

All States will benefit from proposed delimitation: PM

Modi seeks to address concerns over the exercise for the first time; government intends to provide definitive guarantee in Parliament, Prime Minister says at a campaign rally in poll-bound Kerala

Varghese K. George
THIRUVALLA

States that have stabilised their populations will not lose their Lok Sabha seats, and all States will benefit from a proposed increase in the size of the House, Prime Minister Narendra Modi told an election rally in Kerala on Saturday.

The Centre is planning amendments to the Constitution and relevant laws to redraw the electoral map of the country, with the size of the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies to be increased by half, with a third of the total seats reserved for women, ahead of the 2029 general election. Parliament's Budget Session is reconvening on April 16 to consider these amendments.

Mr. Modi was responding for the first time to concerns that States that have stabilised their populations would have their re-



Allaying concerns: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with BJP candidates at a roadshow as part of the campaign for the Kerala Assembly election in Thiruvananthapuram on Saturday. NIRMAL HARINDRAN

presentation in the Lok Sabha reduced after delimitation. The Prime Minister said the government wanted to address these concerns.

“There are States – be it Kerala, Tamil Nadu, or others – that have done exemplary work in the field of population control. However, certain individuals are spreading misinforma-

tion, claiming that because their population growth has slowed, their parliamentary seat allocation will be reduced. We intend to provide a definitive guarantee regarding this matter in Parliament during this session. We wish to formally seal this assurance through legislation – ensuring that in no State will the number of Lok

Sabha seats be reduced,” he said.

Mr. Modi, however, did not specify whether he was referring to the absolute number of seats of individual States or their respective proportion.

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Mamata dares Shah to speak to people deleted from rolls

Bengal Chief Minister says culprits behind the violence in Malda have escaped and officers were harassing people in the name of investigation; alleges BJP has stripped citizens of voting rights

Shiv Sahay Singh

KOLKATA

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee on Saturday challenged Union Home Minister Amit Shah to hold a meeting with people whose names have been deleted from the electoral rolls in Malda district.

“I challenge Amit Shah to hold a meeting here in Malda and speak to the people whose names have been deleted. The BJP must fall at people’s feet and beg for their forgiveness for bringing them this misery. I ask people to respond through EVMs,” the Trinamool Congress chairperson said, addressing a public gathering in Malda.

Mr. Shah had recently accompanied BJP candidates, during nomination filing from Bhabanipur and said that he would spend 15 days in the State.

Malda has been on the boil following the gherao of judicial officers engaged



West Bengal CM Mamata Banerjee campaigning for Trinamool candidates during a rally in Malda district on Saturday. PTI

in the special intensive revision (SIR) exercise by a mob. The officials were rescued on Wednesday night by a large police contingent. On Thursday, the Supreme Court came down heavily on the protesters, calling it a “brazen attempt” to browbeat officers and a challenge to the authority of the top court.

About 60 lakh names have been sent for adjudication, with a deletion rate of about 40%. More than 63 lakh names have already been deleted from the electoral rolls of the State.

The prime accused in the gherao, Mofakkkerul Islam, a lawyer who had contested the 2021 election on AIMIM ticket, was arrested by the West Bengal Police. Thirty-four others were arrested before the case was handed over to the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

Speaking at the meeting, the Chief Minister said, “The culprits behind the violence in Malda’s Mothabari have escaped while investigators are harassing the innocent locals in the name of a probe.”

Claiming that the BJP had taken away people’s voting rights, Ms. Banerjee said, “Tomorrow, they will take away your land and language. Meat, fish and eggs are not allowed to be eaten in BJP-ruled States.”

“I know many people who voted for the BJP previously will not vote for them this time. They understand that Bengal is being humiliated. Several members of their families, too, have lost voting rights...,” she said.

The Chief Minister said some members of her family had also been deleted from the voting list and asked, “Are we all infiltrators?”

Urging voters in Malda to support her party, the Chief Minister said people of the constituency voted for the Congress and the BJP in the past. “You voted for the Congress and the BJP in the Lok Sabha. If you vote for them in the upcoming polls, then who will fight for your voting rights?” she asked.

Read

What are the concerns over the FCRA Bill?

How does the Home Ministry regulate foreign donations to NGOs in India? What are the key changes proposed to the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026? Why has the Opposition objected to the Bill and why was the Bill deferred? What is its current status?

Vijaita Singh

The story so far:

The Central government proposed to introduce the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026 during the Budget Session of Parliament, which concluded on April 2. The Bill seeks to amend the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Act, 2010, under which registration is mandatory for non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and associations to receive foreign funds or donations. It was introduced in the Lok Sabha on March 25; however, following an uproar by Opposition parties, its discussion and passage were deferred.

According to the statement of objects and reasons, around 16,000 associations are registered under the FCRA and receive approximately ₹22,000 crore annually. The Act regulates the acceptance and utilisation of

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India said the Bill amounts to executive overreach and that it could unduly interfere with minority institutions and civil society

foreign contributions to ensure that such inflows do not adversely affect national interest, public order, or national security.

What are the key changes proposed?

One of the key changes proposed in the Bill is the appointment of a 'designated authority' to take over, manage, or dispose of assets created from foreign funds when an NGO's FCRA registration is suspended, cancelled, or not renewed. This authority will have the powers of a civil court and can order the transfer or sale of assets owned by NGOs to either the government or any other body. The 2010 Act provided for regulation of foreign fund flows, but lacked a statutory framework for managing assets created from such funds. The government said that Section 15 of the Act provides for vesting of assets, but the absence of a comprehensive framework for the supervision, management, and disposal of such assets has led to administrative uncertainty and scope for misuse.

Another proposed amendment broadens the definition of an NGO's 'key functionary' beyond office bearers and directors to include trustees, partners, the Karta of a Hindu undivided family, governing body members, or anyone controlling or managing the organisation, and makes them liable for FCRA offences unless they can prove lack of knowledge or due diligence.

What are the other changes proposed?

The Bill seeks to amend Section 43 of the parent Act to require any law enforcement agency or State government to obtain prior approval from the Central government before initiating investigations into FCRA-related complaints.

It also proposes timelines for the receipt and utilisation of foreign contributions under the 'prior permission' category (one-time receipt of funds), and provides for automatic cessation of certificates upon expiry or non-renewal.

The Bill proposes to reduce the maximum imprisonment for FCRA offences from five years to one year. It also proposes fixed timelines for the utilisation of foreign funds received under the 'prior permission' category unlike the open-ended provision under the 2010 Act.

How does the Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) regulate foreign donations in India?

The MHA regulates foreign donations in the country through the FCRA to ensure that such funds do not adversely affect the country's internal security. The legislation was first enacted in 1976. In 2010, it was repealed and replaced with a new legislation. The 2010 Act came into force on May 1, 2011 and has been amended in 2016, 2018, and 2020.

The FCRA registration is valid for five years, after which the NGO has to apply for a renewal. Since 2015, the FCRA registrations of more than 18,000 NGOs have been cancelled. As on April 3, there are 14,965 FCRA-registered NGOs active in the country. NGOs can receive foreign contributions for social, educational, religious, economic, and cultural programmes.

Why is the Bill being opposed?

The Catholic Bishops' Conference of India said the Bill amounts to "executive overreach" and raises concerns about "undue interference" in the functioning of minority institutions and civil society groups. The body objected to "clauses that grant sweeping powers to the Central government, allowing it to deny renewal or cancel licenses of organisations" and the powers "to assume control over institutions, including their funds, properties, and other assets." The Chief Ministers of poll-bound Tamil Nadu and Kerala have opposed the Bill as well.

What is the status of the Bill?

The Bill was deferred following an uproar by the Opposition. In Kerala and Tamil Nadu, there were fears it could be misused to seize assets of minority institutions, such as churches. Meanwhile, the Bharatiya Janata Party has been reaching out to the Christian community in Kerala to build a support base. The legislation remains active.



Opposition MPs demanding the withdrawal of the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, during the Budget Session of Parliament, in New Delhi. ANI

As Musk inks Meghalaya deal, a look at Tesla chief's growing interest in India

Soumyarendra Barik
New Delhi, April 4

DAYS AFTER it was reported that billionaire Elon Musk attended a call between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and US President Donald Trump — something that New Delhi has denied — the senior leadership of SpaceX and Starlink, two of Musk's most prominent companies, met with Union Communications Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia.

Starlink also signed a letter of intent with the North-Eastern state of Meghalaya to “explore the possibilities of providing high speed internet connectivity” through its satcom service. The company has previously signed similar agreements with Maharashtra, Gujarat and Goa.

Though Starlink received the necessary regulatory approvals for launching its satellite communication in India last year, the company is yet to offer the service, as New Delhi is understood to be still evaluating the larger security implications of such technology. But, nonetheless, it is clear that Musk sees India as a key user-base market, for not just Starlink, but a number of his other ventures.

Musk's reported presence during the phone call comes amid concerns his companies are exposed to some fresh vulnerability due to the war in Iran. It also suggests he has got some leverage back in the administration in DC, a public fallout with Trump last summer after his departure from the government.

An *NYT* report said that Musk has “looked to India as a potentially lucrative market for



Starlink has received regulatory approvals for launching its satellite communication. REUTERS

his automotive, space and artificial intelligence companies. Tesla, his electric automaker, had previously faced hurdles to selling vehicles in India because of tariffs on foreign manufacturers. Starlink, the satellite internet provider from Musk's SpaceX, is awaiting final clearances to operate in the country and is still “pending regulatory approval,” according to a company website.”

For context, his companies have taken on “significant investment from sovereign wealth funds in countries in the West Asia, including Saudi Arabia and Qatar. Musk has also long coveted a greater commercial presence in India. And SpaceX, his private rocket company, has been considering an initial public offering later this year, which could be thrown into turmoil if global economic conditions worsen,” *the NYT* reported. But beyond these public-facing entities that Musk controls, the overall disruption in global supply chains due to the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz could have far-

• RAISING THE BET

A SENIOR government official in Delhi said that Elon Musk believes that India could play a role in helping normalise the disruptions to the supply chains.

MUSK SEES India as a key user-base market, for not just Starlink, but a number of his other ventures.

LAST YEAR Tesla launched retail operations in India, with showrooms in Mumbai and Delhi-NCR.

reaching repercussions for the billionaire. For instance, the shortage of helium or petrochemicals.

Musk's SpaceX uses helium to pressurise the propellant tanks of Starship and Falcon 9. Given that Qatar produces one-third of the world's helium, the continued blockage at the Strait of Hormuz has resulted in spot prices of helium nearly doubling. Similarly, Tesla's semiconductor supply chain is reliant on helium for etching at fabs belonging to South Korean companies such as SK Hynix or Samsung, analysts said.

Musk has a vested interest in the supply chains returning back to normal, an analyst said. This also seems to have given him a window to claw his way back into favour in an administration that unambiguously pivots towards securing specific business interests. A senior official in Delhi said that Musk believes that India could play a role in helping normalise the disruptions to the supply chains.

FULL REPORT ON

WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Why greater reliance on coal may spur record solar power curtailments

Pratyush Deep
New Delhi, April 4

AS INDIA heads into a “hotter-than-normal” summer, with forecasts pointing to an above-average number of heatwave days, the government plans to rely more on coal-based power to meet peak summer demand.

The central government, on March 30, informed the Parliament that the country’s power system remains “adequately positioned” to meet peak summer demand, despite gas supply constraints triggered by the ongoing conflict in West Asia.

While gas-based power accounts for a relatively small share of the energy mix, it plays a crucial role during non-solar hours, with nearly 10 gigawatts (GW) of capacity typically relied upon during high demand summer months.

The government said it plans to use “alternative sources” like coal-based generation, renewables energy and energy storage systems compensating for reduced gas-based generation.

However, this shift may come with trade-offs that extend beyond immediate supply concerns, experts said.

A greater reliance on coal could lead to curtailment of renewable energy, particularly solar, due to the operational inflexibility of coal plants.

Gas-based power plants, meanwhile, are more flexible and can ramp generation up or down to accommodate renewable power while keeping the grid stable during evening peak hours when solar generation is unavailable.

Greater coal reliance

Coal-based power plants already dominate India’s electricity generation mix, contributing over 70%. Gas contributes around 1-2% in the country’s overall power generation.

Power generated from gas-based units is typically more expensive than coal and renewable energy.

However, due to their flexibility, they are generally used during high-demand periods, such as peak summer months when cooling demand surges, to meet evening peak demand.

In the past, the government has invoked emergency measures to ensure utilities operate both gas and coal plants at full capacity when soaring temperatures push electricity consumption to record levels.

However, disruption of gas supply due to the conflict in West Asia has cast a shadow over availability of gas for the country’s gas-based power plants as the government decided to prioritise certain sectors during the shortage.

To meet this gap and summer demand, the government told the Parliament that a series of measures are being rolled out to ensure adequate power supply.

A few days ago, the government directed Tata Power to operate its 4 GW imported coal-based plant in Gujarat at full capacity, after it had remained idle for six months.

The plant is set to resume operations from April 1.

The government also said it is closely monitoring the progress of thermal and hydro pro-

jects slated for commissioning by June 2026. Meanwhile, thermal power plants have been asked to defer their planned maintenance to make available adequate generation capacity.

“From this, about 10,000 MW will be made available during April to June, 2026,” the government told the Parliament. Further, all the power generating companies, including imported coal-based power plants and Central generating stations, have been advised to generate and maintain full availability on a daily basis excluding the period of planned maintenance or forced outage, the government said.

On clean power sources, the government maintained hydro-based generation is being scheduled in a manner so as to conserve water for meeting demand during peak periods. “Accelerated clearances are being provided for commissioning of renewable energy plants, particularly wind power plants and Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS),” it added.

RE curtailment

A greater reliance on its coal-based power plants could potentially lead to curtailment of renewable energy, particularly solar, due to the operational inflexibility of coal plants, experts maintained.

Duttatreya Das, an analyst with global energy think tank Ember, told The Indian Express that India could see record levels of solar power curtailment this summer as coal-based plants are prioritised to ensure grid stability.

Between May and November last year, India’s grid operator curtailed as much as 23 GW of renewable energy to maintain grid safety and stability. The curtailment was largely necessitated because a significant portion of India’s coal-based thermal fleet failed 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 generation level at which a thermal unit can safely operate without shutting down. With renewable energy 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. “Earlier, solar met daytime demand while expensive coal plants remained largely idle during summer, with gas stepping in to meet the evening peak. Now, with greater reliance on coal, these costly plants will remain operational even during the day, forcing cheaper renewable energy to be curtailed,” Das added.

Sharath Rao, Visiting Fellow at the Centre for Social and Economic Progress (CSEP), said renewable energy curtailment in India is driven largely by grid-security considerations — especially periods of high frequency, state underdrawal, and transmission congestion.

“This has been observed particularly in high-renewable states such as Rajasthan and Gujarat, and at times in other states as well,” Rao said.

Indian refiners are procuring Iranian crude, says Centre

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas on Saturday dismissed reports that an Iranian crude oil tanker heading to India was diverted to China over payment issues, stating that Indian refiners are, in fact, securing Iranian crude oil.

“Amid Middle-East supply disruptions, Indian refiners have secured their crude oil requirements, including from Iran; and there is no payment hurdle for Iranian crude imports, contrary to rumours being circulated,” the Ministry said in a social media post.

Although the quantum of purchase has not been disclosed, the move marks a reversal from 2019, when India stepped away from purchasing Iranian crude following U.S. sanctions.

While refuting reports attributing vessel diversion to payment issues, the Ministry underlined that companies have “full flexibility to source oil from different sources and geogra-

Crude tracks



The move marks a reversal from 2019, when India stepped away from purchasing Iranian crude following U.S. sanctions

- Indian companies have ‘full flexibility’ to source oil from different sources, says Centre
- India currently imports crude oil from over 40 countries
- **No payment hurdle for Iranian crude imports, says Centre**

phies based on commercial considerations”. India imports crude oil from over 40 countries, the post added. It clarified that changes in vessel destinations during transit are common in global trade, as Bills of Lading often indicate tentative discharge ports and cargoes may be rerouted for operational and commercial reasons.

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Trump gives Iran 48 hours to make deal or face ‘Hell’

Agence France-Presse

WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump said on Saturday that Iran had 48 hours left to cut a deal or face “all Hell”, as U.S. and Iranian forces scrambled to find a downed American airman.

Mr. Trump’s threat came after a strike near an Iranian nuclear plant killed a guard and prompted evacuations, and as Tehran announced fresh attacks with the Revolutionary Guards saying they hit a commercial ship in Bahrain allegedly linked to Israel.

“Time is running out – 48 hours before all Hell will reign down on them (SIC),” Mr. Trump posted on social media on Saturday, referring to an ultimatum issued on March 26 for Iran.

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T.N. FISHERS FLOWN OUT

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RISING COST OF WAR

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Indian firms procuring Iranian crude: Centre

Indian refiners have been looking for opportunities to purchase a few cargoes of Iranian oil on water following the recent sanctions waiver by Washington.

“Claims on vessel diversion ignore how the oil trade works. Bills of Lading often carry indicative discharge ports, destinations and on-sea cargoes can change destinations mid-voyage based on trade optimisation and operational flexibility,” the Ministry said, adding, “It is reiterated that India’s crude oil requirements remain fully secured for the coming months.”

An Iranian crude oil carrier, *Ping Shun*, that had crossed the Strait of Hormuz and was signalling that it was heading to Vadinar, India, for the past three days, is now signalling it is headed for China, as per reports.

Meanwhile, motor tanker *Aurora* (new name *Sea Bird*) has been discharging 43,910 metric tonnes of Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) at New Mangalore Port (NMP) since April 2.

Another LPG tanker, *MT Al Ain*, sailing from Saudi Arabia’s Yanbu Port, too, has berthed at NMP on Saturday and began discharging 23,000 metric tonnes of LPG for three public sector oil marketing companies (OMCs).

MT Jag Vasant, presently at Mumbai anchorage, is expected to arrive at NMP on April 8 to discharge 9,500 metric tonnes of LPG.

(With contribution from Anil Kumar Sastry)

Trump gives Iran 48 hours to make deal

“Remember when I gave Iran ten days to MAKE A DEAL or OPEN UP THE HORMUZ STRAIT,” Mr. Trump wrote on Truth Social, referring to an ultimatum issued on March 26. “Time is running out -- 48 hours before all Hell will reign down on them.”

Tehran said on Friday it had shot down an F-15 warplane and U.S. media reported United States special forces had rescued one of its two crew members, with the other still missing. Iran’s military also said it downed a US A-10 ground attack aircraft in the Gulf, with U.S. media saying the pilot of that plane was rescued.

The local Mehr news agency on Saturday quoted the deputy governor of Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad province, Fattah Mohammadi, as saying the search for the missing pilot involved “presence of popular forces and tribesmen alongside military forces and is still ongoing”. He added that “last night, people fired at enemy helicopters with rifles and did not allow them to land”.

Images posted on social media and verified by AFPTV showed Iranian police firing at a U.S. helicopter in southwestern Iran as U.S. forces searched for the airman.

Mohammad Ghalibaf, the Speaker of Iran’s parliament, mocked the Trump administration, saying the “war they started has now been downgraded from ‘regime change’ to ‘Hey! Can anyone find our pilots?’”

A strike near Iran’s Bushehr nuclear plant on Saturday killed a guard and led Russia, which partly constructed the facility and helps operate it, to announce it was evacuating 198 workers.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi warned that continued attacks on the plant on the southern coast could eventually lead to radioactive fallout that would “end life in GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) capitals, not Tehran”.

U.S. PRESIDENT HAS SHOWN INTEREST IN REPLACING INTELLIGENCE CHIEF

Trump considers broader cabinet shake-up as Iran war pressure grows

Multiple cabinet members could be removed before midterms

Reuters
Washington, April 4

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump is considering a broader cabinet shake-up in the wake of Attorney General Pam Bondi's removal this week, as he grows increasingly frustrated with the political fallout from the war with Iran, five people familiar with internal White House discussions said.

Any potential reshuffling could serve as a reset for the White House as it confronts a politically challenging stretch: The five-week-old war has driven up gas prices, dragged down Trump's approval ratings and intensified anxiety about the consequences for Republicans heading into November's midterm elections.

Some allies said his televised speech to the nation on Wednesday - which one senior White House official described as an attempt to project a sense of control and confidence about the direction of the war - flat, adding to the sense that changes in messaging or personnel were needed.

"A shake-up to show action is not a bad thing, is it?" another White House official said.

Three White House officials and two other sources with



The research building of the Shahid Beheshti University, which was damaged by a strike, in Tehran, on Saturday. REUTERS

knowledge of administration dynamics spoke to Reuters on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive personnel matters.

The sources did not consistently describe any single cabinet member as certain to lose their job in the near term. But multiple officials are in some degree of danger, they said.

Several of the sources said Tulsi Gabbard, Trump's director of national intelligence, and Commerce Secretary Howard Lutnick are among those potentially on the chopping block, after Trump ousted Bondi and Homeland Security Secretary Kristi Noem in recent weeks.

Trump has in recent months expressed displeasure with Gabbard, said one senior White House official.

Zelensky holds security talks with Erdogan in Istanbul

Kyiv: Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has arrived in Istanbul for "substantive" talks on security issues with

Turkey's President Tayyip Erdogan, Zelensky said on Saturday. "We are working to strengthen our partnership to ensure real protection of people's lives, advance stability and guarantee security in our Europe, as well as in the Middle East," Zelensky wrote on X.

He did not elaborate further on the subject of the talks. Ukraine has recently signed security co-operation agreements with Saudi Arabia, the

UAE and Qatar, and says it is in talks with several other Middle Eastern states about similar arrangements.

After the outbreak of war in West Asia, Ukraine has sought to leverage its counter-drone experience acquired during its four-year-long war against Russia. Moscow has long deployed Iranian-designed drones to strike Ukraine since its February 2022 invasion.

Zelensky's spokesman told reporters that Zelensky would meet Patriarch Bartholomew, the most senior cleric in the Orthodox Church. REUTERS

Missing airman fuels fears Iran could gain leverage over the US

Yeganeh Torbati
April 4

THE DOWNING of a US fighter jet over Iranian territory and the search for one of its crew members has raised concerns that the airman could be captured and provide Iran with an asset that it could use for leverage against the United States.

The rescue operation for the missing airman was in its second day on Saturday, with not only American troops conducting an all-out search but the Iranian military also trying to find the crew member, according to three Iranian officials who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss military operations.

In one indication of Iran's eagerness to find the airman, an anchor for a local affiliate of Iran's state broadcaster read a statement on Friday on television calling on residents to capture the "enemy's pilot or pilots" and turn them over alive to security forces for a reward.

The possibility that Iran could capture the airman raises the specter of a replay of the 1979 Iran hostage crisis, a traumatizing event in American history that laid the foundation for nearly five decades of hos-

tile US-Iranian relations.

The crisis, in which militant students took over US embassy in Tehran and kept 52 Americans captive for 444 days, set a template for Iran that it would perfect in the coming decades as a way to capture global headlines, inflict pain on its adversaries and extract concessions.

Since 1979, Iran's government has repeatedly used hostage-taking as a tactic against its adversaries. It has detained Americans, Europeans and other foreign citizens, sometimes imprisoning them

for years before releasing them, often in exchange for cash or the release of its own citizens imprisoned abroad. It has used hostages as propaganda tools and to establish leverage.

The 1979 crisis came to define the final year of Jimmy Carter's presidency and served for many as a symbol of his failures. Trump has repeatedly criticized Carter's handling of the hostage crisis, calling it "pathetic."

In 1980, he told a journalist, "That this country sits back and allows a country such as Iran to hold our hostages, to my way of thinking, is a horror, and I don't think they'd do it with other countries."

NYT

BASRA

Iraq shuts key Shalamcheh trade crossing with Iran after air strikes



REUTERS

Iraq closed the Shalamcheh border crossing with Iran after air strikes on the Iranian side killed an Iraqi citizen, security sources said on Saturday, shutting off a vital supply artery. The crossing serves as one of the main routes for imports of vegetables and other food supplies to Iraq from Iran, traders say. REUTERS

WASHINGTON

U.S. agents arrest relatives of Iran's military commander Soleimani



REUTERS

U.S. federal agents have detained the niece and grand-niece of late Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani after Secretary of State Marco Rubio revoked their green cards, the State Department said on Saturday. "Hamideh Soleimani Afshar and her daughter are now in the custody of ICE," the State Department said. REUTERS

China moves to regulate digital humans, bans addictive services for children

Reuters

Beijing, April 4

CHINA'S CYBERSPACE regulator issued draft regulations on Friday to oversee the development online of digital humans, requiring clear labelling and banning services that could mislead children or fuel addiction.

The Cyberspace Administration of China's proposed rules would require prominent "digital human" labels on all virtual human content and prohibit digital humans from providing "virtual intimate relationships" to those under 18, according to rules published for public comment until May 6.

The draft regulations would also ban the use of other people's personal information to create digital humans without consent, or using virtual humans to bypass identity verification systems, reflecting Beijing's efforts to maintain control in the face of advances in artificial intelligence.

Digital humans are also prohibited from disseminating content that endangers national security, inciting subversion of state power, promoting secession or undermining national unity, the draft rules said.

The new rules aim to fill a gap in governance in the digital human sector.

Floods and landslides leave 77 dead in 10 days in Afghanistan

Associated Press

Kabul, April 4

WIDESPREAD FLOODING, landslides and lightning strikes triggered by heavy rain and storms across Afghanistan have left 77 people dead and 137 injured over the past 10 days, the country's Disaster Management Authority said Saturday.

More rain has been forecast for the coming days throughout Afghanistan, and the authority warned the public to stay away from river banks and areas prone to flooding.

So far this year, dozens of people have died due to extreme weather in Afghanistan, an impoverished country that is highly vulnerable to extreme weather events. Earlier this year, heavy snowfall and flash floods left dozens of people dead across the country.

The recent toll includes 26 people killed over the past 48 hours, the disaster authority said. Overall, 793 homes have been completely destroyed and a further 2,673 have been damaged, while floods and landslides have destroyed 337 kilometres (about 210 miles) of roads, it said.

Businesses, agricultural land, water wells and irrigation canals have also been damaged, with more than 5,800 families affected overall, the authority said. Several highways connecting the country's capital to the provinces have also been dam-



Residents inspect a damaged house following floods, landslides and heavy rainfall in Kandahar province on Friday. AP

aged by floods and landslides, forcing travellers to take long, circuitous routes to reach Kabul, Public Works Ministry spokesman Ashraf Haqshinas said Saturday.

They include the Kabul to Jalalabad highway, which is the main route linking the capital to the Pakistani border and eastern Afghan provinces. A landslide and rockfalls, as well as flooding, shut the highway on Thursday morning, and Haqshinas said crews were working to re-open the road.

The Public Works Ministry warned travellers to be cautious when using roads in affected areas. Flooding has also shut the Salang Pass, a high mountain pass in the Hindu Kush mountain range that connects Kabul to the country's north, including the major cities of Kunduz and Mazar-e-Sharif.

Quake toll rises to 12, family of eight killed

Ittefaq: The death toll from a 5.8-magnitude earthquake that struck northern Afghanistan has risen to 12, officials said on Saturday, with a recently returned refugee family among those killed. Afghanistan's deputy government spokesman Hamdullah Fitrat said 12 people were killed and four injured. However, the Afghanistan Disaster Management

Authority put the toll at nine. The reason for the discrepancy was not immediately clear. Eight of the victims were members of one family living on the outskirts of Kabul. AP