal values of acceptance, mutual respect, and peace.

According to the resolution, the US has welcomed more than four million Hindus from around the world since the 1900s, representing diverse racial, linguistic, and ethnic backgrounds.

It said that the United

States has greatly benefited from contributions by Hindu Americans in every aspect of the nation's economy and in every industry. The resolution underlined that Hindu Americans have made significant contributions to the US economy and various industries, while Hindu traditions and practices have enriched American society through philosophy, Ayurveda, arts, music, dance, fashion, meditation, yoga and community service. Condemning the rising "Hinduphobia, anti-Hindu bigotry, hate, and intolerance" in the US, it said that despite the positive contributions to the country,

Hindu-Americans face stereotypes and disinformation about their heritage and symbols, and have been the targets of bullying in schools and on college campuses, as well as discrimination, hate speech, and bias-motivated crimes. It also noted the influence Mahatma Gandhi and his teachings had on Martin Luther King Jr, who acknowledged that the teachings of nonviolent civil disobedience originating in Hindu philosophy positively impacted America's civil-rights movement.

Referring to data from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Hate Crimes Statistics Report, the resolution said anti-Hindu hate crimes targeting temples and individuals are annually on the rise, while in parallel, Hinduphobia in American society is unfortunately rising. The resolution celebrates the historical and continuing contributions of Hindus and Hinduism to the US, recognises the role of Hindu culture in enriching America's diversity, and reaffirms the country's commitment to welcoming Hindu Americans. (PTI)

Nobody knows about their contribution: Manoj Bajpayee on playing a bureaucrat in 'Governor'

MUMBAI, JUNE 2: Actor Manoj Bajpayee says his upcoming film "Governor" highlights the behind-the-scenes efforts of people, who helped the country sail through extreme financial hardship over three-decades ago. Based on true events, the film dives deep into the financial turmoil that shook India during the 1990s economic collapse, and features Bajpayee in the role of an RBI governor, a role inspired by former RBI governor S Venkataramanan. Directed by Chinmay Mandlekar of "Inspector Zende", the film also features Adah Sharma and Madhoo. Recalling the 1991 economic crisis that hit India, Bajpayee said he was a theatre actor in Delhi at the

time and closely followed developments through newspapers.

"I was always a news junkie. So, I know for a fact that it happened. But I don't have any knowledge of what went on behind the closed doors, and who were the people responsible for getting India out of that crisis," the actor told PTI in an interview. Latest News Updates

"The Family Man" star said as a struggling theatre artist, he was living completely broke at the time and would often worry about his next meal. "A poor person's life goes on but it is obvious that when the value of a rupee decreases, everyone has to bear

the burden. Even at that time, the situation was like that. But that decision gave India great relief. After that, it was a warning for India, which helped India think about its market in a new way."

The actor highlighted the contribution of key figures such as former RBI governor S. Venkataramanan, economist Manmohan Singh and then Prime Minister Chandra Shekhar in navigating the financial crisis amid political instability. "Nobody knows about the contribution of these people at that time, and that is where a filmmaker or a screenwriter comes in to take those incidents, make them cinematic and dramatic, take

them to the people, and find some drama there," he said.

Known for his intense preparation for playing a character, Bajpayee said for his role as an RBI governor, he relied primarily on observation, imagination and personal interactions with bureaucrats. The actor, who has played real-life characters in films like "Inspector Zende", "Sirf Ek Bandaa Kaafi Hai", and "Aligarh", said he reached out to his old Delhi University roommates-many of whom had studied for the UPSC exams and were now working as top civil servants-to understand how government officials think and operate.

Mamata sits on dharna in Kolkata to protest 'post-poll violence'

KOLKATA, JUN 2: Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday started her day-long sit-in in central Kolkata to protest against alleged post-poll attacks on party workers and leaders following the BJP's victory in recent assembly elections.

Banerjee reached the dharna site at Esplanade's

Y-channel after the TMC's appeal to hold the protest at the adjacent Rani Rashmoni Road was turned down by the Kolkata Police.

"We were not given permission to set up a stage or use microphones," Banerjee said, while addressing the crowd using a megaphone.

The protest was marked

by chaos with TMC workers shouting slogans amid the former chief minister's speech.

Banerjee was seen accompanied by the party's old guards Firhad Hakim, Madan Mitra, Derek O'Brien, Kalyan Banerjee and Dola Sen, amid the conspicuous absence of most of the fresh faces who

won the assembly seats on TMC tickets.

The party supremo, however, asserted that the dharna, to protest Saturday's attack on her nephew and TMC MP Abhishek Banerjee, alleged post-poll violence and hawk evictions, will continue till the evening as scheduled. (Agencies)