

Leave Iran by all means available: India's new advisory to its nationals

Shubhajit Roy

New Delhi, February 23

AHEAD OF Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Israel on Wednesday, India on Monday advised all its nationals living in Iran to leave the country by all available means of transport, including commercial flights, in view of the evolving security situation.

The latest advisory by the Indian embassy in Tehran comes in the wake of fresh protests and mounting fears of US military strikes on Iran. Students at several universities in Iran held anti-government demonstrations over the weekend — the first such protests since Tehran cracked down on protesters last month. According to official estimates in January, about 10,000 Indians, including students, were living in Iran.

"In continuation of the advisory issued by the Government of India on January 5 and in view of the evolving situation in Iran, Indian nationals who are currently in Iran (students, pilgrims, business persons and tourists) are advised to leave Iran by available means of transport, including commer-



Women out for shopping at Tehran's Grand Bazaar on Monday. AP

cial flights," the Indian embassy in Tehran said. Iran's airport is still functional.

"All Indian nationals in Iran are requested to also have their travel and immigration documents, including passports and identity cards, readily available with them... They are requested to contact the Indian embassy for any assistance in this regard," it said. The advisory reiterated that all Indian citizens and PIOs should exercise due caution, avoid areas of protests or demonstrations and stay in contact with the Indian embassy.

Modi is set to visit Israel on

February 25-26, and is expected to address the Knesset, Israel's Parliament, in what would be his second visit to the country since assuming office.

The US has stepped up its military presence in the Middle East, with President Donald Trump warning last week that "really bad things will happen" if no deal is reached to solve the longstanding dispute over Tehran's nuclear programme.

While Iran and the US are expected to hold a third round of nuclear talks in Geneva this week, Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian said in a post on X

on Sunday that recent negotiations had "yielded encouraging signals", and pointed to Tehran's readiness for "any potential scenario". This has given some hope of a breakthrough in the negotiations.

Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff, who leads nuclear negotiations from the US administration, said on Saturday that the US President was curious as to why Iran has not yet "capitulated" and agreed to curb its nuclear programme.

"I don't want to use the word 'frustrated,' because he understands he has plenty of alternatives, but he's curious as to why they haven't... I don't want to use the word 'capitulated,' but why they haven't capitulated," Witkoff said in an interview. "Why, under this pressure, with the amount of seapower and naval power over there, why haven't they come to us and said, 'we profess we don't want a weapon, so here's what we're prepared to do'? And yet it's sort of hard to get them to that place."

Reacting to this, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said in a post on X: "Curious to know why we do not capitulate? Because we are Iranian."

Tejas fleet undergoes extensive checks after ground accident

Amrita Nayak Dutta

New Delhi, February 23

THE INDIAN Air Force's (IAF) Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas fleet is undergoing extensive maintenance checks after one of the aircraft was involved in an accident at a forward air base earlier this month, sources told *The Indian Express*.

The accident took place when the aircraft overshot the runway during takeoff and slid into an adjoining mud patch. The pilot is learnt to have sustained injuries, and the airframe is learnt to have suffered damage. While there was no official word from the IAF on whether the airframe will be written off after the incident, sources said the Tejas fleet is undergoing comprehensive maintenance checks, which is part of the standard operating procedure after any such incident. A decision on whether to write off the aircraft is yet to be taken. There was no word on the extent of injuries suffered by the pilot, even as sources said whiplash injuries are common in such cases.

In a statement issued Monday, state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), which is the manufacturer of the aircraft, said there has been no reported "crash" of the LCA Tejas. "The event in question was a minor technical incident on the ground. LCA Tejas main-

tains one of the world's best safety records among contemporary fighter aircraft," it said. It also said that as a standard operating procedure, the issue is being analysed in depth, and HAL is working closely with the IAF for a speedy resolution. Both are part of the Board of Inquiry investigating the incident.

This is the third incident involving a Tejas aircraft. In November 2025, IAF pilot Wing Commander Namansh Syal was killed after a Tejas Mk1 fighter jet crashed during an aerial display at the Dubai Air Show. The first crash of a Tejas Mk1 aircraft was in March 2024 near Jaisalmer during a training sortie. The pilot had then ejected safely. The IAF has two operational squadrons of the Tejas Mk1, one each at Naliya in Gujarat and Sulur near Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu.

The IAF is scheduled to receive 180 Tejas Mk1A from HAL — delivery is yet to commence. The Tejas Mk1A, powered by General Electric F404 engines, has multiple upgrades over the Mk1 version. The deliveries have been delayed, and the IAF has agreed to receive the deliveries for the initial batches of the aircraft with some concessions.

The newly inaugurated production line in Nashik has the capacity to manufacture eight aircraft every year, and can be increased to 10. HAL is expected to produce 24 aircraft annually.

J&K encounter ends 2-yr pursuit of 7 JeM infiltrators from Pak: Officers

Arun Sharma

Jammu, February 23

THE KILLING of three Pakistani terrorists, including Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) commander Saifullah, by security forces in Kishtwar district's Chatroo area Sunday marked the culmination of the anti-terror operation codenamed Trashi that lasted nearly two years — and targeted seven JeM terrorists who had crossed the border into J&K in April 2024, senior officers said.

They also described the operation as the longest such security action of its kind across three decades of militancy in J&K that focused on a specific group of targets within one geographical area. The operation employed all available resources — from troops working on the ground to sniffer dogs and drones in a “joint and integrated” manner involving the Army, J&K Police and CRPF, the officers said.

With their elimination, J&K Police IGP (Jammu zone) Bhim Sen Tuti said all the seven terrorists who had crossed over into Kishtwar from Pakistan “have been neutralised”. Describing them as “hardcore terrorists”, also known as “Azrael Group” among the local population, Tuti said they had been engaged by security forces, police and CRPF on at least on 17 occasions earlier — and had inflicted significant damage on security forces and civilians.

Official sources told *The Indian Express* that the anti-terror operation's name refers to a village where Army's Counter Insurgency Force (CIF) Delta has a camp. They also attributed the



(Left) The encounter site where three terrorists were killed in Kishtwar on Monday; (above) the arms and ammunition recovered at the site. ANI

Azrael reference to the local population referring to the terrorists as “Angels of Death”.

Three members of the group were killed in April 2025 during earlier phases of Operation Trashi. However, the search for the remaining four terrorists continued in the difficult terrain of the area, Tuti said.

Based on intelligence inputs from the police, the Intelligence Bureau and other agencies, the second leg of the joint operation, codenamed Operation Trashi-I, was launched on January 14 this year in the Chatroo area, officers said. Contact with the terrorists was re-established on multiple occasions from January 18 onwards, but they managed to escape after brief encounters, they said.

Their hideout was later busted and large quantities of ration and other materials were seized, officers said. The sustained pursuit led to the elimination of another terrorist, code-

named Adil, on February 4. Following fresh inputs received from the Kishtwar Police, on February 21, security forces launched a final operation that culminated in the killing of the remaining three terrorists the next day, they said.

Except for Tyson, an Army sniffer dog that initiated the operation and faced the first bullet fired by the terrorists, there were no casualties or injuries on the side of the Army, police or CRPF, according to Major General A P S Bal, General Officer Commanding (GOC) of CIF Delta.

Describing Operation Trashi as a “perfect example of seamless coordination at all levels”, Major General Bal said, “All the resources available to all of us, from a dog to a drone, were employed in a just and integrated manner, and the success today is a reflection of the strength of unity of our efforts.”

Referring to the terrorists re-

peatedly managing to evade contact, he said, “We did not lose heart as we had clarity of thought and kept on planning and preparing for the operation... Every day, we would go back to the drawing board. We would reorient, realign and redeploy ourselves.”

He said that intelligence inputs from various agencies were constantly analysed, corroborated and acted upon.

Highlighting the challenges involved, Major General Bal said that during winter, when snow levels reached three to four feet, forces were deployed on mountain tops to monitor vast areas and respond quickly to intelligence inputs. However, the difficult terrain often meant that it took six to seven hours to reach a specific location, by which time the terrorists would escape.

The operation, which confined the terrorists to a relatively small area, involved

high tactical precision, real-time drone surveillance, night-vision equipment and the swift mobilisation of reinforcements, including special forces, amid harsh weather conditions. “We were conscious of the fact that such a prolonged operation can lead to fatigue among the troops. Therefore, we planned it in a manner that ensured adequate rotation of forces,” he said.

“We always maintained sufficient reserves — either to be air-dropped by helicopters or to move on foot across extremely difficult terrain. Sometimes it would take six to eight hours to reach a location, but we ensured that we got there,” he said.

Meanwhile, IGP Tuti said three AK rifles and other “war-like stores” or provisions were recovered from the terrorists killed on February 22. He reiterated that the fight against terrorism would continue until the entire ecosystem is dismantled.

L-G okays 20% quota for ex-Agniveers in male constable posts

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Lieutenant-Governor V.K. Saxena on Monday announced 20% reservation for retired Agniveers in recruitment for the post of male constables in Delhi Police, along with a three-year age relaxation and exemption from the physical efficiency test.

“L-G V.K. Saxena has approved an amendment in Rule 9 of Delhi Police (Appointment & Recruitment) Rules, 1980 to incorporate provisions for recruitment of ex-Agniveers as male constables (Executive),” read an official statement.

First batch

It added, “Further, an age relaxation of five years beyond the prescribed upper age limit of 25 years will be given to the candidates of the first batch of the Agniveers.”

The first batch is set to retire later this year.

The Agnipath scheme, a pan-India, merit-based short-term recruitment scheme for soldiers, airmen and sailors, was launched in June 2022. Under the scheme, candidates aged 17.5 to 21 years are given the opportunity to serve in the armed forces as Agniveers for four years, including the training period. After the completion of the four-year tenure, 25% of the recruits are retained for regular service, based on organisational requirements and existing policies.

The order stated that



Retired Agniveers will also get a three-year age relaxation and exemption from the physical efficiency test. FILE PHOTO

the quota and relaxation in recruitment norms will provide the retired Agniveers with a smooth transition into law enforcement roles.

“They will get a better chance to serve society due to their prior training and experience,” read the statement.

42,451 sanctioned posts

Currently, there are 42,451 sanctioned posts for male constables in Delhi Police. Constables are appointed through a direct recruitment process for applicants aged 18 to 25.

Several other States, including Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand and Haryana, have announced similar programmes to recruit retired Agniveers.

The Ministry of Home Affairs is set to increase the reservation for ex-Agniveers in the Group C posts across all Central Armed Police Forces from 10% to 50%.

Let high courts steer tech reforms in justice system



SUPRIYA
SANKARAN

A FEW weeks ago, the Madras High Court permitted an AI-assisted system inside live court proceedings. Kerala's 24x7 ON Court, just a year old, has already shown how locally designed solutions can significantly compress resolution time. But for these efforts to scale, the Rs 1,200 crore e-courts budget announced earlier this year must become accessible to the high courts willing to act.

For nearly two decades, the e-courts mission has been India's flagship effort to modernise court administration. Over Rs 4,104 crore has been spent since 2011, and earnest efforts have followed. Yet, courts remain slow, unpredictable, and disempowering. A critical reason for this is the way the budget is allocated and governed.

If the goal is faster, more predictable, and seamless courts, high courts may need greater autonomy to determine their own needs and innovate. This autonomy to set their priorities, control their spending, and drive local innovation may be the missing piece. There are three reasons:

First, the Constitution and administrative logic support it. Under Article 227, high courts have administrative superintendence over district courts. They are autonomous constitutional courts. Devolving flexible resources respects that constitutional autonomy and aligns decision rights with operational responsibility.

Second, it's practical. Local problems need local solutions. States have different contexts, capacities, and priorities. Their workflows and caseloads are different. Decentralised allocation of funds lets high courts prioritise what actually improves access in their context.

Third, decentralisation catalyses capacity and innovation. When high courts can pilot, measure, and iterate, they learn faster. A single high court experimenting with an e-filing workflow or digital court can produce an evidence base that others can adapt and scale.

Decentralisation is constitutionally grounded, contextually necessary, and a more resilient path to solutions that scale. Closer to litigants and lawyers, high courts can meaningfully improve user experience

and access to justice. Tailored pilots will also reduce wasted investment in poorly matched national rollouts. Devolving funding to high courts need not mean abandoning standards, accountability, or equity. The Centre or the Supreme Court can create mechanisms that ensure both.

One option is to release a defined share of the e-courts budget directly to high courts as conditional block grants for transformation. Conditions can be simple: Utilisation of funds, alignment with national technical standards, and transparent publication of outcomes. This could enable rapid disbursement, local ownership, and lower transaction costs.

Alternatively, disbursements can be tied to simple, auditable outcomes such as infrastructure or capacity built or reduction in disposal time. Crucially, these metrics should be proposed and agreed upon by the high courts themselves, so funding is linked to demonstrable results rather than just inputs.

A third option is creating competitive grants for innovation. High courts bid with concise proposals (scope, timeline, budget). A small central panel, comprising technical and judicial representatives, evaluates the bid on demand signal, scalability, and return on investment. Such an approach would encourage experimentation while using evidence to scale successful models.

The role of central bodies should be limited to creating digital public infrastructure standards for technology, data, and privacy, certifying compliant vendors and creating dashboards for each high court programme funded through the mission. Such measures will build public trust and accelerate the diffusion of good practices.

The budget of Rs 1,200 crore is in place. The Supreme Court, in coordination with the Department of Justice, has a historic opportunity to pilot a decentralised architecture this year. A blended model (conditional block grants and competitive innovation funding) offers the best of both worlds: Local relevance, experiential learning, and national standards.

Decentralise the money, centralise the standards, and we might have a good chance to watch digitisation transform our lives.

The writer is co-founder of PUCAR and Agami

If the goal is faster, more predictable, and seamless courts, high courts may need greater autonomy to determine their own needs and innovate

India's energy shift through the green ammonia route

At the inaugural session of the India Energy Week (IEW), in January 2026, Prime Minister Narendra Modi positioned India's ambitions at the centrestage of the global energy discourse, highlighting investment opportunities worth \$500 billion across the sector. As India raises its ambition from energy security to energy independence, the affordability of clean energy such as green hydrogen and its derivatives is critical to the long-term competitiveness of India's energy transition. But from fertilizers to clean energy and marine fuel, there are now green ammonia applications which are wide-ranging. **Green ammonia – produced by combining nitrogen with green hydrogen – is currently leading in the adoption of green hydrogen, with its strategic adoption advanced across regions such as the European Union (EU), India and South Korea.**

Aggregated procurement mechanisms are starting to lay the foundation for a global green ammonia market. Some noteworthy examples include H2Global's tender of green ammonia under the EU's hydrogen import strategy, South Korea's Clean Hydrogen Portfolio Standard (CHPS) tender for clean ammonia procurement as a bulk fuel, and the recent tender concluded by the Solar Energy Corporation of India (SECI) under the Strategic Interventions for Green Hydrogen Transition (SIGHT) programme of India's National Green Hydrogen Mission.

Green ammonia auction

Compared to these global procurement practices, India's green ammonia auction under SECI demonstrates broader market participation, attracting 15 bidders and resulting in seven unique successful awardees. Under the SIGHT programme, SECI floated a tender in June 2024 for an aggregated demand of up to 724,000 tonnes of green ammonia annually across 13 fertilizer plants in India. These tenders concluded

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The country's green ammonia auction model has the potential to redefine global standards for clean energy adoption

in August 2025, and offered a 10-year, fixed-price offtake agreements to successful bidders. This clarity in price and offtake provided producers with the market certainty required for investment. The auctions established a **significant breakthrough in cost-competitive green ammonia procurement, setting new global benchmarks, almost 40%-50% less than the prices from the H2Global auction**

The tender process faced multiple extensions and revisions, primarily to resolve concerns around risk allocation, payment security, and clarity on offtake and pricing conditions, raised by both project developers and offtakers. These refinements successfully addressed concerns, leading to a balanced win-win framework for all stakeholders.

✓ In this auction, seven bidders secured a total of 13 delivery contracts for green ammonia. Notably, one company won six contracts for 3,70,000 tonnes/year. These contracts include production subsidies of ₹8.82 a kilogramme, ₹7.06 a kg, and ₹5.3 a kg for the first three years and a 10-year fixed price supply agreement to existing fertilizer manufacturers in India.

The discovered prices of green ammonia across these tenders range from ₹49.75 and ₹64.74/kg (\$572 and \$744 a tonne). In India, the grey ammonia price is as high as \$515 a tonne. When factoring in the newly discovered price of green ammonia, supported by longer-term contracts, the cost gap has significantly narrowed.

On delivery and transportation

Notably, a standout feature of SECI's tender is the pre-identification of delivery points, as most fertilizer plants where the green ammonia is to be delivered are located near coastal areas, enabling the transportation of green ammonia through shipping as well. The contracted volumes of green ammonia contribute to approximately 30%

of the total ammonia being imported, offering price predictability and greater insulation from global gas market volatility, currency risks and geopolitical pressures. In locations where grey ammonia costs are higher, green ammonia procurement increases its appeal for scale-up.

Propelling the momentum

India's approach is increasingly **shaping the clean ammonia landscape worldwide, owing to its combination of low renewable energy costs, large-scale logistics, robust contract design and targeted incentives.** As more countries seek reliable clean ammonia imports to decarbonise industry, power and transport, **India's successful auction model is well placed to shape emerging global market structures and accelerate adoption at scale.**

However, **sustaining the momentum created by India's green ammonia auctions will require coordinated and sustained action from policymakers, project developers and financiers.** Developers must focus on strong technical and financial due diligence, integrate hybrid renewable systems with storage, and adopt transparent monitoring frameworks to ensure long-term operational viability. Policymakers, in turn, need to provide stable and harmonised regulations on grid access, banking and incentives, while strengthening safety standards and aligning certification frameworks with evolving global norms.

Long-tenor, blended finance facilities, backed by extended offtake agreements and dedicated risk-mitigation instruments, can further enhance project bankability and crowd in private capital. Together, these measures can reinforce investor confidence, accelerate scale-up, and firmly position India not just as a participant but also as a global leader in clean ammonia markets.

WhatsApp tells SC it does not share data with Meta

Will fully comply with National Company Law Appellate Tribunal directions on user consent for sharing data with parent company, it says as both challenge imposition of penalty of ₹213.14 crore

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The instant messaging platform WhatsApp maintained in the Supreme Court on Monday that it was not “quite right” to say the online entity was sharing data with other Meta platforms.

Appearing before a three-judge Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, senior advocate Kapil Sibal, for WhatsApp and its parent company, Meta, said its technology was very clear and put a premium on privacy. “There is no question of violating the law,” Mr. Sibal submitted.

He said the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act, 2023, comprehensively addressed the privacy concerns raised in the Supreme Court.

The court was hearing petitions filed by Meta and WhatsApp against a National Company Law Appellate Tribunal (NCLAT) decision to uphold a ₹213.14-crore penalty imposed by the Competition Commission of India (CCI).

The CCI had found WhatsApp’s “take-it-or-leave-it” approach in its

Privacy message

WhatsApp submits its view before SC on user consent and sharing of data with Meta



■ WhatsApp and Meta challenge NCLAT order upholding ₹213.14-crore penalty imposed by CCI

■ Case arises from CCI findings on WhatsApp’s 2021 privacy policy

KEY ALLEGATION

■ CCI found WhatsApp’s 2021 privacy policy a ‘take-it-or-leave-it’ practice

■ Regulator said users were forced to share data with Meta to keep using the app

■ Tribunal stressed user choice and consent for non-essential data use

DEFENDING STATEMENTS

■ WhatsApp denies improper sharing, cites encryption and DPDP Act

■ Company says it will follow NCLAT directions by March 16, 2026

■ CCI argued the matter also involves competition law and consumer protection

2021 privacy policy an abuse of its market dominance. It found the prior consent sought from users to share their data with Meta “manufactured”. It had concluded that users were forced to share data for continued access to WhatsApp messaging services.

In an appeal last year, the NCLAT concluded that the “core principle is to remove exploitation by restoring user choice”.

“The users can be given choice if users retain the right to decide what data is collected from them, for which purposes, and for how long. We had also stat-

ed in our findings that any non-essential collection or cross-use (like advertising etc.) can occur only with the concerned user’s express and revocable consent,” the NCLAT had observed.

On Monday, WhatsApp said it would fully comply with the NCLAT directions relating to user consent for sharing data with Meta under its controversial 2021 privacy policy by March 16, 2026. The tribunal had, however, found the CCI’s five-year ban on sharing data for advertisement purposes “redundant”, considering that the user

had already been given a choice to opt in or out.

WhatsApp has filed a comprehensive affidavit explaining its technology of end-to-end encryption, following scathing oral remarks from the Bench in the previous hearing on February 3.

The Bench had cautioned that it would not permit the platform and Meta to breach the right to privacy of millions of their “silent consumers” in India through the sharing and commercial exploitation of personal data. It had even compared sharing of private data to a “decent way of committing theft”. Though WhatsApp and Meta had protested that users could “opt out” of the data-sharing provision, the court had persisted in its criticism.

Senior advocate Madhavi Goradia Divan, for CCI, said there was also a competition law concern attached to the case.

“Data-sharing has many facets. One may be privacy and data protection. But there is another aspect, protecting market and consumer, which stands on a totally different footing,” Ms. Divan submitted.

Canadian PM arriving on February 27 for trade talks

Carney to meet Modi on March 2 and discuss new tie-ups in energy, AI, defence; officials hope the visit will reset the ties ruptured by allegations over killing of Khalistani separatist leader Nijjar

Suhasini Haidar

NEW DELHI

Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney will travel to Mumbai and Delhi this week as part of a three-nation tour of India, Australia and Japan aimed at enhancing and diversifying Canada's trade relations, his office announced on Monday.

Mr. Carney is expected to land first in Mumbai on February 27, and meet with Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Delhi on March

2, and discuss "new partnerships in trade, energy, technology and artificial intelligence (AI), talent and culture, and defence", a statement released in Ottawa said. The visit to three of Canada's "strongest Indo-Pacific partners", who are all part of the Quad with the U.S., is also a significant push for Canada's own Indo-Pacific policy.

"In a more uncertain world, Canada is focused on what we can control. We are diversifying our trade and attracting massive new investment to create new opportunities for our workers and businesses," Mr. Carney was quoted as saying about the 10-day visit to all three countries. "We are forging new partnerships abroad



PM Narendra Modi met Canadian PM Mark Carney in June 2025 on the sidelines of the G7 Leaders' Summit in Canada. REUTERS

to create greater certainty, security and prosperity at home," he added.

Ahead of the visit, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar held talks with his Canadian counterpart, Anita Anand, on the sidelines of the Munich Security Forum last week.

During the visit, Mr. Carney is expected to focus on India-Canada trade negotiations for comprehensive economic partnership agreement, investment opportunities, cooperation in fossil fuel and nuclear energy, as well as critical minerals technology. He will also seek to put behind years of mistrust and sharp rhetoric between the Modi government and his predecessor, Justin Trudeau, whose last visit to India for

the G-20 summit in 2023 proved to be particularly acrimonious over the Khalistan issue.

Last year, Mr. Modi's visit to Canada for the G-7 outreach and meeting with Mr. Carney began the process of repairing ties, which the return visit this week is expected to complete, officials said.

Thaw in ties

In what was seen as a particular breakthrough, National Security Ajit Doval visited Canada in early February, after years of India-Canada tensions over the killing of Khalistani separatist leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar in June 2023, that the Canadian police accused the Indian government of orchestrating through

agents there. The trial of four men who have been arrested is expected to begin later this year, but in a sign that the Canadian government wants to be sensitive to India's concerns over the case, the Canadian Attorney-General has, according to local reports, requested permission to suppress certain evidence disclosures as they could be "injurious to international relations and national security".

In a statement about the meeting between Mr. Doval and his counterpart Nathalie Drouin, the Ministry of External Affairs did not refer directly to the case but said that they "agreed to a shared workplan to guide bilateral cooperation on national security and law enforcement issues and to enable practical collaboration on respective priorities".

Mr. Carney will meet Mr. Modi for official talks on Monday and fly that evening to Australia, before travelling to Tokyo to meet newly re-elected PM Sanae Takaichi.

Mr. Carney's visit comes a month after his trip to Beijing, where Canada and China restored trade ties, visas, and reduced restrictions on Chinese electric vehicles.

Witkoff reiterates red lines; Iran says U.S. talks yielded encouraging signals

Tehran is committed to peace and stability in the region, says President Pezeshkian, adding that recent talks with the U.S. involved the exchange of practical proposals; U.S. envoy says Trump's red lines include 'zero uranium enrichment' for Iran

Stanly Johny

Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian on Sunday expressed cautious optimism about talks with Washington, saying the discussions involved exchange of "practical proposals", while Steve Witkoff, the U.S. special envoy for West Asia, said President Donald Trump had set clear red lines regarding Iran's nuclear programme.

"Iran is committed to peace and stability in the region. Recent negotiations involved the exchange of practical proposals and yielded encouraging signals," Mr. Pezeshkian wrote in a social media post. "However, we continue to closely monitor U.S. actions and have made all necessary preparations for any potential scenario," he added.

Mr. Pezeshkian's comment came immediately after Oman's Foreign Minister Badr Albusaidi said a third round of talks bet-



Treading the line: Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian speaks during a meeting in Tehran on Saturday. REUTERS

ween the U.S. and Iran would take place on February 26 in Geneva. "Pleased to confirm U.S.-Iran negotiations are now set for Geneva this Thursday with a positive push to go the extra mile towards finalising the deal," Mr. Albusaidi wrote in a post.

Oman mediated the first round of the talks in Muscat on February 6 and the second round in Geneva on February 17. While Iran claimed "guiding principles" of future talks were agreed between the two sides on February 17, the U.S. side was less optimis-

tic and said gaps remained.

Trump 'curious'

Mr. Witkoff, the chief U.S. negotiator with Iran, said in an interview on Sunday, the President was "curious" on why Iran had not capitulated under American pressure. "The President asked me that this morning, and he's - I don't wanna use the word frustrated... because he understands he's got plenty of alternatives, but... he's curious as to why they haven't, I don't wanna use the word capitulated, but why they haven't capitulat-

ed," Mr. Witkoff told Lara Trump, the President's daughter-in-law, on Fox News.

He added that Mr. Trump is wondering "why, under this pressure, with the amount of sea power and naval power over there, why haven't they come to us and said, 'we profess we don't want a weapon, so here's what we're prepared to do?'"

The U.S. has deployed dozens of fighter jets, warships, two aircraft carriers, missile defence shields and fuel tankers to the region, with the President threatening to use force if Iran failed to make a deal. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has warned that any attack on the Islamic Republic would trigger a regional war.

Mr. Witkoff added that Mr. Trump gave him and Jared Kushner, Mr. Trump's son-in-law, who is also part of the negotiating team, the administration's red lines. "Zero, zero enrichment; we have to get the material back," he said,

referring to Iran's nuclear enrichment capability and its stockpile of highly enriched uranium. After the June 2025 attack by Israel and the U.S. on Iran's nuclear facilities, Mr. Trump had claimed that the U.S. had "obliterated" Iran's nuclear programme. But Mr. Witkoff indicated on Sunday that Iran still possessed highly enriched uranium.

"They say it's all about a civilian programme, yet they've been enriching far beyond what's needed for civil nuclear use, up to 60%. They're probably a week away from having industrial-grade, bomb-making material. That's extremely dangerous, and I can't accept that," Mr. Witkoff said.

Earlier, Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told CBS that there was still a "good chance" for a diplomatic solution to the nuclear issue. "One fact is there, that if they (the U.S.) want to find a resolution for Iran's peaceful nuclear program, the only way is diplomacy," he said.

Leave Iran by all means available: India's new advisory to its nationals

Shubhajit Roy

New Delhi, February 23

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The latest advisory by the Indian embassy in Tehran comes in the wake of fresh protests and mounting fears of US military strikes on Iran. Students at several universities in Iran held anti-government demonstrations over the weekend — the first such protests since Tehran cracked down on protesters last month. According to official estimates in January, about 10,000 Indians, including students, were living in Iran.

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February 25-26, and is expected to address the Knesset, Israel's Parliament, in what would be his second visit to the country since assuming office.

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on Sunday that recent negotiations had "yielded encouraging signals", and pointed to Tehran's readiness for "any potential scenario". This has given some hope of a breakthrough in the negotiations.

Trump's special envoy Steve Witkoff, who leads nuclear negotiations from the US administration, said on Saturday that the US President was curious as to why Iran has not yet "capitulated" and agreed to curb its nuclear programme.

"I don't want to use the word 'frustrated,' because he understands he has plenty of alternatives, but he's curious as to why they haven't... I don't want to use the word 'capitulated,' but why they haven't capitulated," Witkoff said in an interview. "Why, under this pressure, with the amount of seapower and naval power over there, why haven't they come to us and said, 'we profess we don't want a weapon, so here's what we're prepared to do'? And yet it's sort of hard to get them to that place."

Reacting to this, Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said in a post on X: "Curious to know why we do not capitulate? Because we are Iranian."

What happens to India's Russian oil imports, \$500-bn U.S. import goal?

NEWS ANALYSIS

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan
NEW DELHI

The Indian trade delegation's last-minute postponement of trip to Washington to finalise an Interim Agreement with the U.S., and the U.S. Supreme Court's order on tariffs both have implications for India's imports from Russia as well as the U.S.

The Indian delegation was to be in the U.S. on February 23-25 to finalise the Interim Agreement, which Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said could be implemented between mid-March and early April. However, sources in the Commerce Ministry on February 22 said that the meeting will be rescheduled "at a mutually convenient date".

"The two sides are of the view that the proposed visit of the Indian chief negotiator and the team be scheduled after each side has had the time to evaluate the latest developments and its implications," the official said.

Mr. Goyal had earlier said India would be able to remove or lower tariffs for American imports only after a deal is signed. The U.S., on the other hand, could so far modify tariffs through executive orders.

No Russian oil threats

Trade and legal experts, said U.S. SC order meant President Trump no longer had any law enabling him to levy tariffs on India if it continues buying Russian oil in large quantities.

Without the tariff threat, India can once again reduce its purchase of the relatively expensive



Pressure tactics: The value of India's Russian oil imports fell to a 38-month low in December 2025. GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCK

American oil and sour Venezuelan oil.

"With reciprocal tariffs gone, the U.S. now does not have any law under which it can penalise India for buying Russian oil," Ajay Srivastava, founder of the Global Trade Research Initiative and former Director General of Foreign Trade said. "Even if we were to continue our oil imports from the U.S., which have nearly doubled in the last few months, we should refrain from buying oil from Venezuela."

It is important to note Mr. Trump had, on February 6 itself, removed the tariffs linked to India's import of Russian oil. As per Ramesh K. Vaidyanathan, managing partner at law firm BTG Advaya, tariffs could theoretically return, but they would need the backing of U.S. Congress.

Multiple mechanisms

"There are multiple legal mechanisms under which he can do this, but I think what is coming to the fore is that he cannot do these through executive orders and will have to do it under legislative backing for the purpose for which they are designed." In other words, if Mr. Trump can convince the U.S. Congress that ta-

riffs linked to Russian oil imports are necessary, then they could return.

An analysis by *The Hindu* found the value of India's crude oil imports from Russia fell to a 38-month low in December 2025 with Russia's share falling to less than a quarter from 34% a month ago. However, oil imports from the U.S. rose almost 31% over December 2024.

The analysis showed India imported oil from the U.S. at an average price of \$506.7 per tonne in December 2025 or almost 8% higher than the average price of Russian oil imported that month.

Uncertainty over deal

"India should follow a wait-and-watch approach and should see how other countries that have signed deals with the U.S. are reacting," said Pankaj Chadha, chairman of exporter body EEPIC India.

Mr. Srivastava says the decision to postpone the Indian team's visit to Washington could simply be an "administrative delay".

"There is a possibility that this delay in the Indian team's visit to the U.S. could have been at the request of the U.S. since their officials would be under

fire trying to figure out the way forward."

Impact on imports

A delayed Interim Agreement will also push back the date from which India will have to reduce tariffs for imports from the U.S. This can have a dual effect.

On the one hand, local manufacturers can breathe a bit easier since they will not have to compete with duty-free U.S. imports.

On the other several items India imports will continue to face import tariffs, thereby making them more expensive than they would have been had the deal gone through.

Mr. Goyal had previously told *The Hindu* there were several items such as oil, LPG, LNG, aircraft and parts, parts for data centres and quantum computing that India needs but does not manufacture, and so would need to import.

India's imports of electronic parts grew 117% year-on-year to about \$2.1 billion in April-December 2025. Similarly, the import of telecom instruments rose 25% and organic chemicals by almost 34%.

A joint statement said India intends to import \$500 billion worth of energy products, aircraft and aircraft parts, precious metals, technology products, and coking coal from the U.S. over the next 5 years.

The European Union (EU) also said the U.S. must provide more clarity before EU Parliament can ratify the U.S.-EU deal.

Meanwhile, Japanese officials said they won't immediately be revisiting the deal adding, the crux of Japan's deal with U.S. was on lowering auto-related tariffs, which stay unaffected by the U.S. SC decision.

25 troops killed as violence erupts in Mexico after Army kills cartel leader

Agence France-Presse
GUADALAJARA

Twenty-five Mexican troops died in clashes with cartel gunmen following a raid that led to the death of the country's most-wanted drug lord, a top security official said on Monday.

Nemesio 'El Mencho' Oseguera, leader of the Jalisco New Generation Cartel, was wounded in a clash with soldiers in the town of Tapalpa, in Jalisco State, and died while being flown to Mexico City, the Army said on Sunday. He had a \$15 million U.S. bounty on his head.

News of his death triggered cartel members



Conflict zone: A bus set on fire by organised crime groups in Zapopan, Mexico, on Sunday. AFP

across the country to block roads, torch vehicles and businesses, and send fearful residents into hiding.

Security Secretary Omar Garcia Harfuch said

that apart from the 25 National Guard members, a prison guard, a member of the state prosecutor's office, and 30 suspected members of Oseguera's cri-

iminal organisation were killed in the clashes.

The streets of the State capital Guadalajara were almost empty as stores, pharmacies and gas stations shut down. The violence spread to the neighbouring Michoacan, where the cartel has a presence, and gripped the resort city of Puerto Vallarta.

The Indian Embassy in Mexico on Monday issued an advisory to Indian nationals residing in the country, urging them to exercise caution and remain indoors amid escalating violence.

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● SIGNIFICANT PORTION OF INDIA'S COAL-BASED THERMAL FLEET UNABLE TO OPERATE BELOW 55% MINIMUM TECHNICAL LOAD

RE curtailment hits 23 GW during May-Nov on coal plants' limits

Pratyush Deep

New Delhi, February 23

INDIA'S GRID operator curtailed as much as 23 gigawatts (GW) of renewable energy (RE) between May and November last year to maintain grid safety and stability, as rising green power generation collided with the operational limits of coal-fired plants. The curtailment was largely necessitated because a significant portion of India's coal-based thermal fleet is unable to operate below 55% Minimum Technical Load (MTL), according to a report by a committee of the Central Electricity Authority (CEA).

MTL is the lowest stable gen-

eration level at which a thermal unit can safely operate without shutting down. With RE generation surging during daytime hours, a lower MTL is increasingly seen as essential to allow coal plants to back down further and accommodate green power.

The report observed that heavy RE curtailment shows the urgent need for deeper thermal flexibility. Enabling two-shift operation and operation of thermal power plants at lower technical minimum loads below 55% is crucial to avoid renewable curtailment and ensure secure grid management, it added.

'Duck curve' pressures, grid security concerns



Minimum Technical Load is the lowest stable generation level at which a thermal unit can safely operate without shutting down. AP FILE

GRID-India, which manages national electricity grid operations, told the CEA committee that the growing share of renewable energy is intensifying the "duck curve" phenomenon in the Indian power system. This is

marked by surplus renewable generation during mid-day hours and a steep evening ramp-up requirement of nearly 60 GW, posing operational challenges.

Flagging grid security risks, GRID-India said that in May last

year, system frequency remained above the Indian Electricity Grid Code operating band for nearly 20% of the time. Notably, the permissible band of system frequency is 49.900 Hz - 50.050 Hz.

Sustained high-frequency conditions persisted for almost four hours during solar generation hours, reflecting the strain of surplus supply. "On May 25, 2025, despite backing down the national thermal fleet to approximately 58% and curtailing nearly 10 GW of solar generation through TRAS emergency down dispatch, system frequency still rose to 50.48 Hz, posing a serious concern for safe and secure grid operation," the committee re-

port noted, citing GRID-India.

The data reveals that the highest renewable curtailment, over 23 GW, occurred on October 12, followed by over 16 GW on November 9. Curtailment exceeded 13 GW on September 28 and June 1, crossed 11 GW on May 31 and August 10, and was lowest at 4.6 GW on July 29. GRID-India informed the committee that the peak RE curtailment of 23 GW in October occurred during high solar generation hours, primarily due to the inability of several thermal power stations — particularly at the intra-state level — to operate at 55% MTL.

FULL REPORT ON

WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

UNDER NMP 1.0, 89% OF RS 6 LAKH CR TARGET ACHIEVED

FM launches NMP 2.0, sets eye on Rs 16.72 lakh cr of asset monetisation by 2030

Monetisation of highways, logistics parks, ropeways in focus

Siddharth Upasani

New Delhi, February 23

FINANCE MINISTER Nirmala Sitharaman Monday launched the National Monetisation Pipeline 2.0 (NMP 2.0), with proceeds from asset monetisation seen at Rs 16.72 lakh crore over the five years that started April 2025. Developed by the NITI Aayog, the Centre's top think-tank, the second phase of the pipeline is based on the mandate for 'Asset Monetisation Plan 2025-30' announced in the Union Budget for 2025-26 last year, but exceeds the figure of Rs 10 lakh crore mentioned therein.

The first phase of the pipeline — which aimed to unlock value from underutilised public infrastructure assets through transfer of assets for a limited period, divestment of portions of listed entities, securitisation of cash flows, or strategic commercial auctions — was launched in 2021. The NITI Aayog noted in its report on NMP 2.0 that NMP 1.0 had shown that monetisation projects had led to greater involvement of institutional investors such as pension and sovereign wealth funds in the development of India's infrastructure.

"Most of these investors have entered the Indian market by way of the larger asset monetisation projects, such as National Highways Authority of India's Toll-Operate-Transfer (TOT) projects and Infrastructure Investment Trust (InvIT). Further, the progress made under NMP 1.0 has led to the creation of Public InvITs, allowing citizens to directly participate in infrastructure development in India," the report said, noting that 89% of the NMP 1.0 target of Rs 6 lakh crore had been achieved over the four-year period covering FY22 to FY25. The second phase of the

NMP 1.0 and 2.0 - achievements and annual targets

(in Rs lakh cr)

YEAR	NMP 1.0	NMP 2.0
FY22-24	3.87	
FY25	1.43	
FY26		2.49
FY27		3.26
FY28		3.46
FY29		3.69
FY30		3.81

SOURCE: GOVERNMENT

pipeline covers the five years starting 2025-26, with the overall asset monetisation potential figure of Rs 16.72 lakh crore inclusive of private investments worth Rs 5.8 lakh crore, the government said. More than a quarter of the funds, or Rs 4.42 lakh crore, is expected to be raised from the monetisation of 21,300 kilometres of highways, 15 Multi-Modal Logistics Parks, and six ropeways.

The other sectors part of the pipeline and their estimated Total Monetisation Value are power (Rs 2.77 lakh crore), ports (Rs 2.64 lakh crore), railways (Rs 2.62 lakh crore), coal (Rs 2.16 lakh crore), mines (Rs 1 lakh crore), urban infrastructure (Rs 52,000 crore), civil aviation (Rs 27,500 crore), petroleum and natural gas (Rs 16,300 crore), warehousing and storage (Rs 10,000 crore), telecom (Rs 4,800 crore), and tourism (Rs 1,200 crore).

The above includes raising money through the listing of a minority stake in GAIL Gas, divestment of Airports Authority of India's holdings in one subsidiary and four joint-venture airports, developing select land parcels belonging to the major port authorities and the Food

The second phase of the pipeline is based on the mandate for 'Asset Monetisation Plan 2025-30' announced in the Union Budget for 2025-26 last year, but exceeds the figure of Rs 10 lakh crore mentioned therein

Corporation of India through the Public-Private Partnership (PPP) model, auctioning around 94 coal mines, and leasing out 38 land parcels of Bharat Sanchar Nigam Ltd (BSNL) on long-term basis, among others.

"NMP 2.0 aligns with the infrastructure development plans of the Viksit Bharat initiative," the NITI Aayog report said. "It aims to contribute in accelerated infrastructure development through upgrading and expansion of transportation networks, including highways, railways, ports and airports, along with other sectors. PPPs are an important mode of monetisation under NMP 2.0 and are expected to play a significant role by improving public sector efficiency and service quality, reducing public debt through capital recycling and attracting private sector investment," it added.

The government has estimated that the largest portion of the proceeds under NMP 2.0 will accrue to the Consolidated Fund of India, followed by direct investment (private), public sector undertakings or port authority allocation, and State Consolidated Fund.

I-T brings Rs 14,601-cr undisclosed offshore investments to tax

Follows *The Indian Express's* Panama, Paradise and Pandora Papers investigations into offshore tax havens

Ritu Sarin

New Delhi, February 23

DISCLOSING COLLECTIVE figures regarding this for the first time, the Central Board of Direct Taxes (CBDT) has said that Rs 14,601 crore worth offshore assets investigated by *The Indian Express* have been "brought to tax".

The reply to an RTI by the CBDT includes the Rs 686 crore "brought to tax" following the publication of the Pandora Papers in 2021.

The Panama Papers, Paradise Papers and Pandora Papers investigations, published in 2016, 2017 and 2021, respectively, were done over several years by *The Indian Express*, in collaboration with the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) and media partners from across the world.

While the CBDT had earlier provided figures of the "undisclosed tax detected" via the off-

• ₹14,601 cr 'BROUGHT TO TAX'



PANAMA PAPERS (2016)

Amount brought to tax

₹13,800 cr

Cases filed: **426**



PARADISE PAPERS (2017)

Amount brought to tax

₹115 cr

Cases filed: **494**



PANDORA PAPERS (2021)

Amount brought to tax

₹686 cr

Cases filed: **335**

Source: RTI replies

shore assets investigations, the RTI reply to *The Indian Express*, dated January 30, 2026, now discloses "the undisclosed investments brought to tax" as well.

The "brought to tax" figures were derived after the completion of assessment of each of the tax cases, dispatch of tax notices to the asses-

sees, and receipt of their replies. Hence, it goes beyond a calculation of what was undeclared, and is a step towards prosecu-

tion and penalty according to Indian tax laws. These figures are, however, still not those for taxes finally collected by the CBDT after detection of offshore assets.

As per the CBDT reply, while Rs 13,800 crore was "brought to tax" in the Panama Papers; the figure was Rs 115 crore for the Paradise Papers; and Rs 686 crore for the Pandora Papers.

Earlier RTI replies by the CBDT showed that 1,255 tax cases in all had been filed following the three global offshore

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

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AN EXPRESS RTI
APPLICATION

Tejas fleet undergoes extensive checks after ground accident

Amrita Nayak Dutta

New Delhi, February 23

THE INDIAN Air Force's (IAF) Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas fleet is undergoing extensive maintenance checks after one of the aircraft was involved in an accident at a forward air base earlier this month, sources told *The Indian Express*.

The accident took place when the aircraft overshot the runway during takeoff and slid into an adjoining mud patch. The pilot is learnt to have sustained injuries, and the airframe is learnt to have suffered damage. While there was no official word from the IAF on whether the airframe will be written off after the incident, sources said the Tejas fleet is undergoing comprehensive maintenance checks, which is part of the standard operating procedure after any such incident. A decision on whether to write off the aircraft is yet to be taken. There was no word on the extent of injuries suffered by the pilot, even as sources said whiplash injuries are common in such cases.

In a statement issued Monday, state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), which is the manufacturer of the aircraft, said there has been no reported "crash" of the LCA Tejas. "The event in question was a minor technical incident on the ground. LCA Tejas main-

tains one of the world's best safety records among contemporary fighter aircraft," it said. It also said that as a standard operating procedure, the issue is being analysed in depth, and HAL is working closely with the IAF for a speedy resolution. Both are part of the Board of Inquiry investigating the incident.

This is the third incident involving a Tejas aircraft. In November 2025, IAF pilot Wing Commander Namansh Syal was killed after a Tejas Mk1 fighter jet crashed during an aerial display at the Dubai Air Show. The first crash of a Tejas Mk1 aircraft was in March 2024 near Jaisalmer during a training sortie. The pilot had then ejected safely. The IAF has two operational squadrons of the Tejas Mk1, one each at Naliya in Gujarat and Sulur near Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu.

The IAF is scheduled to receive 180 Tejas Mk1A from HAL — delivery is yet to commence. The Tejas Mk1A, powered by General Electric F404 engines, has multiple upgrades over the Mk1 version. The deliveries have been delayed, and the IAF has agreed to receive the deliveries for the initial batches of the aircraft with some concessions.

The newly inaugurated production line in Nashik has the capacity to manufacture eight aircraft every year, and can be increased to 10. HAL is expected to produce 24 aircraft annually.