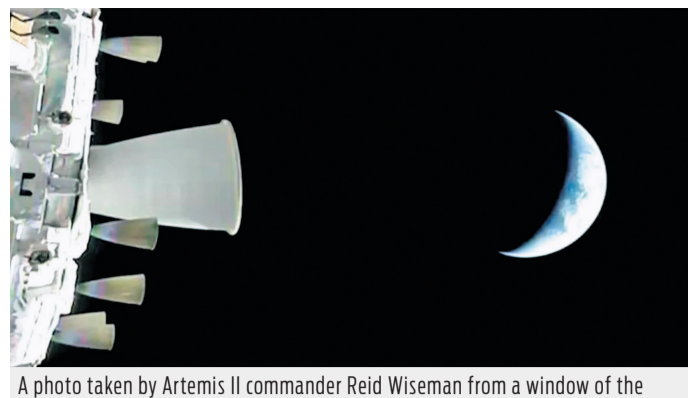




THE NEW INDIAN EXPRESS

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A photo taken by Artemis II commander Reid Wiseman from a window of the Moon-bound space capsule, shows a curved slice of Earth | AP/PTI | P11

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INS Aridhaman ahead of its commissioning ceremony | PTI

With INS Aridhaman, India gets 3rd n-sub

JAVARIA RANA @ New Delhi

INDIA on Friday commissioned its third nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine (SSBN), INS Aridhaman, in a key step towards establishing continuous at-sea nuclear deterrence and strengthening the most survivable leg of its strategic triad.

There was no official word yet on the commissioning of Aridhaman but sources confirmed it. Reports said Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Navy Chief Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi attended the commissioning ceremony held at a frontline naval base.

With this, India has three operational SSBN fleet. INS Arihant (commissioned in 2016) and INS Arighaat (2024) are the other two SSBNs. This meets the minimum requirement for sustained deterrent patrol cycles, with at least one submarine deployed at all times while others undergo maintenance.

Aridhaman can carry up to eight K-4 submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) or a greater number of shorter-range K-15 missiles depending on requirements.

SSBNs are considered the most dependable second-strike capability given their stealth and survivability.

Earlier in the day, Navy's new warship INS Taragiri was commissioned at Visakhapatnam. In his address, the defence minister described INS Taragiri as a symbol of India's growing technological prowess.

China has six SSBNs, Pak none

China has 6 Jin-class SSBNs and 6-8 Shang-class nuclear-powered attack submarines, alongside a conventional submarine force of 50 vessels. Pakistan does not possess nuclear-powered submarines

It's not words but power, 'Aridhaman'

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh in a cryptic post on X in Hindi, hinting at the commissioning of INS Aridhaman

First US jet downed in Iran

F-15E shot down; US forces rescue one crew member; search on for the second

AGENCIES @ Tehran/Dubai

IN the first known loss of a US fighter jet inside Iran since the start of the war, Iran reportedly shot down an F-15E on Friday. The number of persons on board was not immediately known but reports said the jet had a weapons-systems officer, apart from the pilot.

Iranian media said the pilot appeared to have ejected, as no body parts were recovered from the site. A local television channel also broadcast visuals of the downed jet.

Tehran immediately offered a bounty for the pilot and urged people to hand the "enemy" over to police.

In parallel, the US launched a high-risk search and rescue mission deep inside Iran. Iranian media shared images of US fleet, including planes, helicopters, and drones, flying over Iran's Kohkiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad province.

Multiple reports said one crew member was rescued by the US team and efforts were on

to locate the other.

If Iran gets hold of the second person, it could change the course of the war as Tehran could use the US citizen as a bargain chip and extract concessions from Washington.

The Trump administration has not officially confirmed the loss of the aircraft or commented on the fate of the crew. US Central Command, which is responsible for military operations in West Asia tried to play down the damage claiming all its aircraft were accounted for, but major US media outlets reported that an F-15E jet went down.

F-15E Strike Eagle is a high-speed, two-seat fighter jet with increased fuel capacity for extended combat.

Around the same time the US jet went down on Friday afternoon, blasts rocked Tehran.

The downing of the US fighter jet comes on the eve of the UN Security Council voting on a draft resolution proposed by Bahrain on reopening the Strait of Hormuz.



Debris of a purported F-15E shot down in Iran. US and Iranian forces are searching for the pilot who bailed | X

Missile launchers: 50% intact
US intelligence estimates that around half of Iran's ballistic missile launchers are still intact. Some of them are unusable as they are buried under rubble. Besides, Iran has thousands of attack drones stocked and ready for use

Fired: US army chief chucked
US Army Chief of Staff Randy George was on Friday fired by Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth. Gen Christopher LaNeve will be stepping in as acting Army chief of staff, the Pentagon said

LPG: Tanker on way to India
A ship with 44,000 kt of LPG is en route to India after crossing the Strait of Hormuz. Two other vessels — Green Asha and Jag Vikram — are expected to arrive in the coming days | P12

Naxalite-affected dists across India scaled down to two

MUKESH RANJAN @ New Delhi

AHEAD of the March 31 deadline set for eliminating the Naxal footprint, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs had convened a high-level review meeting to assess the status of Left-Wing Extremism (LWE) across the country.

What followed was a revised categorisation of LWE affected districts under the Security Related Expenditure (SRE) Scheme, which determines the allocation of Central funds and security resources, sources said.

As per the fresh classification, only two districts — Bijapur in Chhattisgarh and West Singhbhum in Jharkhand — have now been designated as 'LWE Affected Districts', sources said, adding that Kanker district in Chhattisgarh has been placed under the 'District of Concern' category.

Union home minister Amit Shah had earlier informed Parliament that the number of severely affected districts has reduced drastically, with no district currently falling under the "most affected" category.

Legacy & thrust
SRE districts are bunched in 3 categories: 'LWE Affected Districts', 'Districts of Concern' and 'Legacy and Thrust Districts'. 35 districts across 9 states have been classified under the Legacy & Thrust category

EXPRESS READ

SC quashes confiscation of properties linked to DMK MP

New Delhi: The SC has set aside the confiscation of properties belonging to Accord Distilleries & Breweries Pvt Ltd and its directors, including DMK MP S Jagathrakshakan, under the Foreign Exchange Management Act. It said the action is arbitrary and contrary to law | P7

Cong, BJP release candidate list for TN polls

Chennai: After prolonged deliberations, Congress and BJP on Friday released their lists of candidates for the Assembly polls. While Congress has named candidates for 27 of 28 constituencies allotted to the party as a part of the DMK-led SPA, it is yet to finalise a candidate for Melur. Meanwhile, the BJP's list of 27 candidates came on expected lines, with three of four sitting MLAs being given tickets and ex-TN chief Annamalai staying out of the race. Of the 17 sitting MLAs in Congress, 12 were renominated | P5

₹50 lakh seized from house of TVK candidate's relative

Tiruchy: A poll squad seized ₹50 lakh cash from the house of a relative of Lalgudi TVK candidate Ku Pa Krishnan in Tiruchy on Thursday. Probe is on to ascertain the source of the cash seized from Neelamegam's house and its possible links to the upcoming polls | P5

POLL WALL

VIJAY TO REFILE NOMINATION IN PERAMBUR | P5

'KARUNA HOUSE ARREST': STALIN BLASTS EPS | P5

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