G7 Summit 2024

# Modi's vision is to make India a leading power, key player in world affairs: Natasha

■ VIJAY GUPTA

BARI (ITALY): The G7 Summit is being held in Borgo Egnazia (Fasano) in Apulia, from June 13-15. The event brings together the Leaders of the seven member States, as well as the President of the European Council and the President of the European Commission representing the European Union.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi is also visiting Italy to participate in the G7 Outreach Summit on the invitation of Prime Minister of Italy Giorgia Meloni.

The Young Bites Team is also covering the summit and had interaction with Natasha Pirzada, Senior Researcher, G-7 Research Group, Munk School of Global Affairs, University of Toronto. Talking to Editor-in-Chief (Young Bites) Vijay Gupta, Natasha gave detailed views about the G-7 and issues to be discussed during the summit.

Here are the excerpts of the interview

**Q: Welcome, Natasha. It's a pleasure to have you with us. Can you start by explaining how the G7 came into existence and the purpose of this group?**

Natasha: The G7 Summit first convened in 1975, bringing together the world's most developed and democratic countries. The founding members included the United States, Canada, Japan, France, Germany, Italy, and the European Union. The group's primary purpose was to discuss and coordinate economic policy among the major advanced economies.

*Editor-in-Chief (Young Bites) Vijay Gupta interacting with Natasha Pirzada, Sr Researcher, University of Toronto.*

**Q Before 2019, the G7 Summit was more of a private meeting among these developed countries. How has the inclusion of guest countries since then changed the group's dynamics and policies?**

Natasha: Indeed, prior to 2019, the G7 was an exclusive club of the most powerful developed nations. Since then, the inclusion of guest countries has broadened the group's focus. India has also been specially invited. Egypt, Tunisia, Algeria, and Middle Eastern countries like the UAE and Saudi Arabia are also invited for the summit. Under the current Italian presidency, the summit is addressing a range of global issues including development in Africa, climate change, the Israel-Hamas conflict, the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, energy, migration, and artificial intelligence. Despite these diverse topics, the economic development of Africa remains a top priority.

**Q Last year's G-20 meeting in India, led by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, also emphasized Africa's development. What are your thoughts on this focus?**

Natasha: Historically, about 17 percent of G7 communiqués since 1974 have focused on African development. From 1996 to 2022, the compliance rate with these commitments was about 75 percent. Italy has made a focus on Africa development with the involvement of IMF.

**Q As a senior researcher on the G7 and other international groups, how do you view Prime Minister Narendra Modi, especially as he enters his third term?**

Natasha: Prime Minister Narendra Modi has attended several G-7 Summits even though India is primarily a member of the G20. Modi has been a regular guest during the meeting in the past. His vision is to make India a leading power and key player in the world affairs. However India needs to focus on several areas before it can join the developed nations.

**Q Speaking of regional issues, there has been a notable improvement in the situation in Jammu and Kashmir after the abrogation of Article 370. Tourism, in particular, has seen an increase. What are your views on this?**

Natasha: Yes it is a fact that the security situation has considerably improved in Jammu and Kashmir after the scrapping of Article 370 in 2019. The G 20 tourism meeting held in Srinagar in May 2023 has given a new direction to the region. My personal opinion is that more needs to be done for the development of the region.

# Kuwait fire: IAF aircraft on standby to bring back mortal remains of Indians

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: Kuwaiti authorities are conducting DNA tests on the bodies of over 40 Indians killed in the devastating fire in Mangaf area and an IAF aircraft is on standby to bring back the mortal remains, officials said on Thursday. Minister of State for External Affairs Kirti Vardhan Singh reached Kuwait to oversee assistance to Indians injured in the fire and to ensure early repatriation of mortal remains.

The total number of people killed in the fire incident in the southern Kuwait locality is 49 and 42 of them are learnt to be Indians, the officials said.

The IAF aircraft has been kept on stand-by to bring back the mortal remains, officials said.

Hours after arriving in Kuwait, Singh met the Gulf nation's foreign minister Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya.

The Indian embassy in Kuwait said Al-Yahya assured of full support including for medical care, early repatriation of mortal remains and investigation into the incident.

"FM Yahya conveyed his condolences on the tragic incident. He assured full support including for medical care, early repatriation of mortal remains and investigation of the incident," the mission said on X.

"MoS conveyed his appreciation for the cooperation being extended by all concerned authorities of Kuwait," it said.

Singh also visited Mubarak Al Kabeer hospital where seven injured Indians are admitted.

"In an unfortunate and tragic fire incident earlier today in a Labour housing facility in Mangaf area of Kuwait, around 40 Indians are understood to have died and over 50 injured," the Ministry of External Affairs had said in a statement late on Wednesday night.

Last night, Prime Minister Modi reviewed the situation at a meeting with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, NSA Ajit Doval, Foreign Secretary Vinay Kwatra and Principal Secretary to PM PK Mishra among others.

Following the meeting, the prime minister announced ex-gratia relief of Rs 2 lakh to the families of the deceased Indian nationals from the PM's Relief Fund and directed that the government should extend all possible assistance.

Jaishankar spoke to his Kuwaiti counterpart Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya on phone and urged him for the early repatriation of the mortal remains of those killed.

"Spoke to Kuwaiti FM Abdullah Ali Al-Yahya on the fire tragedy in Kuwait. Apprised of the efforts made by Kuwaiti authorities in that regard. Was assured that the incident would be fully investigated and that responsibility will be fixed," Jaishankar said on X on Wednesday night.

"Urged the early repatriation of the mortal remains of those who lost their lives. He emphasized that those injured were getting the requisite medical attention," he said.

The officials had said most of the Indian victims are from Kerala.

The fire in Al-Mangaf building was reported to authorities in Al-Ahmadi governorate at 4.30 am on Wednesday and most of the deaths were due to smoke inhalation, Kuwaiti media reported, adding the fire started in a kitchen.

Construction firm NBTC group rented the building for the stay of more than 195 workers, most of them Indians from Kerala, Tamil Nadu and northern states, the Kuwaiti media said.

The NBTC group is partly owned by an Indian, officials said.

Interior Minister of Kuwait Sheikh Fahad Al-Yousuf Al-Sabah ordered an investigation into the fire incident and issued directions to apprehend the owner and janitor of Al-Mangaf building.

# Rajkot fire: Gujarat CM asks officials to stop illegal construction from very beginning

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

AHMEDABAD: Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel on Thursday asked officials and elected representatives to pay attention to people's complaints and stop illegal construction at the very beginning, referring to the Rajkot fire that claimed 27 lives last month.

Speaking at a function to distribute grants to municipalities and civic corporations in Gandhinagar district, he said a single mistake can wipe out the good work being done by the government.

"Following the Rajkot fire, I was wondering though we work so hard, we end up committing a mistake. Human life must be given top priority and there should be no compromise over it, be it by government officials or elected representatives. This is the only way to avoid such situations in the future," Patel said.

Any type of illegal construction must be stopped at the very beginning itself, the CM underscored.

"This will make things easier for both the government and the owner of the property. On the other hand, if the construction goes on and illegal structures come up, it becomes difficult for us to deal with it," Patel said.

Urging officials and elected representatives to pay attention to citizens' complaints, Patel, however, cautioned against people who keep filing complaints out of ulterior motives to stop development.

"People keep sending us complaints. Nowadays, they take videos and send them to us to draw our attention to any wrongdoing. So, you don't have to go out and look for violations… You just need to pay attention to those complaints. This will also improve monitoring," said Patel. He said one mistake can wipe out all the good work that the government is doing. The CM also praised the role of the media in drawing the government's attention to such issues.

Patel informed the audience that in the wake of the Rajkot game zone fire, his government has prepared draft rules that seek to ensure safety at such recreation facilities.

He added that the 'The Gujarat Amusement Rides and Gaming Zone Activities (Safety) Rules-2024' have been put in the public domain inviting people's suggestions and objections.

As many as 27 persons, including children, were charred to death in a massive fire that gutted TRP Game Zone in Rajkot city on May 25. A probe found that the facility did not have the 'No Objection Certificate' (NOC) from the municipal fire department.

Following the tragedy, the state government formed an SIT headed by senior IPS officer Subhash Trivedi to find out what triggered the fire, loopholes in the system and suggest steps to prevent such incidents in the future.

Several game zones and other recreation hubs were sealed across the state after the incident and FIRs were also registered against their owners for running such facilities without necessary permission.

So far, police have arrested five co-owners of the game zone and four government officials for alleged negligence and dereliction of duty.

# GST Council to meet on Jun 22, may take up review of online gaming taxation

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: The GST Council, chaired by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman, will meet after a gap of eight months on June 22, and is likely to review the implementation of 28 per cent GST on the online gaming sector.

"The 53rd meeting of the GST Council will be held on 22nd June, 2024 at New Delhi," the GST Council Secretariat said in a post on X.

The 52nd meeting of the GST Council, which comprises finance ministers of all states and UTs, was held on October 7, 2023.

The agenda for the 53rd meeting is yet to be circulated amongst the Council members.

This would be the first Council meeting after Lok Sabha elections.

Results of the elections were declared on June 4, and Sitharaman was sworn in as a Cabinet minister in the new Modi Government on June 9.

The GST Council is likely to review the decision to levy 28 per cent GST on full value of bets for online gaming companies which came into effect from October 1, 2023.

In its meetings in July and August, the GST Council had approved amendments to the law to include online gaming, casinos and horse racing as taxable actionable claims, and clarified that such supplies would attract 28 per cent tax on full bet value.

At that time it was said that a review of the implementation would be carried out after six months, which is April 2024.

Since no GST Council meeting has taken place since April, the June 22 meeting of the Council is expected to review the taxation of the online gaming sector. Another key pending issue before the GST Council is rate rationalisation and a panel under Uttar Pradesh Finance Minister Suresh Kumar Khanna has been mandated to suggest required rate rationalisation.

The GST Council in its June 22 meeting may decide to fasttrack the process and set a timeline for the panel to submit a final report.

The GoM on GST rate rationalisation was set up in September 2021 by the GST Council. The panel had submitted an interim report to the GST Council in June 2022, proposing changes in tax rates for some goods and services to rationalise the levy.

The GoM was mandated to suggest required rate rationalisation and correction of inverted duty structure with an objective of simplifying the rate structure, reviewing the GST exemption list and enhancing GST revenues.

Currently, the GST regime has five broad tax slabs of zero, 5, 12, 18, and 28 per cent. A cess is levied over and above the highest 28 per cent rate on luxury and demerit goods.

Deloitte India Partner Mahesh Jaising said the expected clarifications on critical matters such as related party free of cost transactions and ESOP taxation are also indicative of policymakers' efforts to engage with industry stakeholders and streamline procedures based on feedback.

KPMG in India, Partner and Head (Indirect Tax) Abhishek Jain said multiple clarifications are being looked after to including taxability for the online gaming sector before October, taxability of ESOPs, corporate guarantee taxability, and various rate-related clarifications are also anticipated due to recent litigations.

Shardul Amarchand Mangaldas & Co Partner Rajat Bose said there is a need to address key industry issues like the taxation of online gaming and the promised review of the valuation rules introduced in October 2023.

Besides, inverted duty structure in textiles, fertilisers could also be discussed by the Council.

Deloitte India Partner MS Mani said the Council will need to take up the keenly awaited rate rationalisation discussion.

"In addition, a preliminary effort to include low impact petroleum products such as natural gas within the GST ambit would be highly beneficial to business," Mani said.

# HC directs meeting of DU authorities on water coolers, WiFi at Law Faculty

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: Delhi High Court has asked the Delhi University authorities to convene a meeting of stakeholders within a week on the availability of water coolers/purified drinking water and infrastructure such as WiFi for students at the Faculty of Law and to file a report. A vacation bench of Justice Amit Sharma also issued notices to the Bar Council of India secretary and the university's dean of students' welfare on the petition by three law students, raising concerns over the lack of basic amenities and infrastructure on campus. The counsel appearing for the Delhi University assured the court that necessary provisions with regards to water cooler/drinking water are available on the campus.

Justice Sharma opined that the Bar Council of India and the dean of students' welfare are necessary parties to the petition and also appointed advocate Rajesh Mishra as amicus curiae. "Keeping in view the issues raised in the present petition, it is imperative that a meeting be convened amongst all the stakeholders, ie, dean of students' welfare of Delhi University, dean (Faculty of Law), petitioner No 2 and the learned amicus curiae appointed by this court with regard to assessing the facilities provided to the students with regard to the water coolers/provision for purified drinking water as well as the other infrastructural facilities, including the availability of WiFi services," the court said in its order on June 12.

"Let the meeting be convened with the mutual convenience of the parties within one week from today ... and a report with regard to the same be placed on record before the next date of hearing," it ordered.

Besides water and WiFi, the petitioners Ronak Khatri, Ankur Singh Mavi and Umesh Kumar also raised concern over lack of air conditioning in classrooms, saying conditions become "unbearable" when temperatures in Delhi reach up to 48 degrees Celsius during the summer months.

"This situation is contrasted by the presence of multiple air conditioners in administrative offices and staff rooms, indicating a significant disparity in the allocation of resources. Furthermore, the third building, constructed with makeshift materials such as tin roofs and asbestos-lined walls, exacerbates the heat issue, creating an uninhabitable learning environment. The students have on many occasions suffered heat strokes, fainting etc, including the petitioner No 1," the plea stated.

It further said there is no provision for clean drinking water on campus, which forces students to buy packaged water, and added that maintenance of washroom facilities is also inadequate.

"Overall, the campus lacks essential amenities and properly maintained classrooms and common areas. These deficiencies collectively create an environment that is not conducive to learning and pose significant safety risks. The lack of basic infrastructural facilities constitutes a violation of petitioners' fundamental rights under Article 21 of the Indian Constitution, which guarantees the right to life and, by extension, the right to education," the plea said. The matter will be heard next on July 4.

# Delhi water crisis: BJP says AAP govt failed to prevent wastage of water

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: The Delhi BJP on Thursday attacked the AAP government over the water crisis in the national capital, accusing it of failing to prevent wastage of water and misleading people on the issue. Addressing a press conference, Delhi BJP secretary and New Delhi MP Bansuri Swaraj said due to the shortage of water, people are being fleeced by the tanker mafia. Earlier in the day, police here began patrolling the Munak canal area to check the activities of the tanker mafia and Water Minister Atishi inspected a pipeline network supplying water to south Delhi residents.

The Delhi government is ensuring through patrolling by additional district magistrates and sub-divisional magistrates across the city that not even a single drop of water is wasted due to leakage from the main pipelines, Atishi said in a post on X. Hitting out at Atishi, Swaraj alleged that instead of ensuring action against the tanker mafia, the minister is extending protection to them.

"Atishi says that even if the tanker mafia is stopped, not much water would be saved. This is very unfortunate because people facing water shortage are being fleeced by the tanker mafia," she said.

The BJP leader also criticised the AAP government for "failing" to prevent wastage and leakage of water and "misleading" people on the issue. "I want to ask the AAP government and Atishi how long will they continue to come up with excuses and mislead people. They should come out of their air-conditioned press conference rooms and see the plight of the people," Swaraj said. On Atishi's letter to Lieutenant Governor V K Saxena seeking a probe into alleged collusion between senior officers and the tanker mafia, Swaraj said the Delhi government faced the Supreme Court's wrath on the issue of the tanker mafia but it was trying to shift the blame on the officers.

The Supreme Court on Thursday directed the Delhi government to approach the Upper Yamuna River Board (UYRB) for water supply as Himachal Pradesh took a U-turn and told the top court that it did not have surplus water to spare. The court asked the Delhi government to submit an application to the UYRB by 5 pm seeking supply of water to the national capital on humanitarian grounds.

# Aditya Thackeray releases 'Vachan Naama' for J&K, instructs party unit to gear up for assembly elections

## Expresses concern over increasing terrorist activities

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

MUMBAI: Shiv Sena (UBT) Jammu and Kashmir has been ordered to gear up for the upcoming assembly elections. Along with this, National President of the party Yuva Sena and former Cabinet Minister of Maharashtra Aditya Thackeray released 'Vachan Naama' for J&K based on the aspirations of the people.

A team of party state leaders led by Jammu and Kashmir unit chief Manish Sahni congratulated their young flamboyant leader Aditya Thackeray on his birthday at Matoshree and took a pledge to fulfill the released 'Vachan Naama'.

*Former Cabinet Minister of Maharashtra, Aditya Thackeray releasing 'Vachan Naama' for J&K.*

While giving detailed information regarding the 'Vachan Naama', Sahni said that the safe return of Kashmiri Pandits to Valley and restoration of rights of Bhumiputras, women empowerment, better health and education etc. are based on public aspirations.

Along with this, Aditya Thackeray also expressed concern over the delay in restoration of democratic process in Jammu and Kashmir and increased terrorist activities in Jammu division.

Sahni assured the party high command that with the state unit continuously going among the people and raising voice on public issues and getting full support from the public, the party will perform better in the upcoming assembly elections and for the first time, the flag of Shiv Sena (UBT) will be hoisted in the Jammu and Kashmir Assembly.