

India joins 60 nations at UK meeting calling for opening Strait of Hormuz

Shubhajit Roy

New Delhi, April 2

WITH THE shipping disruption in the Strait of Hormuz impacting energy supplies to India, Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri joined a meeting of more than 60 countries, convened Thursday by the UK, on reopening the crucial waterway where he underlined the principles of “freedom of navigation” and “unimpeded transit”.

Misri’s remarks found an

echo in the Chair’s statement following the meeting. The statement issued by the British government said the partners called for the “immediate and unconditional reopening” of the Strait and respect for the “fundamental principles of freedom of navigation and the law of the sea”.

The statement said “Iran’s closure of the Strait of Hormuz is a direct threat to global prosperity” and “Iran is trying to hold the global economy

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UK meet

hostage” and “must not prevail”.

Ahead of the meeting, British PM Keir Starmer said the virtual meeting, chaired by British Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper, would “assess all viable diplomatic and political measures we can take to restore freedom of navigation, guarantee the safety of trapped ships and seafarers and to resume the movement of vital commodities”.

The *Associated Press*, reporting from London, said Thursday’s meeting is considered a first step, to be followed by “working-level meetings” of officials to hammer out details. It quoted Starmer saying resuming shipping “will not be easy,” and will require “a united front of military strength and diplomatic activity” alongside partnership with the maritime industry.

In a statement, the Ministry of External Affairs said, “Foreign Secretary (Misri) represented India at a meeting convened by the UK Foreign Secretary on the situation in West Asia. More

than 60 countries participated in the meeting.” The MEA statement said, “Foreign Secretary (Misri) noted the importance of principles of freedom of navigation and unimpeded transit through international waterways”.

He also conveyed the impact on India’s energy security and the toll on Indian seafarers due to the ongoing conflict between US-Israel and Iran.

“He (Misri) emphasised the impact of the crisis on India’s energy security and the fact that India remains the only country to have lost mariners in attacks on merchant shipping in the Gulf,” the MEA said. Three Indian seafarers have been killed and one is missing.

A total of 18 Indian-flagged vessels with 485 Indian seafarers continue to remain in the western Persian Gulf region.

The MEA statement said Misri also “underlined that the way out of the crisis consisted of de-escalation and a return to the path of diplomacy and dialogue among all parties concerned”.

The Strait of Hormuz is the key channel through which 20% of global energy supply passes in

large carriers. The government has been working with different partners and Iran on reopening the Strait of Hormuz.

The Chair’s statement said the meeting discussed a number of areas of possible collective, co-ordinated, action”, and listed four such measures:

- “Increase international diplomatic pressure, including through the UN, to send clear and co-ordinated messages to Iran to permit unimpeded transit passage through Strait of Hormuz and to comprehensively reject imposition of tolls on vessels which seek to pass through.”

- “Explore co-ordinated economic and political measures, such as sanctions, to bear down on Iran if Strait remains closed.”

- “Work together with the International Maritime Organisation to secure the release of thousands of ships and sailors trapped in the Strait.”

- “Joint arrangements to support greater market and operational confidence. This includes working with shipping operators and industry bodies to ensure timely information sharing.”

Military supplies from Israel may be delayed, but have enough for a year: HAL CMD

Amrita Nayak Dutta
New Delhi, April 2

MILITARY SUPPLIES from Israel may experience delays due to the ongoing conflict with Iran, but India has sufficient stocks to meet its needs for the current year, said D K Sunil, Chairman and Managing Director of Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, on Thursday.

He said he is hopeful that the issue will be addressed once the war ends. He also said drawing from the lessons of the ongoing conflict, HAL has put its weight behind CATS Warrior — a low-observable unmanned combat aerial vehicle — that it is developing.

“What has happened is, because of the bombardment from Iran, the plants (in Israel) have shut down, so there will be a delay. We have enough stocks for the current year; I hope that it (Israel) will catch up. Once this war peters out, things will come back to normal,” Sunil told *The Indian Express* on the sidelines of a media interaction.

Over the last decade, India has purchased a range of military equipment and weapons from Israel including missiles, unmanned aerial vehicles, sensors and radars, air defence systems and small arms.

For the indigenous fighter jet Tejas, manufactured by HAL, the radars, electronic warfare suite and the helmet-mounted displays are procured from Israel. “So, there may be a delay, but generally, what we have seen is that they catch up. Initially, when this war started, their plants shut down. We had our people there working with them, but once it became serious, they asked us to withdraw our people and we called them back,” he said. “So, we will just wait and watch,” he added.

Asked about the lesson and trends emerging from the ongoing war influencing future military projects of HAL, Sunil told *The Indian Express* that the CATS Warrior is essentially its

foray into the area. “These will be UCAVs, which can carry weapons and will be remotely piloted. We are focusing on that area. Today, we are building a 3-tonne prototype, and then this will gradually increase in class, from 3 tonne to five and seven tonne.”

The CATS Warrior, he said, is a self-funded project. “We have done the detailed design. The parts are under manufacture, and the fuselage is also under manufacture, so it is in the prototyping stage,” he told *The Indian Express*.

Responding to questions from the media over the delivery of the Tejas Mk 1A jets, which have been significantly delayed, their current status, and the possible revised timeline for delivery to the Indian Air Force, Sunil said five jets are ready with the engines, and the sixth engine from GE Aerospace is on its way.

He said that GE assured HAL that 20 engines would be delivered between June and December.

It is learnt that the contract with GE includes a provision stating that if there is a delay in the delivery of F-404 engines for the Light Combat Aircraft, liquidated damages will be imposed on GE and accordingly, the cost is being imposed as per the contract. Sunil said a major review of the status of the LCA Mk 1A delivery is expected with the IAF next month, which will help finalise the delivery timelines.

Asked when the existing squadrons of LCA Tejas would be operational — they underwent extensive maintenance checks following one of the aircraft being involved in an accident at a forward air base last month — he said the jets are set to fly again next week onwards as a flaw detected in the braking software has been fixed.

Asked about possible plans to get Russian Su-57 fighter jets for the IAF, he said presentations have been made to the Air Force team regarding the capabilities of the aircraft.

India's defence exports rose by 62.66% in '25-26 to reach all-time high of Rs 38,424 cr

Amrita Nayak Dutta

New Delhi, April 2

DEFENCE EXPORTS have reached an all-time high of Rs 38,424 crore in the financial year 2025-26, marking an increase of Rs 14,802 crore (62.66%) over the previous fiscal year's figure of Rs 23,622 crore, in which the Defence Public Sector Undertakings (DPSUs) and the private sector have contributed 54.84% and 45.16% respectively, the Defence Ministry said on Thursday.

In a statement, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) said that the DPSUs' exports surged by 151% compared to the previous year while private firms recorded an increase of 14%.

"In terms of value of con-

tribution, the private sector accounted for Rs 17,353 crore worth of defence exports, while DPSUs contributed Rs 21,071 crore. Their respective figures in the previous financial year stood at Rs 15,233 crore and Rs 8,389 crore (respectively)," it said, adding that this figure indicates an increase by around three times in the last five years.

The ministry said the sharp rise highlights the increasing global acceptance of Indian made defence products and the sector's growing integration with the international supply chains.

It stated that aside from being a successful global partner for systems/sub-systems, India is exporting defence equipment to more than 80 countries as of FY 2025-26,

adding that the number of exporters went up to 145 from 128 – a 13.3% rise from the previous fiscal.

It also highlighted the Department of Defence Production has streamlined defence export regulatory processes with a revamped online portal and simplified Standard Operation Procedure for authorisations.

Commending the efforts of all stakeholders in this achievement, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, in a post on X, said that with DPSUs contributing 54.84% and private industry 45.16%, this milestone showcases the power of a collaborative and self-reliant defence ecosystem.

He also noted that this significant jump of Rs 14,802 crore

in defence exports reflects the growing global trust in India's indigenous capabilities and advanced manufacturing strength.

On Wednesday, the Defence Ministry said that it has fully utilised its capital outlay of Rs 1.86 lakh crore for defence services provided for the FY 2025-26 at the Revised Estimates stage.

In the FY 2025-26, AoN (Acceptance of Necessity) for 109 proposals amounting Rs 6.81 lakh crore has been accorded by MoD, compared to 56 proposals worth Rs 1.76 lakh crore approved in FY 2024-25. Also, capital procurement contracts for a total 503 proposals amounting Rs 2.28 lakh crore were signed by MoD in FY 2025-26, it said.

GE delivers sixth engine for Tejas LCA-Mk1A fighter jets

Engine manufacturer General Electric (GE) Aerospace on April 2 announced delivery of the sixth of the F404-IN20 engine to Hindustan Aeronautics Ltd. (HAL) for the Tejas Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Mk1A. GE Aerospace is to deliver 99 F404-IN20 engines to HAL. “GE Aerospace has handed over the sixth F404-IN20 engine against the order from 2021,” said a GE Aerospace spokesperson. A HAL spokesperson told *The Hindu*, “The sixth F404-IN20 engine was handed over in the U.S., and it will be brought here through freight.” The spokesperson did not specify when the engine would arrive in India considering the ongoing crises in West Asia.

Can injured boarded-out officer cadets get ex-servicemen benefits, asks SC

Express News Service
New Delhi, April 2

THE SUPREME Court on Thursday asked the Centre whether officer cadets boarded out from military on account of disability suffered during training can be treated as ex-servicemen so that they can avail reservation in government and semi-government jobs.

“During the course of submissions, one of the aspects that was discussed was as to whether the boarded-out cadets could also be considered as ex-servicemen or ex-military personnel for the purpose of having the benefit of reservation for such persons in various governmental and semi-government jobs and posts. Learned ASG to seek instructions on this aspect, so that the scope of the ex-military personnel could also include the boarded-out cadets, since a majority of them are in their 20s, 30s”, said a bench of Justices B V Nagarathna and Ujjal Bhuyan.

The court was hearing a suo motu case registered following reports published in The Indian Express on the plight of officer cadets discharged from top military institutes due to disabilities suffered during training. It appointed Senior Advocate Rekha Palli to assist it in the matter as amicus curiae.

She came up with recommendations, including coverage under Ex-Servicemen Contributory Health Scheme (ECHS) for all “invalidated” past and future officer cadets and eligible dependents; hike in ex gratia benefits equivalent to rank of Lieutenant/ Flying Officer; implementation of previous recommendations for disability pension; one-time compensation for immediate relief; periodic medical reassessment for resettlement, reservation in higher education and better insurance. On October 7, 2025, the SC had directed that these suggestions be placed before the Army, Navy and Air Force headquarters for them to frame a scheme for the rehabilitation of these cadets.

The Indian Express in December 2025 had reported that a May 2022 proposal of the Department of Military Affairs (DMA), that also featured points highlighted by the Amicus in her report, has been lying unimplemented despite having the concurrence of all stakeholders. During the hearing on December 16, 2025, ASG Aishwarya Bhatti appearing for the Centre informed the court that the three service chiefs were positive about the recommendations and the response of the two ministries was awaited.

The ASG repeated the stance on the next date of hearing on March 10, 2026. The court gave the ministries two more weeks to arrive at a decision, failing which it said the officials would be summoned to the court and fixed the hearing for March 24. During the March 24 hearing, Solicitor General Tushar Mehta requested for more time which the SC granted and fixed the hearing for April 2. On Thursday, Justice Nagarathna reiterated that the boarded-out candidates should be reassessed to see if they can be rehabilitated in some other tasks.

ASG N Venkataraman appearing for the Centre said the Ministry of Defence is already working on their rehabilitation and “it’s in a nascent stage”.

He said the 7th Pay Commission had expressed some reservations regarding the payment of disability pension to the cadets and now it will be discussed again by the 8th Pay Commission. **The court will hear the matter next on April 27.** The amicus said there are not more than 2,500 cadets who have been out boarded and that 90% of them can be rehabilitated.

She said they, however, don’t get any reservation in jobs because they don’t have ex-servicemen status. To the query if they can be treated as ex-servicemen, the ASG said even Agniveers are not treated so. He, however, agreed to take instructions on the court’s query.

FULL REPORT ON
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India's online takedown mechanism politically motivated: US in key report

Soumyarendra Barik
New Delhi, April 2

THE US government, in a key report, has noted that since 2021, American companies like Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, and X have been subject to an "increasing number of takedown requests" for content and user accounts related to issues that appear "politically motivated".

The report, called the *2026 National Trade Estimate Report on Foreign Trade Barriers*, was released by the Office of the United States Trade Representative (USTR), outlines "significant foreign trade barriers facing US exports" in various countries. For India, the report flagged a number of barriers that American firms face in the country, ranging from its laws for the digital ecosystem — like the IT Rules, 2021 and the data protection law — to UPI and agriculture, among others.

The USTR's comments on India's censorship mechanism comes as the government is tightening its control over the internet, and recently proposing it to broaden to what independent news creators and citizen journalists post on social media. Queries sent to the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology did not elicit a response.

Content takedowns 'politically motivated'

In February 2021, the Indian government published regula-



The report claims that US firms have been subject to 'increasing number of takedown requests' since 2021.

REUTERS FILE

tions — the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 (IT Rules) — to govern a wide range of Internet-based service providers, particularly those that operate social media, messaging, and news and entertainment content in India, the USTR report said.

It added that these rules require compliance by significant social media intermediaries — companies like Meta, Google etc — and platforms with five million registered users or more, along with a number of requirements that "US stakeholders have identified as concerning".

"For example, the IT Rules impose personal criminal liability on individual employees in cases where a firm is not in compliance with the rules. The

IT Rules also include imposition of impractical compliance deadlines and take-down protocols. Since 2021, US firms have been subject to an increasing number of takedown requests for content and user accounts related to issues that appear politically motivated," the USTR said in its report.

Online censorship mechanism in India

Last month, draft amendments to the Information Technology (Intermediary Guidelines and Digital Media Ethics Code) Rules, 2021 proposed that the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting (MIB) will be able to recommend the issuing of direct blocking orders to independent news creators online, requiring them to apologise, or make changes to the content, if found guilty of any grievances received by an inter-departmental committee.

Popular news and current affairs creators could fall under the ambit of these proposed changes, since they are currently not defined as publishers. In fact, the proposed rules could be even wider in their coverage. For instance, even if a creator does not regularly make content related to news or current affairs, but creates something involving a current topic — say a stand-up comic making a joke about a government policy — could potentially fall under its ambit.

FULL REPORT ON

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Gherao of judicial officers in Bengal a challenge to SC: CJI

He says the violence in Malda district was not a routine incident but a 'calculated, well-planned and deliberate move' to demoralise judicial officers and sway the adjudication process; 'complete failure' of civil, police administration, says court

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Thursday said a mob gherao of seven judicial officers, confining them without food or water for more than nine hours at a government office in Malda district of West Bengal, reportedly after several voters were struck off the electoral rolls in the special intensive revision (SIR) was not only a "brazen attempt" to browbeat the officers but also amounted to a challenge to the authority of the top court.

Hundreds of judicial officers have been deployed on the basis of a Supreme Court order to function as Election Registration Officers and adjudicate objections raised by voters ex-



Row over roll: People lay siege to the BDO office at Kaliachak Block II in Malda, where seven judicial officers were gheraoed on Wednesday. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

cluded from the rolls during the SIR ahead of the Assembly election scheduled for April 23 and 29.

Noting that three of the judicial officers were women, the court said the incident exposed the "complete failure of the civil and police administration in

the State of West Bengal".

Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, heading a three-judge Bench, asked what the political leaders were doing during all those hours of captivity - could they not have gone to the spot and calmed down the situation.

CC This was not a routine incident. It was *ex facie* a calculated, well-planned and deliberate move to demoralise the judicial officers and impact the ongoing process of adjudication of objections. We will not allow anyone to interfere and take law into their hands by causing fear in the minds of judicial officers. This undoubtedly amounts to criminal contempt

JUSTICE SURYA KANT
CHIEF JUSTICE OF INDIA

A shocked court pointed out that the judicial officers were pelted with stones as they were finally rescued and led out by the police after being detained from 3.30 p.m. on Wednesday till well past midnight.

"This was not a routine incident. It was *ex facie* a

calculated, well-planned and deliberate move to demoralise the judicial officers and impact the ongoing process of adjudication of objections. We will not allow anyone to interfere and take law into their hands by causing fear in the minds of judicial officers. This undoubtedly amounts to criminal contempt," Chief Justice Kant observed.

He said he had never seen such a "politically polarised State like West Bengal". Addressing the West Bengal side, he said, "You are forcing us to say. Unfortunately in your State, each one of you speaks a political language... I have never seen such a politically polarised State."

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'Gherao of officers a challenge to SC', says CJI

"Even in court orders, the politics is reflected... We passed the order deploying judicial officers because we thought we could have a neutral structure for the adjudication of objections, and this is how people are behaving? Do you think we are not aware who are the miscreants behind this incident? I was monitoring events till 2 a.m.," Chief Justice Kant said.

'Condemn the incident'

Justice Joymalya Bagchi said political leaders who form part of the executive of the State and leaders in the Opposition must condemn the incident in one voice. "The orders of the judicial officers are deemed to be the orders of this court. This incident sought to scuttle the entire effort, discourage judicial officers... It amounts to contempt of court," Justice Bagchi remarked.

The court directed the Election Commission (EC) to assign the Central Bureau of Investigation or National Investigation Agency with the task to probe the incident. It directed the Commission to requisition Central forces to protect the life, liberty and families of the judicial officers.

The Bench narrated that the Registrar General of the Calcutta High Court had informed the local police and civil administration for immediate backup on learning about the gherao. "The matter was met with conspicuous inertia until approximately 8:30 p.m.," it said. The official had then contacted the Home Secretary, the Director General of Police (DGP) and the Chief Justice of the High Court. Finally, the High Court Chief Justice had to intervene personally, following which the Home Secretary and the DGP had turned up at his residence at midnight.

The Bench directed the DGP, Malda District Magistrate and the Superintendent of Police to show cause why suitable action should not be taken against them. The Bench scheduled the case for hearing on April 6.

"They have to place before this court reasons for failing to take any effective measures to secure the safety of the judicial officers," the court ordered.

Govt. confirms extra sittings to debate amendments to women's reservation Act

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Budget Session of Parliament went into a short recess to be reconvened on April 16, instead of the original schedule of ending on Thursday. It will now end on April 18. In the two extended sitting of two days, Parliament will take up amendments to the Constitution (One Hundred and Sixth Amendment) Act, popularly known as the women's reservation Act, 2023.

'Promise to women'

"The government will propose that the House be adjourned, and we will meet very soon, for a specific period, for purposes already known to members," Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju said.



Union Minister Kiren Rijju speaks in the Rajya Sabha during the second part of the Budget Session of Parliament on Thursday. ANI

Though he did not spell out that the session is being extended to debate the amendments to the women's reservation Act, 2023, which seeks to provide 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and Assemblies, he said, "The Parliament of India has made a promise to the

women of this country. We have a bounden duty to fulfil that commitment."

Repeated demands

The Minister's clarification came amid repeated demands from the Congress for clarity on whether the Budget Session would formally end on April 2, 2026.

Soon after the House met for the day, Congress Chief Whip Jairam Ramesh sought an explanation on media reports suggesting that the session would be extended. Leader of the House J.P. Nadda said the government would "get back" to him.

Mr. Ramesh raised the issue again shortly before the Rajya Sabha took up discussion on the Andhra Pradesh Reorganisation Bill at 1 p.m.

He argued that uncertainty over the House's schedule was detrimental to parliamentary functioning and transparency. He also said Congress president and Leader of the Opposition Mallikarjun Kharge had written to Mr. Rijju seeking an all-party meeting after the election campaign or polling con-

cluded on April 29. Accusing the government of pushing legislation during the operation of the Model Code of Conduct (MCC) for electoral gain, Mr. Ramesh said the move was "wholly objectionable" and reiterated that all Opposition parties were seeking wider consultation.

Responding, Mr. Rijju said the government had already shared its proposed legislative agenda with Opposition members and that extensive consultations had been held.

He said an important sitting was planned in the next two to three weeks and that nearly 80% of political parties had participated in consultations.

The Congress, he added, was the only party that had not engaged with the government.

CAPF Bill passed in LS amid Opposition walkout

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Central Armed Police Force (General Administration) Bill, 2026 was passed by a voice vote in the Lok Sabha as the Opposition walked out due to the absence of Home Minister Amit Shah in the Lower House on Thursday.

Mr. Shah is campaigning for the Assembly election in West Bengal.

Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, who was in Assam for election campaigning, said that he and his party firmly stood

behind the officers of the paramilitary forces. "When our government comes, we will ensure justice for you 100%," Mr. Gandhi said on X.

Mr. Gandhi alleged it was unfair that officers of the paramilitary force never got to head their own organisation. "I wanted to speak on the CAPF Bill in the House but the government brought it in a day when I was touring election-bound Assam," he said.

Minister of State for Home Affairs Nityanand Rai said the legislation would bring administrative

Opposition MPs asks the government to refer the Bill to a Joint Parliamentary Committee

clarity and was not against the interests of the Central Armed Police Force (CAPF) officers and would ensure promotion and financial benefits for the cadre.

He said that Group A officers of CAPFs get minimum four promotions in their career and the promotions were delayed due to court cases.

Opposition MPs, includ-

ing those from the Congress, Samajwadi Party and Trinamool Congress, asked the government to refer the Bill to a Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC) for deliberations.

Trinamool Congress member Mahua Moitra moved an amendment to the Bill, and sought that it be sent to the select committee for greater scrutiny.

Congress MP Manickam Tagore questioned the absence of Mr. Shah even though the Bill "directly impacts the future, promotions, and dignity" of CAPF personnel. "When it comes to taking credit for

controlling left-wing extremism, he is front and centre – quick to claim success and pat his own back. But when it comes to defending a controversial law affecting the very forces who fought that battle, he is missing from the Lok Sabha," he said on X.

Through the Bill, in CAPFs, 50% of the total posts in the rank of Inspector-General, at least 67% in the rank of Additional Director-General and all in the ranks of Special Director-General and Director-General shall be filled by Indian Police Service officers on deputation.

AAP writes to Rajya Sabha to remove Raghav Chadha as party's deputy leader

Punjab MP Ashok Mittal to replace Chadha, calls it a 'routine process'; move comes amid growing rift between AAP leadership and Chadha, who until not so long ago was considered close to Kejriwal

Nikhil M Babu

NEW DELHI

The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) on Thursday wrote a letter to the Rajya Sabha Secretariat seeking the appointment of MP Ashok Mittal as the deputy leader of the party in the Upper House, replacing MP Raghav Chadha, according to party sources.

Although the party did not issue an official statement, the move comes amid a growing rift between the AAP leadership and Mr. Chadha, who until not so long ago was considered very close to party chief Arvind Kejriwal, over the past many months.

Responding to the development, Mr. Mittal said such changes in leadership positions within the party keep happening and dismissed reports that Mr. Chadha is joining the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). "Earlier, N.D. Gupta ji was the deputy leader, then Raghav ji took over, and now I have been given the responsibility. Tomorrow, someone else may get the opportunity. The party wants every MP and leader to gain experience in different roles," he said.



In happier times: Former CM Arvind Kejriwal with MP Raghav Chadha, who many within AAP said was given undue importance. FILE PHOTO

Delhi BJP president Virendra Sachdeva alleged that Mr. Chadha has distanced himself from the "anarchic and corrupt leadership" of Mr. Kejriwal. "Whoever speaks the truth, opposes his policies that are not in favour of people, be it [Rajya Sabha MP] Swati Maliwal or Raghav Chadha, will become an irritant for him [Kejriwal]," Mr. Sachdeva said. Ms. Maliwal had an acrimonious fallout with AAP after she accused Mr. Kejriwal's aide Bibhav Kumar of assaulting her in 2024.

In February, when Mr. Kejriwal and other top leaders were discharged by a Delhi court in the excise policy case, Mr. Chadha did not make any public state-

ments. He continued his silence on the matter even as he raised several other issues on social media.

Growing distance

On the day the court order came, the top leadership was present at Mr. Kejriwal's residence but Mr. Chadha was missing, a party leader said. "The issue has been brewing for more than a year. And since AAP lost power in Delhi, it has only intensified. Also, he has been talking to the BJP leadership too," the leader added.

In the run-up to the 2024 Lok Sabha poll, when Mr. Kejriwal was arrested in the excise case, Mr. Chadha issued a delayed response and he was missing from

Delhi. It was later attributed to an eye surgery he underwent in London. However, things were different earlier. After AAP won the Punjab Assembly poll in 2022, Mr. Chadha was in many ways Mr. Kejriwal's representative in the State and part of important meetings. "This was not liked by the State leadership and he was pulled back a little after that," a leader said.

When AAP was part of the Opposition's INDIA bloc ahead of the Lok Sabha poll, on several occasions, Mr. Chadha was present with Mr. Kejriwal and senior leader Sanjay Singh during closed-door meetings with chiefs of other parties.

"Many within AAP felt he was given undue importance," a party leader said. Another party source said Mr. Chadha started keeping a distance from the top leadership as he wanted to distance himself from the excise case.

Chadha posts video

Mr. Chadha didn't issue any statement immediately but posted a video montage on social media highlighting issues he raised in the House.

A path to peace in West Asia beyond Pakistan talks

A much-talked-about meeting finally took place in Pakistan. The Foreign Ministers of Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Egypt sat together with Pakistan, in Islamabad on March 29, to explore ways out of the war in West Asia. Just before this, Pakistan Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif had a long conversation with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian. Then, Pakistan Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar was in China to hold talks on restoring peace and stability in West Asia. All this sounds grand but is only a tiny step in a long process, where the devil lies in the details.

Ceasefire requirement

The very first step is to hammer out a ceasefire. That will happen only when both sides – the United States/Israel and Iran – either concede victory or have exhausted themselves to a standstill. In the first regard, it is unclear what the U.S. sees as a ‘win’, with U.S. President Donald Trump shifting goals rapidly – from denuclearisation to regime change, and, after a whole rung of leaders in Iran were killed, to an **undefined ‘surrender’**. As of now, it seems that the U.S.’s ultimate objective is to control the Strait of Hormuz, similar to its ‘securing’ of the Panama Canal.

Similarly, Israel’s early call for a people’s uprising in Iran after the assassination of their Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei does not stand scrutiny. Any intelligence agency worth its salt would know that any ‘uprising’ requires a carefully selected group to lead it, either within or outside the country. Moreover, such a move **must happen in the first few weeks of war**.

Beyond that, any leadership would be hard-pressed to negotiate an end to war in the face of a furious public. It seems, then, that Israel’s objective was to decimate, once and for all, Iran’s entire capability to strike. That point has not yet been reached, as is clearly apparent.



Tara Kartha

Former Director,
National Security
Council Secretariat

India could lead a Global South initiative at the United Nations to mediate the West Asia war

Therefore, Tel Aviv will remain lukewarm toward an end to the war.

In terms of the subject of ‘exhaustion’, the U.S., of all sides, witnessed one of the largest non-violent marches in American history. True, the ‘No Kings’ protest was not specifically against the war, but it still counts politically. Meanwhile, at least two aircraft carriers of the United States have moved out of range, amid reports of **munitions shortages**. **Israel is being hit, regardless of the famed ‘Iron Dome’ – its air defence system – though the extent is debatable**. Iran is bleeding, and badly. Each side has summarily rejected the demands of the other – at least in public.

Second, mediation is a process. The first step is a ceasefire, which is no easy task when there is zero trust. **The U.S., after all, attacked Iran even as negotiations were on**. Washington, in turn, **accused Israel of unilaterally attacking the Pars gas field, causing a serious escalation**. In this case, a ceasefire will need a force capable of enforcing it; primarily, only a physical presence can provide security guarantees. That needs a United Nations mandate to be legal in what is an entirely illegal war.

In sum, a UN Security Council (UNSC) member will have to vote for a **peacekeeping force that can act in case of transgressions**. That is farcical, even assuming that the U.S. would heed a despised UN.

Revisiting history

There is, however, a way out. In the 1956 Suez Crisis, when Egypt nationalised the Suez Canal, France and the United Kingdom blocked UNSC action. The General Assembly passed the ‘Uniting for Peace’ resolution which authorised peacekeepers in a rare move that bypassed the UNSC. It brought peace, but only because a U.S. President, in this case Dwight D. Eisenhower, twisted allies’ arms. In sum, the UN only works when a strong country decides it should

Third is the question of troop contributors.

Presumably, that will include Egypt, Türkiye and Pakistan, all with large standing armies. Egypt recognises Israel, and Türkiye is a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Pakistan may consider a token presence rather than having to honour its Strategic Mutual Defence Agreement with Saudi Arabia, which was signed in 2025. **Mr. Dar’s visit to China yielded only a five-point peace plan, which also called for the delivery of humanitarian aid**. This will require some presence of aid agencies, presumably under UN cover.

Primarily, China is expected to persuade Iran to accept a ceasefire, though ‘persuasion’ will require something more concrete than a plan. A direct security commitment is out of the question. No one wants a third world war. Other countries, such as Indonesia and Malaysia – both of whom support the Pakistani initiative – may weigh in, with the whole effort funded by the Gulf countries.

So far, so good. But Iran does not entirely trust the mediators. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates are allegedly pushing the Americans to attack Iran and ‘finish the job’. In 2024, the Pakistanis bombed Iran, and Türkiye’s Kurdish problem has Iranian tentacles.

A role for New Delhi

India had best keep out of such dubious ventures, though it should talk to all sides to prevent escalation. While China is an unlikely partner in this, there is also Australia, the Southeast Asian countries and India’s neighbours, all of whom **have been hit hard by the energy crisis**.

This might be the time for Indian diplomacy to fire up and rally the ‘Global South’ at the UN, fostering a united opposition to the war and pushing for a lasting ceasefire. A global voice must be heard, not just through a single channel, no matter how busy. That might just be the impetus that the UN needs.



Moon-bound, Orion looks back

A view of the Earth from NASA's Orion spacecraft during the Artemis II mission test flight. Carrying three Americans and one Canadian, the rocket lifted off from the Kennedy Space Center in Florida Wednesday on an approximately 10-day mission around the Moon and back to the Earth. NASA

FOUR ASTRONAUTS — Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover, Christina Koch and Jeremy Hansen — set off on humanity's first lunar voyage in more than half a century

CAPSULE SET to zoom past the Moon and travel 4,000 miles (6,400 km) beyond, before making a U-turn and heading home to a splashdown in the Pacific

DURING MONDAY'S lunar flyby, astronauts should see features never before viewed through human eyes. They'll also catch snippets of a total solar eclipse

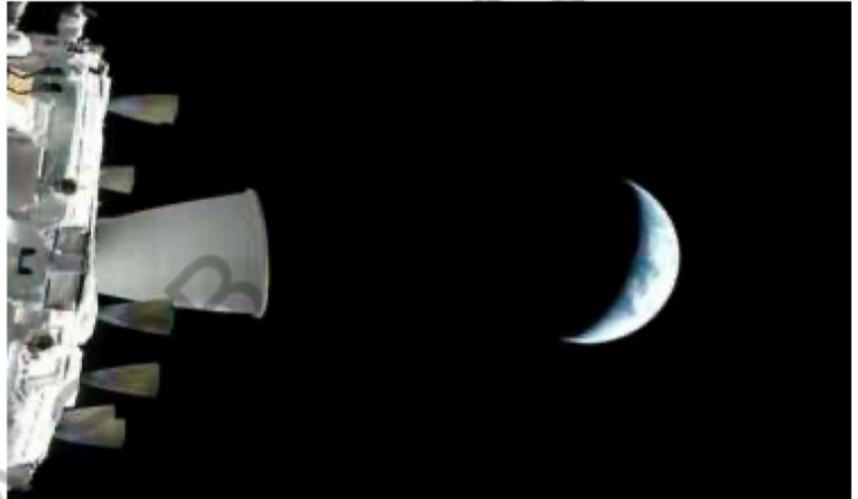
NASA launches 4 astronauts on a crewed lunar mission

Agence France-Presse

KENNEDY SPACE CENTER

Four astronauts blasted off aboard a massive NASA rocket on Wednesday on a long-anticipated journey around the Moon, the first crewed lunar flyby in more than 50 years.

NASA teams and spectators alike were ecstatic as the spacecraft ascended into a radiant sky atop a cascade of flames. The team, who donned bright orange suits with blue trim as the mission began, includes Americans Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover and Christina Koch along with Canadian Jeremy Hansen. “We have a beautiful moonrise. We’re headed right at it,”



In this photo provided by NASA, a view of the Earth from Orion spacecraft as it orbits above planet during the Artemis II flight. AP

said Mr. Wiseman, the mission commander.

U.S. President Donald Trump praised “our brave astronauts,” calling the successful launch “quite something” at the top of his televised address on

the war against Iran.

The astronauts are now in orbit around the Earth. They successfully completed “promixity operations” demonstrations, which tested how their Orion capsule can move.

'It's phenomenal': Astronauts thrilled by views of Earth

Reuters

Cape Canaveral, Florida,
April 1

FOUR ASTRONAUTS blasted off from Florida on Wednesday on NASA's Artemis II mission, a high-stakes voyage around the moon that marks the boldest step yet by the US toward returning humans to the lunar surface later this decade in a race with China. NASA's Space Launch System (SLS) rocket, topped with its Orion crew capsule, roared to life just before sunset at the agency's Kennedy Space Center in Cape Canaveral, Florida, carrying its debut crew — three US astronauts and a Canadian astronaut — into Earth orbit. The 32-storey space vehicle thundered into clear skies trailing a towering column of thick, white vapor.

NASA Administrator Jared Isaacman said the launch was an opening act for subsequent missions that would include construction of a moon base to support the "enduring presence we're trying to create on the surface."

'Lunar Loo' Working

The astronauts have reason to celebrate - their toilet is now working. The so-called lunar loo malfunctioned as soon as the Artemis II crew reached orbit on Wednesday evening. Mission Control guided astronaut Christina Koch through some plumbing tricks and she finally got it going. The bad news is that it's so cold inside the Orion capsule — 18 degrees Celsius — that the four astronauts are digging into suitcases for long-sleeved clothes. Mission Control is trying to warm things up.

The crew consisting of NASA astronauts Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover and Christina Koch, plus Canadian Space Agency astronaut Jeremy Hansen, are on track to bust out of orbit around Earth on Thursday night and zoom to the moon for a lunar fly-around. It will be Mission Control's first translunar injection since Apollo's swan song in 1972.

Until then, the astronauts are savouring Earth's views from thousands of miles high. Koch told Mission Control that they can make out the entire coastlines of continents and even the South Pole. "It is just absolutely phenomenal," radioed Koch. The mission is due to end on April 10. WITH INPUTS FROM AP



NASA's Artemis II mission to fly by the moon, comprising of the Space Launch System (SLS) rocket with the Orion crew capsule, lifts off from the Kennedy Space Center, Florida on Thursday. REUTERS

• Artemis II crew: First woman, first Black astronaut and first Canadian



Mission Command REID WISEMAN (50) Logged 165 days aboard the ISS during a 2014 mission, flying to

the orbiting platform aboard a Russian Soyuz spacecraft. A former U.S. Navy test pilot, he later served as NASA's chief astronaut before being selected to command Artemis II.



Pilot VICTOR GLOVER (49)

Spent 168 days in orbit beginning in 2020 as pilot of NASA's Crew-1

flight, the first full-fledged ISS mission using SpaceX's Crew Dragon capsule to carry astronauts to the space station. Before joining NASA, he flew more than 40 aircraft during a US Navy career.



Mission Specialist CHRISTINA KOCH (47)

Set a record in 2019 for the longest continuous spaceflight by a woman, spending 328 days aboard the ISS, and was part of NASA's first three all-female spacewalks. Trained as an electrical engineer and physicist, she previously worked as a NASA engineer and carried out extended research expeditions in Antarctica.



Mission Specialist JEREMY HANSEN (50)

A Royal Canadian Air Force colonel, is the first Canadian, and first non-U.S. citizen, sent on a lunar mission even as he makes his own first spaceflight. He was selected for Canada's astronaut corps in 2009, and his seat aboard Artemis II reflects a long-standing U.S.-Canadian partnership in human spaceflight.

Actively facilitating Pak-Afghan peace talks, says Beijing

Associated Press

Islamabad, April 2

PAKISTAN ON Thursday confirmed it was holding peace talks with Afghanistan's Taliban government in China, where Beijing is mediating to broker a lasting ceasefire after weeks of fighting that have killed hundreds, disrupting trade and cross-border travel.

The confirmation of the new round of talks came a day after officials from the two sides told *The Associated Press* that representatives from the two countries had travelled to Urumqi in northern China, where they held the first round of talks.

It remains unclear who is representing Pakistan and Afghanistan in the latest negotiations in China. In Islamabad, Pakistan's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Tahir Andrabi told a news briefing that the talks are ongoing.

"Yes, Pakistan has sent a delegation to Urumqi, in line with its consistent position and longstanding practice of supporting a credible process that

can help find a durable solution to cross-border terrorism from Afghanistan," he said.

However, Andrabi said success of the talks largely depends on Kabul. "The burden of a real process lies with Afghanistan, which must demonstrate visible and verifiable action against terrorist groups using Afghan soil against Pakistan," he said. Andrabi said Pakistan has never shied away from dialogue on the issue.

Though China has not officially confirmed the talks, the Chinese Foreign Ministry on Thursday said Xi Jinping's government has been "actively mediating and facilitating the resolution of conflicts between Afghanistan and Pakistan." Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning said China has "always supported both sides in resolving their differences through dialogue and negotiation."

Despite the ongoing peace talks, Pakistan's operations against the Pakistani Taliban along the border with Afghanistan and other militant groups will continue, according to Andrabi.

Trump seeks deal with 'Stone Age' bombing threat

Despite a month-long campaign by the U.S. and Israel, Iran continues to hit Israel, which is more than 2,000 km away, with missiles, and target American bases in the Persian Gulf region; Trump is using the threat of extensive strikes, including at civilian infrastructure, as an added layer of pressure to force Iran to shift its position and make a deal; Tehran says it is not ready for a ceasefire

NEWS ANALYSIS

Stanly Johnny

Before U.S. President Donald Trump delivered his national address on the evening of April 1 in the White House, Iran and Hezbollah launched heavy missile attacks at Israel. While Mr. Trump was speaking about America's achievements in the war, including degrading Iran's missile capability, missile alerts were issued in the UAE. After Mr. Trump concluded his speech, Iran launched another salvo of missiles at Israel.

There was much speculation on what Mr. Trump was going to say in his first primetime national address since the U.S. and Israel launched the war on Iran on February 28. Some

said he would escalate with a ground attack, while others said he would chicken out or issue a timeline to wind up operations. But the U.S. leader did not say anything new. The speech was largely a reassertion of the claims he has been making over the past few weeks. He said the U.S. was "on track to complete all of America's military objectives shortly". He also said the U.S. was going to hit Iran "extremely hard" over the next two to three weeks. "We are going to bring them back to the Stone Ages."

Mr. Trump said discussions were under way and asked the Iranians to make a deal. "If there is no deal, we are going to hit each and every one of their electric-generating plants very hard and properly simultaneously." He said the Strait of Hormuz, a critical water-

way connecting the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman that has been taken control of by Iran after the war, is not America's problem. He had earlier asked America's allies to send ships to reopen the Strait – which nobody is willing to do.

He also indicated that he was not considering a ground operation to seize Iran's enriched uranium because it's buried deep underground. "It would take months to get near the nuclear dust," he said, adding that U.S. satellites are monitoring Iran's nuclear sites.

Trump's goals

While the main objective of the speech appeared to make the case for the war to the American public, it also underscores the limited options Mr. Trump has in winding down the con-



Donald Trump speaks during a televised address from the Cross Hall of the White House in Washington DC on Saturday. AFP

lict. In the speech Mr. Trump praised the Venezuela attack earlier this year. But in Venezuela, U.S. troops went in and got out with President Nicolas Maduro, handing the country to his Vice-President who is willing to work with Washington. In Iran, the assassination of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei seemed to have

strengthened Iran's resolve to stand up to the U.S.

On February 28, when he launched the war, Mr. Trump outlined five broad objectives: to "raze" Iran's missile industry "to the ground"; to "annihilate" Iran's Navy; to ensure that Iran's "proxies" could no longer "destabilise" the region; to prevent Iran from ever obtaining a nuclear

weapon; and to bring about regime change. "When we are finished, take over your government. It will be yours to take. This will be probably your only chance for generations," he said at the time. In his April 1 address, Mr. Trump claimed the U.S. was now completing all of these objectives.

Ground reality

The ground reality, however, tells a different story. Despite a month-long campaign by the U.S. and Israel, Iran continues to strike Israel, which is more than 2,000 km away, with ballistic missiles, and target American bases in the Persian Gulf region. Mr. Trump has claimed that he has annihilated Iran's navy, but he is not willing to send American troops to reopen the Strait of Hormuz.

Israel is bombing Iran

while carrying out a ground invasion in Lebanon against Hezbollah, an Iranian ally. But Iran and Hezbollah continue to launch coordinated attacks. Last week, Yemen's Ansar Allah (better known as Houthis), another Iranian ally, launched a ballistic missile at Israel, formally joining the war. The Houthis, who rule almost half of Yemen, have the capability to shut the Bab el Mandeb Strait, a choke-point between the Gulf of Aden and the Red Sea.

And Mr. Trump's last objective, regime change in Iran, remains distant. He now claims that regime change has already occurred, which is not a serious argument. The assassination of Ali Khamenei did not alter the state structure of Iran. If anything, it has strengthened elite cohesion within the

Islamic Republic and further elevated the IRGC's standing in the system.

What Mr. Trump can do is continue bombing Iran, which is what he threatened to do in his speech. He is using the threat of extensive strikes, including at civilian infrastructure, as an added layer of pressure to force Iran to shift its position and make a deal. But if Mr. Trump follows through on his threats, Iran is likely to retaliate by attacking energy infrastructure across the Persian Gulf. In the words of Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, Tehran is not ready for a ceasefire.

With Mr. Trump lacking an exit path and Iran prepared to absorb the costs and play a longer game, the war is likely to drag on, with serious implications for the Persian Gulf and the broader global economy.

Iran fires missiles at Israel, Gulf states as Trump talks of winding down war

Associated Press

DUBAI

Iran fired more missiles at Israel and Gulf Arab states on Thursday, demonstrating Tehran's continued ability to strike its neighbours even as U.S. President Donald Trump claimed the threat from the country was nearly eliminated and predicted the war would end soon.

Iran's attacks on Gulf states and its chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz have disrupted the world's energy supplies. That has proved to be Iran's greatest strategic advantage in the war.

Mr. Trump has insisted the strait can be taken by force – but said it is not up to the U.S. to do that. In an address on Wednesday



U.S. President Donald Trump speaking about the Iran war from the Cross Hall of the White House in Washington on Wednesday. AP

night, he encouraged countries that depend on oil from Hormuz to “build some delayed courage” and go “take it”.

Before the U.S. and Israel started the war on February 28 with strikes on Iran, the waterway was open and 20% of all traded

oil used to pass through it.

Iran responded defiantly to Mr. Trump's speech in which he claimed U.S. military action had been so decisive that “one of the most powerful countries” is “really no longer a threat”.

A spokesperson for Iran's military, Lt. Col.

Ebrahim Zolfaghari, insisted on Thursday that Tehran maintains hidden stockpiles of arms, munitions and production facilities. He said facilities targeted so far by U.S. strikes are “insignificant”.

Just before Mr. Trump began his address in which he said U.S. “core strategic objectives are nearing completion”, explosions were heard in Dubai as air defences worked to intercept Iranian missiles.

Less than a half-hour after the President was done, Israel said its military was working to intercept missiles. Sirens sounded in Bahrain, home to the U.S. Navy's 5th Fleet, immediately after the speech.

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'West Asia crisis hits Helium supplies'

Mini Tejaswi

BENGALURU

The supply of Helium, a critical gas used to save lives and power technology seems suddenly at risk on account of geopolitics, observed industry experts.

Helium, a colourless, odourless, non-toxic, and inert gas and primarily used to cool superconducting magnets, MRI scanners, spectrometers and semiconductor fabs, has no or a few substitutes.

Over 50% of India's Helium imports traditionally come from Qatar, which accounts for some 34% of global helium exports. Missile strikes and force majeure at Qatar's Ras Laffan complex in March significantly reduced Qatar's Helium export capacity.

According to Ralf Gubler, research director for industrial gases and fertilizers at S&P Global Energy, India is 100% import-dependent for helium, making many industries, such as healthcare (MRI), semiconductors & electronics, fibre optics & display manufacturing etc. in the country acutely vulnerable to global disruptions.

Mr Gubler said liquid Helium was indispensable for cooling superconducting magnets (MRI scanners). If Helium levels fell below critical thresholds, superconductivity would be lost, the Helium rapidly quenches (vaporises) which even lead to damaging superconducting magnets resulting in long and costly repairs.

Most MRI scanners in India India rely on periodic refilling and failure risks magnet quench and multi-week downtime. Supply disruptions force hospitals to ration refills, delay installations and prioritise



Helium is used to cool superconducting magnets, MRI scanners and chip fabs.

emergency scans.

On India's helium demand and supply scenario, Mr. Gubler, said, the country's helium demand in 2025 was estimated at 3.4 million cubic tonne with zero domestic production.

'Eye other suppliers'

Mr. Gubler said India should benefit from multi-origin contracts, including Russia, the U.S. and emerging suppliers like South Africa and Tanzania.

In India, traces of Helium exist in natural gas fields in West Bengal and Jharkhand but concentrations are below the 0.2% economic threshold. Commercial viability is at least 5-10 years away, as per S&P Global Energy data.

Ashok Chandak, President, India Electronics & Semiconductor Association said, critical materials such as helium must be treated as strategic inputs as India scales its semiconductor ecosystem.

Sharp price increase

Typical inventories in India are for 7-10 days.

"Helium prices have seen a sharp surge of about 35-50% in recent weeks, with spot prices in some cases rising even higher. The impact is more in the form of cost pressures than production disruptions," Mr. Chandak said.

Hit by West Asia crisis, manufacturing activity slows to 45-month low in March

The Hindu Bureau

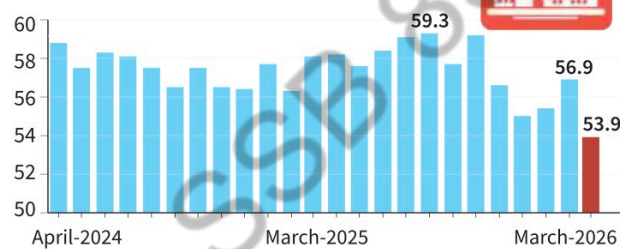
NEW DELHI

Manufacturing sector activity slowed to its lowest level in nearly four years in March 2026, dragged down by the impact of the war in West Asia on costs, demand, and new order levels, according to a survey of private sector companies.

The HSBC India Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) – a measure of overall conditions based on new orders, output, employment, supplier delivery times and stocks of purchases – fell sharply from 56.9 in February to 53.9 in March, marking the lowest reading since June

War impact

The manufacturing PMI for March 2026 slipped to a 45-month low



Source: HSBC India Manufacturing PMI

2022. A reading above 50 denotes expansion, while a reading below that level indicates contraction.

“Growth in India’s manufacturing industry took a step back in March as cost pressures, fierce competition, heightened mar-

ket uncertainty, and the war in the Middle East all contributed to softer increases in new orders and output,” the report stated. “Firms also faced an intensification of cost pressures, the steepest since August 2022.”

The report went on to say that the two largest sub-components of the PMI – new orders and output – rose at their slowest rates since mid-2022.

“Anecdotal evidence showed that growth was curbed by challenging market conditions, cost pressures, and the war in the Middle East,” it added. “March data saw input prices increase to the greatest extent in over three and a half years. Aluminium, chemicals, fuel, jute, leather, fabric, oil, rubber, and steel were some of the items reported to have increased in price.”

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