

# Centre signals early delimitation, women's quota for 2029 polls

**Nistula Hebbar**  
NEW DELHI

The Union government has indicated that it will bring an amendment Bill proposing a delimitation exercise based on the 2011 Census to ensure the implementation of the Women's Reservation Act, 2023, ahead of the 2029 Lok Sabha election.

Under the proposed amendments, the number of Lok Sabha seats will increase from 543 to 816, with 273 seats, 33%, reserved for women. The amendments could be brought in the ongoing Budget Session or in a Special Session called for the purpose.

## States' concern

Though the draft of the amendments are yet to be circulated, it is understood by sources that care would be taken so that the existing proportion of seats will



The Bill will enable delimitation based on the 2011 Census to implement the 2023 quota Act.

be maintained for all States, amid concerns that States that had showed success in population control programmes would lose out on representation *vis a vis* more populous States. Southern States had in particular expressed this concern. Overall, each State is likely to see a 50% rise in seats, but the pro rata basis would be maintained.

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# Women's quota: Centre mulls early delimitation

As per Article 82 of the Constitution, the next delimitation exercise was to be done based on the first Census after 2026, but these amendments could mean that the 2011 Census data will be applied and the remaking of constituencies can proceed without the current Census exercise being concluded. The proposals may include the expansion of State Assemblies as well.

The Act originally passed in September 2023 envisaged the conduct of the Decadal Census, followed by delimitation of seats. The 2021 Decadal Census, which got delayed because of COVID, beginning next month. As per the current timelines, implementation of the Act could be pushed beyond 2030. However, by bringing in fresh amendments, the government is now seeking to bring forward the implementation of the Act.

Government managers, including Union Home Minister Amit Shah, met with leaders of several Opposition parties on Monday, including the Nationalist Congress Party (SP)'s Supriya Sule, YSR Congress Party's P.V. Midhun Reddy, the All India Majlis-e-Ittehadul Muslimeen's Asaduddin Owaisi and the Shiv Sena (UBT)'s Arvind Sawant, among others. Trinamool Congress and the Left skipped the meeting.

A separate meeting of NDA partners was held later on Monday evening. The government managers had consulted the Congress and Samajwadi Party earlier. The Congress will be holding a meeting of Opposition floor leaders on Tuesday morning to go through the proposals put forward by the government.

"The amendments will require a two-thirds majority of both Houses, which is why extensive consultations are being held with the Opposition...", said a government source.

The Women's Reservation Act, 2023, known as the Constitution (106th Amendment) Act, 2023, mandates a 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies.

# Per capita income of Delhi to grow at 7.09%: Economic Survey

Only about 57% of ₹59,300 cr. allocated for schemes, projects in last year's budget spent as of March 18: report; it adds that the number of hospital beds in the city according to its population continues to be lower than international standards

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

The per capita income of Delhi is estimated to grow at 7.09% to ₹3,05,433 in 2025-26 (at constant prices) compared to the previous year, according to the Economic Survey of Delhi 2025-26 tabled by Chief Minister Rekha Gupta in the Assembly on Monday.

Ms. Gupta said the Economic Survey serves as clear evidence of the national capital's "rapidly growing economy, robust infrastructure, and pro-people welfare policies".

This is the first such survey presented by the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government as the report was not presented last year during the Budget Session by the Chief Minister, who also holds the Finance portfolio.

According to the report, though the BJP government increased last year's budget to a record ₹1 lakh crore, the actual amount spent could be much lesser. Of the total budget outlay, ₹59,300 crore was set aside for schemes, programmes, and projects. Of this, only ₹33,805 crore (57.01%) was spent as of March 18, the report stated, adding that the



The GSDP of the national capital is expected to grow at 8.53% in 2025-26. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

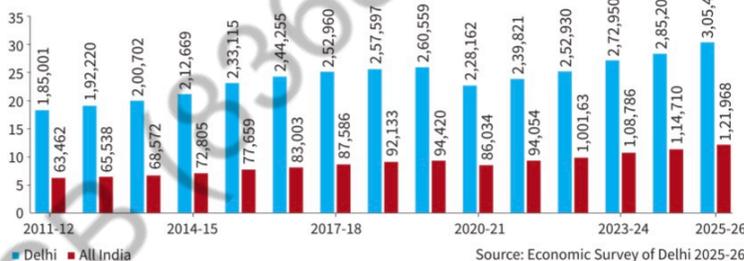
per capita income at constant prices is estimated at ₹2,85,207 in 2024-25 as compared to ₹2,72,950 in 2023-24.

It estimated the city's per capita income (at constant prices) to be 2.5 times higher than the national average in 2025-26.

The Gross State Domestic Product (GSDP) of the national capital is expected to grow at 8.53% to ₹7,76,479 crore in 2025-26 (at constant prices), according to the report. "Government of NCT (National Capital Territory) of Delhi is budgeted to have a fiscal deficit of ₹13,703 crore in BE (budget estimates) 2025-26, which is mainly on account of increase of more

## On the growth path

The city's per capita income (at constant prices) has been steadily rising year-on-year, except for a dip due to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020-21, according to data from the Economic Survey of Delhi (in ₹)



than double (145%) in capital expenditure over 2024-25," the report stated.

### 'Within limits'

The fiscal deficit is within accepted limits of 3% of GSDP, the report said. Fiscal deficit of ₹13,702.95 crore was mentioned in last year's BE. A revised estimate (RE) is likely to be part of the 2026-27 budget to be presented by the Chief Minister on Tuesday.

However, experts said this is not a major cause of worry because Delhi's debt-to-GSDP ratio is the lowest in the country, according to RBI data. A lower value indicates better financial health, implying that Delhi can afford to have a slightly

higher fiscal deficit.

As per the survey, the city's economy continued to be predominantly driven by the service sector, with its share of contribution to Gross State Value Added (at current prices) estimated at 86.32% in 2025-26.

It also noted that the number of hospital beds in Delhi according to its population continues to be lower than international standards. "According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the recommended bed population ratio is 5 beds per a population of 1,000. However, the bed population ratio in Delhi in 2025-26 has remained at 2.84, which is much below the WHO norm," it stated.

This figure has dipped compared with previous years - 2.86 in 2016-17, 2.99 in 2017-18, and 2.96 in 2018-19. However, the number of beds in Delhi government hospitals has steadily increased: 14,330 on December 31, 2023; 14,380 on December 31, 2024; and 15,659 on December 31, 2025.

### Water connections

About 93.5% households in the city now have access to piped water supply, the report added. "The total number of motor vehicles on the road in NCT of Delhi as of March 19, 2026 is 87.61 lakh, showing an increase by 7.93% compared to 2024-25," it stated.

# Will Indian refiners buy Iranian crude oil after US sanctions waiver?

Sukalp Sharma

New Delhi, March 23

INDIAN REFINERS will decide on buying Iranian crude oil based on techno-commercial feasibility, a senior Petroleum Ministry official said on Monday.

Amid the ongoing war in West Asia, the US on Saturday suspended for a month the sanctions on Iranian crude already loaded on tankers in a bid to allow as many barrels of oil as possible to flow into the international market to improve the global oil supply situation and curb spiralling crude oil prices.

“Regarding purchasing crude from some particular country, I will like to say that these are all techno-commercial

decisions taken by the oil marketing companies,” said Petroleum Ministry Joint Secretary Sujata Sharma in response to a question on whether Indian refiners will resume buying Iranian oil, last imported into India back in 2019.

According to the general licence issued by the Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) of the US Department of the Treasury on Saturday, transactions related to the sale, delivery, or offloading of crude oil and petroleum products of Iranian origin — loaded on any vessel, including tankers sanctioned by the US, as of 12:01 eastern daylight time (9:31 am India time) on March 20 — are authorised till April 19.

## E. EXPLAINED

### Payment poser

IT IS not clear how new potential buyers of Iranian crude, including India, will make payments for their purchase. Iran and its banks remain out of SWIFT — the main messaging network through which international payments are initiated. Earlier, a mechanism for payments in Euros existed, but that channel also shut down following sanctions on Tehran by the first Donald Trump administration.

It is, however, not clear how new potential buyers of Iranian crude, including India, will make payments for their purchase. This is because Iran and its banks remain out of the Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) — the main messaging network through which international payments are initiated.

For years now, over 90% of Iranian oil exports have been going to one country — China.

Technically, this move will not really increase the global oil supply — Iranian oil was already part of it with China’s purchases — but will enable other countries also to buy Tehran’s oil. On its part, Iran has claimed that it currently has no floating crude

or surplus available for international buyers. According to industry experts, shipping data shows that around 140-170 million barrels of Iranian oil is on water, including volumes that are already sold and those that are yet to be sold.

Nonetheless, industry analysts say that the US move could see Indian refiners capitalise on the opportunity. Amid the tight global supply situation, every barrel counts. Vessel movement through the Strait of Hormuz has effectively been halted due to the conflict that began on February 28. The Strait accounts for one-fifth of global oil and LNG flow. Around 2.5-2.7 million barrels per day (bpd) of India’s crude imports — around half of the

overall oil imports — have transited the Strait in recent months, while the longer-term average is around 40%.

“India could emerge as a key demand centre to watch, alongside Chinese buyers and other Asian countries. Historically, India was a major buyer of Iranian crude, importing significant volumes of light and heavy (crude) grades due to strong refinery compatibility and favourable commercial terms. Following sanction tightening in 2018, imports ceased from May 2019, with volumes replaced by Middle Eastern, US and other grades,” said Sumit Ritolia, lead research analyst, refining and modeling, at Kpler, a commodity market analytics firm.

# Impact of West Asia war likely to be felt for long time, PM tells Lok Sabha

Country should be prepared and united, says Modi as he condemns attacks on commercial ships and obstruction of Strait of Hormuz; India has 5.3 million tonnes of petrol reserves, and govt. is working towards increasing this to 6.5 million tonnes

**Sandeep Phukan**  
NEW DELHI

**T**he situation in West Asia is “deeply concerning”, and the impact of the war is likely to be felt for a long time, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Monday, while briefing the Lok Sabha on the steps taken by his government to secure India’s energy needs.

The country should be prepared and united, Mr. Modi said, urging all members to ensure the Indian Parliament sends out a “united and unanimous voice on the issue”.

The government should hold a proper discussion so that other members can put forth their views, Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi Vadra said after the Prime Minister’s speech.

Earlier, making a statement in the Lok Sabha, Mr. Modi said he had spoken to the heads of most West



Every Indian in the war-affected region is being given every possible help, Narendra Modi informed in Parliament on Monday. SANSAD TV

Asian countries, all of whom had assured the safety of Indians.

“India has always raised its voice for peace in the interest of humanity. Dialogue and diplomacy are the solutions to this problem. Our efforts are aimed at reducing tensions and ending this conflict,” Mr. Modi said, amid the thumping of desks by ruling party members.

“I myself have spoken with all relevant leaders in West Asia. I have urged

them to reduce tensions and end the conflict. India has opposed attacks on civilians, energy, and transport-related infrastructure. Attacks on commercial ships and obstruction in international waterways like the Strait of Hormuz are unacceptable. Through diplomacy, India is continuously working to ensure safe passage for Indian ships even in this war environment,” he added.

The government was in constant touch with sup-

pliers from various countries to ensure that oil and gas supplies continued from wherever possible, he said, addressing apprehensions of fuel shortages. All power plants in the country have adequate stocks of coal, he added.

India has 5.3 million tonnes of strategic petroleum reserves, and the government was working towards increasing this to 6.5 million tonnes, he told the House. “The reserves maintained by our oil companies are separate. In the past 11 years, our refining capacity has also increased significantly,” Mr. Modi added.

The country’s farmers had filled the food grain reserves, so India is well prepared in terms of food security, he said, speaking on the war’s impact on agriculture.

“We are also making efforts to ensure that kharif sowing takes place proper-

ly. For this, the government has made adequate arrangements for fertilizers to deal with any emergency...,” he said.

As summer has begun in India, the demand for electricity has increased, but all power plants in the country have adequate stocks of coal, he said.

West Asia is important to India as nearly one crore Indians live and work in the Gulf countries, the Prime Minister added.

Every Indian in the war-affected region was being given every possible help, and more than 3.75 lakh Indians, including 1,000 people from war-torn Iran, had been safely evacuated, Mr. Modi said.

However, several lives had been lost, and some people had been injured during the conflict, the Prime Minister said, adding that their families were being given the necessary help.

# Greater cooperation needed between India and Russia, says Jaishankar

**Kallol Bhattacharjee**

NEW DELHI

Against the backdrop of the war in West Asia, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Monday said the “evolving multipolar order” calls for “greater cooperation” between India and Russia both bilaterally as well as multilaterally through groupings such as BRICS, SCO, G-20, and the United Nations.

Mr. Jaishankar addressed a conference on India-Russia relations through video link and said Delhi-Moscow relations over the past decades helped in advancing “regional and global peace” and stability.

Speaking at the same event, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said India-Russia ties had “major significance” against the backdrop of the U.S.-Israel war on Iran and said



Foreign Minister S. Jaishankar with Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov. FILE PHOTO

Russia was “looking forward” to hosting Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the India-Russia annual summit, 2026.

“India, during its BRICS chairmanship with a ‘humanity first’ and ‘people-centric’ approach looks forward to closely working with Russia to address shared challenges in a balanced and inclusive manner,” Mr. Jaishankar said at

the conference titled “India and Russia: Towards a New Bilateral Agenda”.

## Special ties

Talking about the “special and privileged strategic partnership” between India and Russia, Mr. Jaishankar said the relationship continued to “deepen” and reminded that during President Vladimir Putin’s December 2025 visit to New Delhi, the two sides signed multiple agreements on areas such as mobility of skilled professionals, health and food safety, maritime cooperation, fertilizers, customs, and commerce.

“Over decades, our mutually beneficial cooperation has advanced regional and global peace, stability and progress,” said Mr. Jaishankar. He expressed India’s support for the Eurasian Economic Union

Free Trade Agreement about which the two sides had expressed readiness during Mr. Putin’s last visit to India. He described Russia as the “foremost partner” of India in the field of civil nuclear energy and referred to the Kudankulam nuclear project as a “stellar example”.

Mr. Lavrov said India “steadfastly pursues strategic autonomy” in the current world scenario. He said that around 96% of India-Russia trade was now conducted in national currencies and expressed Russian support for India’s BRICS chairship in 2026.

He further said that bilateral relation between the two sides had “major significance” against the backdrop of the “acute military and political crisis in the Persian Gulf provoked by the United States and Israel”.

# Two more Indian vessels carrying 93,000 tonnes of LPG cross Strait of Hormuz

**M. Kalyanaraman**

CHENNAI

Two Indian-flagged LPG carriers, *Jag Vasant* and *Pine Gas*, have transited through the Strait of Hormuz on Monday evening. They are together carrying nearly 93,000 tonnes of LPG, as per the inter-Ministerial briefing held on Monday. In addition, a flurry of LPG import shipments that came in the past few days and scheduled for the upcoming week may have eased the cooking gas crisis somewhat.

In a sign of the easing crisis, the government had announced a 20% increase in commercial LPG allocations, taking it to 50% of pre-war levels even while saying the LPG situation continues to be worrisome.

*Jag Vasant* and *Pine Gas*, owned by Great Eastern Shipping and Seven Island Shipping respectively, are likely to reach Indian ports between March 26 and 28.

The government had said that domestic LPG production had increased by 40%, which would mean an additional 18,000 tonnes pro-



People in a queue with empty LPG cooking gas cylinders to avail refilled ones in Prayagraj.

duction a day, bringing down the approximate daily import requirement from 55,000 tonnes. At normal times, India would need at least one Very Large Gas Carrier of some 55,000 tonnes to dock at one of its ports every day and discharge the cargo.

Two foreign-owned and foreign-flagged LPG carriers, *Hellas Gladiator* and *Gas Jupiter*, each carrying 24,000 tonnes are expected to reach Visakhapatnam on March 30.

*Hellas Gladiator* had loaded in Netherlands. Port sources say that this shipment is part of the strategic decision to source LPG from European markets to bypass the ongoing supply constraints in West

Asia. *Gas Jupiter* loaded its cargo in the U.S.

The cavern project of SA-LPG at Visakhapatnam, which is one of India's two long-term LPG storage locations, had handled two ships carrying LPG after February 28. Each ship carried and unloaded about 24,000 tonnes. The total capacity of the cavern is 60,000 tonnes and is one of two long-term LPG storage facilities in India.

*Globe Polaris*, carrying cargo from Houston, Texas, is expected to reach Sandhead, Kolkata, on March 24, according to an official in Haldia port.

It will berth the following day and discharge more than 20,000 tonnes in all.

*BW Birch*, carrying LPG taken from *Nanda Devi* in Vadinar Port in Gujarat through ship-to-ship transfer, is expected to dock at Haldia on March 29 and discharge cargo.

*Gas Jupiter* is also expected on April 3 at Haldia. (Inputs from Sumit Bhattacharjee, Sunita Sekar, Anil Kumar Sastri, Satyasundar Barik, Dhinesh Kallungal and Lalatendu Mishra)

ISLAMABAD POSSIBLE VENUE FOR TALKS: FINANCIAL TIMES

# Munir speaks to Trump, Pak bid to play 'lead mediator' on Iran: Report

**Shubhajit Roy**

*New Delhi, March 23*

PAKISTAN IS positioning itself as the "lead mediator" trying to "broker an end" to the US-Israel war against Iran, with Pakistan's Army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir speaking to US President Donald Trump Sunday, UK-based daily *Financial Times* reported Monday.

Pakistan has pitched Islamabad as a possible venue for talks as early as this week involving senior figures from the Trump administration and Iran, the report said.

Pakistan's Prime Minister



Pakistan's Army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir. AP FILE

Muhammad Shehbaz Sharif also held talks with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian Monday.

Pakistan's leading English daily, *Dawn*, also reported that Pakistan, along with Turkiye

and Egypt, is engaged in "active back-channel diplomacy" to "bridge the gap between" the US and Iran, an official confirmed to the newspaper Monday.

The official said that this also involved US Special Envoy to the Middle East Steve Witkoff and Iran Foreign Minister

Abbas Araghchi. A "strategic synergy" between Ankara, Cairo and Islamabad had established a "vital diplomatic conduit, demonstrating that regional cooperation is the most effective antidote to escalation," the *Dawn* report said.

The conversation between

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# Pak bid to play 'lead mediator' on Iran: Report

the Pakistani and Iranian leaders came at around the same time as Trump announced that he was delaying his threat to "obliterate" Iran's power plants after "very good and productive" conversations with Tehran to end the war.

The White House declined to elaborate on Trump's negotiations. "These are sensitive diplomatic discussions and the United States will not negotiate through the news media," the White House said, according to *FT*.

Turkey, which was involved in mediation efforts before the war, has also been talking to Iranian officials and Witkoff in an attempt to secure a brief ceasefire and open space for negotiations.

Pakistan's Foreign Minister Muhammad Ishaq Dar held talks with his Turkish counter-

part Hakan Fidan Monday. Egypt's foreign minister Badr Abdelatty also spoke with his Iranian and Pakistani counterparts Sunday, as well as with Witkoff and Qatar's foreign minister.

Iran's foreign ministry denied any direct negotiations with the US since the start of the war, but said that some regional states were involved in mediation efforts.

"Over the past few days, messages were received via certain friendly states conveying the US request for negotiations to end the war," the foreign ministry's spokesperson told official news agency IRNA.

"Appropriate responses were given (to those initiatives) in accordance with the country's fundamental positions." The spokesperson insisted that there

had been no changes to Iran's positions regarding the situation at the Strait of Hormuz or Tehran's conditions for ending the war, according to IRNA.

The *FT* report said that senior Pakistani officials were "backchanneling communications" between Tehran and Witkoff and Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and envoy. Sharif has spoken to Pezeshkian multiple times since the war started. "While sharing with the Iranian President the diplomatic outreach efforts of Pakistan's leadership, the prime minister assured the Iranian leadership that Pakistan would continue to play a constructive role in facilitating peace," Pakistan said in a readout of their conversation on Monday.

Dar told Arab counterparts at a meeting in Riyadh last week

that Islamabad was mediating between the US and Iran, but did not provide details, a diplomat said.

Pakistan, which does not host any American bases, is one of the few US allies in the neighbourhood that has been spared Tehran's missiles and drones. That fact has helped shore it up as a neutral arbiter to Iran and the US, according to three people familiar with the matter, the *FT* report said.

Pakistan has the second-largest Shia Muslim population after Iran. "Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei namechecked Pakistan in a written message...to mark the start of the Iranian new year last week, saying he had a special feeling towards the people of Pakistan," the *FT* report said.

# IEA chief warns oil shock worse than 1970s crises

**Associated Press**

WELLINGTON

The head of the International Energy Agency (IEA) said on Monday that the global economy faces a “major, major threat” because of the Iran war.

“No country will be immune to the effects of this crisis if it continues to go in this direction,” Fatih Birol said at Australia’s National Press Club in Canberra on Monday.

The crisis in West Asia, he said, has had a worse impact on oil than the two oil shocks of the 1970s

combined, and a worse effect on gas than the Russia-Ukraine war.

One major fear is that the war could knock out oil and gas production in West Asia for a long time, which would mean high prices could last a while and cause inflation to rip higher around the world. The U.S. stock market has a history of bouncing back relatively quickly from past conflicts in West Asia and elsewhere, as long as oil prices do not stay too high for too long.

The oil crises of 1973 and 1979, he said, lost to-



Fatih Birol

gether 10 million barrels per day, causing “major economic problems around the world, the recessions. And today, only as of today, we lost 11 mil-

lion barrels per day – so more than two major oil shocks put together.”

## Growing shortage

After Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, he said, the gas markets, especially in Europe, “lost about 75 billion cubic meters, 75BCM. And as of now, as a result of this crisis, we lost about 140BCM, almost twice (as much).”

Mr. Birol said 40 energy assets in nine countries across the region were “severely or very severely damaged.”

“Some of the vital arter-

ies of the global economy, such as petrochemical, such as fertilizers, such as sulfur, such as helium – their trade is all interrupted, which would have serious consequences for the global economy,” he said.

He said the International Energy Agency, “in order to comfort the markets,” earlier released 400 million barrels of oil, “which is historic. We have never released so much oil to the markets. ... The single most important solution to this problem is opening up the Hormuz Strait as things stand now.”

# Trump pauses strikes on Iran, says deal is possible

Attacks on power infrastructure in Iran will be 'postponed' for five days, says U.S. President; major 'points of agreement' reached in 'good and productive talks,' he says; Iran rejects Trump's claims

**Stanly Johny**

**U**.S. President Donald Trump, who issued a 48-hour ultimatum to Iran on Saturday to reopen the Strait of Hormuz or face strikes on its power infrastructure, said on Monday that he would postpone the attacks for five days after "very good and productive" talks with Tehran.

"I am please[d] to report that the United States of America and the country of Iran have had, over the last two days, very good and productive conversations regarding a complete and total resolution of our hostilities in the Middle East," Mr. Trump wrote in a social media post.

Later in Washington, Mr. Trump told pressper-



**Taking hits:** A residential building damaged by a strike, amid the U.S.-Israeli conflict with Iran, in Tehran on Monday. REUTERS

sons that the Islamic Republic and the U.S. had "very, very strong talks" and there were "major points of agreement" between the two countries with a "real possibility of making a deal".

Iranian Parliament Speaker Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf, however, de-

nied negotiations with the U.S., saying that "fake news is intended to... escape the quagmire in which America and Israel are trapped".

Iranian Foreign Ministry also denied Mr. Trump's claims while the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) said it

## Two more Indian vessels cross Strait of Hormuz

**CHENNAI**

Two Indian-flagged LPG carriers, *Jag Vasant* and *Pine Gas*, have transited through the Strait of Hormuz on Monday evening. They are together carrying nearly 93,000 tonne of LPG, as per the inter-Ministerial briefing held on Monday. » **PAGE 12**

launched a new wave of missile and drone attacks targeting the U.S. Fifth Fleet in Bahrain and U.S. bases in other West Asian countries.

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**LONG-TERM IMPACT: PM**

» **PAGE 12**

# Trump pauses strikes on Iran, says deal is possible

“Our people demand the complete and humiliating punishment of the aggressors. All officials stand firmly behind their Leader and people until this goal is achieved”, the Iranian Speaker said in a social media post on Monday.

In recent days, friendly countries sent messages indicating that the U.S. had requested talks to end the war, but Iran had not responded, Iran’s state news agency *IRNA* quoted its Foreign Ministry spokesperson as saying. “Yes, there have been initiatives from regional countries to reduce tensions, and our response to all of them is clear: we are not the party that started this war, and all such requests should be directed to Washington,” state-run *Mizan* agency cited the Foreign Ministry.

## ‘Constructive conversations’

“Based on the tenor and tone of these in-depth, detailed, and constructive conversations, which [which] will continue throughout the week, I have instructed the Department of War to postpone any and all military strikes against Iranian power plants and energy infrastructure for a five day period, subject to the success of the ongoing meetings and discussions,” Mr. Trump wrote in his post.

“All I am saying is, we are in the throes of a real possibility of making a deal... We are dealing with the man who I believe is the most respected and the leader,” Mr. Trump said in Washington, without saying who the U.S. was speaking with but added that it was not the Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei. “Look at Venezuela, how well that’s working out... Maybe we find somebody like that in Iran,” he said, adding that the U.S. wants Iran to abandon any nuclear ambitions and give up its enriched uranium stockpiles.

# North Korea's Kim reappointed as President of state affairs: state media

**Agence France-Presse**

SEOUL

North Korea's rubber-stamp legislature has re-elected Kim Jong-un as President of state affairs, state media reported on Monday.

Mr. Kim's reappointment as head of the authoritarian nation's highest policy-making and governing body, the State Affairs Commission, was announced by KCNA.

Critics argue that elections in North Korea are pre-determined and designed to give the country's leadership a veneer of democratic legitimacy.

"The Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK re-elected Comrade Kim Jong-un as President of the State Affairs of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea at the First Session, the first state affairs activity of its 15th term, on March 22," KCNA reported.

The report said the deci-



**Hall of power:** The first session of the 15th Supreme People's Assembly in progress at Mansudae Assembly Hall in Pyongyang. AFP

sion to re-elect Mr. Kim to the "top post" reflected "the unanimous will and desire of all the Korean people".

Mr. Kim is the third-generation ruler of the nuclear-armed state founded by his grandfather Kim Il-Sung in 1948. He has ruled the country since his father's death in 2011.

The election is a "highly choreographed event with a pre-determined outcome", said Lee Horyung of the Korea Institute for

Defense Analyses.

## 'Anachronistic' Japan

Meanwhile, Kim Yo-Jong, the powerful sister of the North Korean leader, said on Monday a summit between her brother and Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi will not happen if Japan sticks to "its anachronistic" approach.

Ms. Kim Yo-Jong's statement came after Ms. Takaichi told reporters last week that she had informed U.S. President Donald Trump

during a summit in Washington that she had "a very strong desire" to meet Mr. Kim.

"But this is not the one that comes true, as wanted or decided by Japan," Ms. Kim Yo-Jong said. "In order for the meet, Japan should first be determined to break with its anachronistic practice and habit."

Ms. Kim Yo-Jong, who is also a senior official, did not explicitly say what Japan's "anachronistic practice and habit" are.

However, in 2024, she said in a statement that North Korea's acceptance of a reported offer for a meeting by one of Ms. Takaichi's predecessors would depend on Japan tolerating the North's nuclear weapons programme and ignoring its past abductions of Japanese nationals.

The meeting eventually did not occur.

*(With inputs from Associated Press)*