

States can reap benefits of women's reservation: PM

Modi reiterates that States that have done well in population control will not lose seats during delimitation, calls gherao of judicial officers in Malda 'maha jungle raj' sponsored by Trinamool

Shiv Sahay Singh
KOLKATA

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday sought to reach out to women voters in West Bengal, stating that his party was committed to "real empowerment of women" through 33% reservation.

Addressing a public meeting in Cooch Behar, Mr. Modi said it was necessary to increase the role of women in decision-making for the country. "Therefore, the government has scheduled a special session of Parliament on April 16, 17, and 18. This right of our mothers and sisters has been pending for 40 years. Our government has enacted a law to provide 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies," he said.

He added that ensuring reservation for women was the responsibility of all parties and urged them to cooperate on the issue.

Mr. Modi reiterated that the States which have done well in population control would not lose seats during delimitation. "From Cooch Behar, I once again assure all States that the good work done in population



Warm welcome: Prime Minister Narendra Modi being felicitated by Union Minister Sukanta Majumdar in Cooch Behar on Sunday. PTI

control will not result in any loss in seats. Everyone will benefit..." he said.

Mr. Modi said that the government wanted to ensure in Parliament "that additional seats are created for women so that States can reap major benefits from it". The reservation will be implemented from the 2029 Lok Sabha election.

Women voters are crucial to the outcome of the 2026 West Bengal Assembly election. The BJP has been trying to win them over by raising issues of crimes against women, particularly by fielding the mother of the doctor who was raped and killed at R.G. Kar Hospital in August 2024.

The Prime Minister also referred to the alleged atrocities on women at Sandeshkhali and said, "On one side are the cries of sisters and daughters subjected to brutal atrocities, like those in Sandeshkhali. On the other side is Modi's guarantee of security, dignity and empowerment for women."

Trinamool Congress MP Sagarika Ghose accused the saffron party of hypocrisy on women's issues. "Shri @narendramodi is speaking about the Women's Reservation Bill and 'nari shakti'. Modi insults women leaders; he has insulted Bengal CM @MamataOfficial with his 'Didi oh didi' taunts, @BJP4India has garlanded those con-

victed of rape and given tickets to those accused of sexual assault. @BJP4India and Modi are anti-woman to the core; their hypocrisy on women's representation is glaring," she said in a social media post.

'Maha jungle raj'

Highlighting the gherao of seven judicial officers in Malda's Mothabari on April 1, Mr. Modi described the incident as a reflection of "Trinamool Congress-sponsored maha jungle raj".

He said the Trinamool government does not give much importance to any constitutional institution, and the Malda incident was a reflection of that.

"The law-abiding citizens were shocked by the way judicial officials were held hostage. What kind of a government is this, where even judges are not safe? How can you expect the safety of common people from such a government..." Mr. Modi said.

Thirty-five persons have been arrested in connection with the incident, and the National Investigation Agency (NIA) has taken over the probe.

Conduct fresh census before taking up women's quota in Parliament, says Akhilesh

Press Trust of India

LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav on Sunday questioned the basis of the proposed women's reservation, asserting that a fresh census must be completed before taking up the issue of reserving seats for women in Parliament and State Assemblies.

In a post on X, Mr. Yadav said any policy must rest on accurate data, arguing that the women's reservation framework is flawed if it relies on outdated population figures of the 2011 census.

'Wrong mathematics'

"The basis of reservation is one-third of total seats, which is purely a mathematical issue depending on numbers. Numbers, in turn, must be derived from population data, and that comes from a census. If old 2011 data is used to deter-



Akhilesh Yadav argued that the women's reservation framework is flawed if it relies on outdated population figures. FILE PHOTO

mine the women's population, the very foundation of the reservation becomes incorrect," he said.

Using a metaphor, the former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister asked if the "foundation itself is faulty, how can a proper outcome be expected."

Accusing the ruling BJP and its allies of attempting to "mislead" women, Mr. Yadav reiterated his party's demand for conducting a fresh census before implementing women's reserva-

tion. "Our primary objection is that a census must be conducted first, and only then should the issue of women's reservation be taken up."

His remarks come a day after Prime Minister Modi said that the Budget Session of Parliament has been extended for three days so that the law enacted in 2023 for providing 33% reservation to women in the Lok Sabha and State Assemblies can be implemented from 2029.

Congress slams PM for 'deceiving people' over delimitation

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI

The Congress launched a scathing attack on the Modi government on Sunday over its delimitation proposal related to the implementation of the women's reservation law, saying it would benefit larger and populous States more and was nothing but a "weapon of mass distraction".

The Opposition party also alleged that Prime Minister Narendra Modi was "hoodwinking" people by claiming that the strength of the southern States in the Lok Sabha would not go down.

In a post on X, Congress general secretary in-charge of communications Jairam Ramesh said, "The PM is up to his usual tricks of making misleading statements that are meant to deceive. He says South Indian States will not be hurt in any way if the strength of the Lok Sabha is increased by 50% and the

number of seats of each state in the Lok Sabha is also increased by 50%."

"This is hoodwinking the people of the country in which the PM has unique expertise," he said.

For example, the difference between Uttar Pradesh's and Kerala's seats in the Lok Sabha is now 60 and Mr. Modi's proposal will increase it to 90, he said. Similarly, the difference between Uttar Pradesh and Tamil Nadu will increase from 41 to at least 61, Mr. Ramesh said.

Congress MP P. Chidambaram said the proposal to convene Parliament from April 16 to 18 was "mischievous" and must be opposed.

"The proposal to increase the strength of the Lok Sabha from 548 to 816 is retrograde and will widen the difference between the more populous States and the Southern States that have stabilised their population," Mr. Chidambaram said.

Ladakh tourism body calls for 'restricted outside investment'

Stakeholders flag 'pressure from vested interests seeking to enter, dominate tourism sector in UT,' call for securing jobs, businesses of residents; Wangchuk stresses need for a 'middle-path' solution

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

Tourism stakeholders of Ladakh on Sunday passed a joint resolution on outside investment in the sector and called for "restricted external investment and only with local participation". Meanwhile, recently-released climate activist Sonam Wangchuk received a warm welcome in Ladakh's Kargil district during his ongoing tour.

"Any concerns regarding the impact of external investments: whether direct, indirect, declared, or otherwise; should be addressed through lawful means, dialogue, and coordinated representation by local communities, trade bodies, and associations," read the resolution adopted by the Ladakh Tourist Trade Alliance (LTTA), an



Climate activist Sonam Wangchuk at a press conference in Kargil on Sunday. PTI

amalgam of 14 Leh-based organisations.

"In recent years, there has been increasing pressure from large external businesses and vested interests seeking to enter and dominate the tourism sector in Ladakh," the resolution stated.

It flagged a "serious threat not only to the fragile environment but also to the limited economic opportunities available to the local population".

"The livelihoods, entrepreneurial opportunities, and economic interests of the local population shall be protected and prioritized through policy advocacy, community-led initiatives, and responsible tourism practices," read the resolution.

First visit since release

The day also saw Mr. Wangchuk visiting Kargil for the first time since his release on March 14 this year. The

climate activist spent nearly six months in detention in Jodhpur jail under the National Security Act, following street protests in Leh last year demanding statehood and Sixth Schedule status for Ladakh.

"Ladakhis were described as 'anti-nationals', which is baseless. People of Ladakh are deeply patriotic and are only seeking constitutional safeguards and protection for their land, culture and environment," he said. He spoke about the need for unity among Muslims and Buddhists in Ladakh in their joint struggle and expressed hope for a "constructive and meaningful discussion" between the Centre and the UT's representative. "There is a need for an open-minded dialogue with the Centre for a middle-path solution," said the climate activist.

Indian-flagged ship with 15,400 tonnes of LPG sails out of Strait of Hormuz

Debayan Tewari

CHENNAI

Liquefied petroleum gas tanker *Green Asha* crossed the Strait of Hormuz on Sunday. The Indian-flagged vessel is carrying 15,400 tonnes of LPG.

Green Asha is the eighth LPG carrier under the Indian flag that has exited the strait, which has been virtually shut by Iran ever since the U.S. and Israel attacked the country on February 28, triggering a global oil crisis.

Before the war, India imported almost 90% of its LPG through the strait.

According to marine-traffic.com, the tanker left the Al Rams port in the United Arab Emirates on March 30 and was sailing at a speed of 12.8 knots (23.7 km per hour). It sailed close to the Iran coast, transiting between Larak, Hormuz, and Qeshm islands.

Another LPG tanker, *Jag Vikram*, carrying around 20,000 tonnes of LPG, is stranded in the Gulf

Green Asha is owned by MOL India Private Limited.

According to sources, the ship was chartered by Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited and was originally intended for Jawaharlal Nehru Port Trust in Mumbai.

On Saturday, the government had said that *Green Sanvi*, carrying 46,650 tonnes of LPG with 25 seafarers aboard, had transited the strait.

Another LPG tanker, *Jag Vikram* carrying around 20,000 tonnes of LPG, is stranded in the Gulf.

On March 19, *The Hindu* had reported that the government had identified 22 India-bound vessels in the Persian Gulf for evacuation through the Strait of Hor-

muz. Of these, 20 vessels were critical to India's energy needs.

Three more foreign-flagged vessels cumulatively carrying 87,000 tonnes of LPG are awaiting a safe passage from the strait.

On Sunday, the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas said 17 India-flagged vessels, with 460 Indian seafarers aboard, remain in the western Persian Gulf region. The government said that "DG Shipping, in coordination with ship owners, RPSL agencies and Indian Missions, (is) actively monitoring the situation".

The Shipping Ministry has taken steps to "safeguard Indian vessels and seafarers operating in the region" and all Indian sailors stuck in the conflict zone are safe with "no incident involving Indian-flagged vessels" reported in the past 24 hours, the government said.

Migrant workers head home amid LPG supply concerns

Shrimansi Kaushik

NEW DELHI

At the New Delhi railway station, hundreds of migrant workers can be seen returning to their native places in Bihar and Uttar Pradesh from Delhi owing to delays in deliveries and higher prices in the black market for LPG cylinders.

'Was using firewood'

Anju Kumari, a resident of Kapashera in Delhi and a native of Patna, said she has been using firewood for cooking for the past 15 days after her husband lost his job when the food stall he worked at shut down.

"Our landlord allowed us to use firewood, unlike many others. But if there is no work, why would we stay?" she said.



Passengers at the New Delhi railway station. SHRIMANSI KAUSHIK

Several migrants that *The Hindu* spoke to said the village offers an option to permanently switch to firewood or coal, which is less expensive than an LPG cylinder that is selling for ₹400-500 per kg in the black market.

"Firewood costs about

₹10 per kg. If this is the lifestyle we have to live in a city, why spend on rent at all?" Ms. Anju said.

A similar sentiment was shared by Sushila Devi, accompanied by her two sons and a daughter-in-law, who was leaving for her native village in Azam-

garh after just a year in Delhi. "I have eight family members. We all work in a toy factory in Jahangirpuri. The expense on LPG has increased significantly. We have been eating out for the past week," she said. She was uncertain if they would come back.

'Taking parents back'

Manoj Kumar from Hajipur had recently brought his parents to Delhi after buying a house in Haiderpur.

Working in an IT company in north-west Delhi's Rohini and living in a joint family, a single cylinder connection was not sufficient for a family of 10.

"A 14-kg cylinder doesn't even last a month. The gas agency says there should be a gap of 25 days between two bookings.

This is not working out for us, so the parents have decided to go back," he said.

Migrant workers said the LPG crisis has seen the return of tandoors and kerosene stoves while alternatives such as electric cookers and induction stoves remain expensive.

According to vendors at the automatic ticket vending machines at the railway station, at least 10,000 to 12,000 tickets are being sold every day, with separate queues at the ticket windows. "At least five lakh persons depart from the station daily. Most of them are bound for Uttar Pradesh and Bihar, with the others bound for cities and towns in Haryana, Punjab, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Odisha, and the southern States," an official said.

Why did Iran war not affect China's energy security so far?

How has China diversified its energy sources and consumption patterns to strengthen energy security?

WORLD INSIGHT

Avinash Godbole

As the Israel-US war on Iran has meandered on, India has faced the shortage of liquified petroleum gas (LPG) and experienced a social panic over the possible shortage of petrol and diesel. One does not see similar news from China despite its bigger economy, larger consumer market and role as a supplier to global markets, raising the question of how China escaped the early consequences and how, and in what ways it may be affected in the future. The answer to that question lies in what China has done in the past two decades and how its geography, its position as the world's largest polluter, its stringent actions against the local air pollution

challenges and its concerns over status have combined to protect it from the current crisis.

How did it tackle the Malacca dilemma?

About 15 years ago, China's concerns over its dependence on the Malacca strait for trade and energy transits, and the near permanent American presence in the vicinity were real. The country sought to address this by building the capacity to create strategic petroleum reserves (SPR) and used long-term contracts to fill those up. Today China has nearly 120 days of SPR storage and it may be tapping into some of that. Data suggests that a combination of China's oil reserves and diversification may allow it to bypass imports from the Strait of Hormuz for several months.

China's second approach to reducing the dependence on the Malacca strait was

to build pipelines to import oil and gas from Central Asia and Russia. If the straits were a geopolitical challenge, its stable relations with its Central Asian neighbours made the geography an opportunity.

Now almost 20 per cent of China's crude oil imports happen through these pipelines, including an estimated 900,000 barrels per day from Russia. Consider that against the failed attempts to establish the Iran-Pakistan-India and the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipelines, which have been stalled for a combination of reasons. On the other hand, China's national oil companies like Sinopec, CNPC and CNOOC, have traditionally had deeper pockets and China has been an active negotiator in conflict zones like Sudan or Angola and their proactive strategies have also helped it create a good diversification in its imports sources.

What are China's climate and energy strategies?

For its part, China joined hands with India, South Africa, and Brazil, to protect their carbon space, forming the BASIC bloc during the early days of global climate change negotiations.

However, it also used its status as the world's largest polluter and managed to get the US-China Ten-Year Framework Cooperation on Energy and Environment, in June 2008, before it agreed to any commitments under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This cooperation and the subsequent knowledge and technology transfer led to the success of the Paris Climate Accord and allowed China to create a foundation for its industrial surge in sectors like solar panels, wind and tidal energy, energy efficiency and management, carbon storage and sequestration, electric mobility including cars and buses.

Along with this, China has also faced a significant criticism for its role as the world's largest coal consumer. China has also worked to undertake energy transition plans and address the air pollution challenge that Beijing and other cities have faced via time-bound targets declared in its numerous white papers, task forces and bureaucratic restructuring initiatives.

How did EVs help lower oil demand?

China's role as a large middle-class economy also matters. China is also the largest consumer of electric vehicles. Its preferential policies favour EV via tax concessions, mandates and preferential lottery chances and its scaling capabilities and larger size of consumer markets have contributed to their popularity. This has allowed China to significantly reduce its imports in 2025 and this number is bound to grow in the coming years.

Is economic slowdown a factor?

Lastly, China is indeed facing a serious economic slowdown which means its overall energy consumption is lower. It has set a modest target of growth at 4.5% for 2026. Its construction sector has nearly stalled and it means that sectors such as cement, iron and steel and others are not doing well too. China's role as the world's factory is changing gradually compared to how it was a decade ago, and it has been a good thing for its energy demand.

To sum it up, a combination of opportunities, proactive strategies and strategic and status concerns have helped China to stay afloat stronger in the current crisis.

(Avinash Godbole is a Professor and Associate Academic Dean, JSLH, JGU. Views expressed are personal)

Iran attacks energy infrastructure across UAE, Bahrain, and Kuwait

Iranian drones strike Kuwaiti oil and petrochemical facilities, igniting fires and causing 'severe' damage; two Kuwaiti power and water desalination plants sustain 'significant damage' from drone attacks; fire breaks out at petrochemical plant in UAE

Agence France-Presse

DUBAI

Critical infrastructure across the Gulf came under attack from Iran on Sunday, with damage reported at civilian facilities in the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Kuwait.

Gulf countries have faced repeated drone and missile salvos from Iran in response to U.S. and Israeli strikes on the Islamic republic that began at the end of February.

Iran has targeted energy and other industrial infrastructure in the oil-rich Gulf nations, accusing its neighbours of allowing U.S. forces



Material damage: The impact of a fire caused by a drone attack on a building of the Kuwait Petroleum Corporation on Sunday. AFP

to carry out attacks from their territory. The Gulf states have vehemently denied the accusations.

Attacks by Iranian drones on Sunday resulted

in "severe" damage to Kuwaiti oil and petrochemical facilities, the state petro-chemical company said.

The Kuwait Petroleum Corporation said a number

of facilities of its subsidiary Petrochemical Industries Company were targeted in the attack which "resulted in the outbreak of fires at several of these facilities and caused severe material damage".

Earlier, Kuwait's Electricity and Water Ministry said two power and water desalination plants were damaged by a drone attack from Iran, causing "significant material damage and the shutdown of two electricity generating units".

In Kuwait City, the Finance Ministry said an Iranian drone attack caused "extensive" damage to a government building, but "no human casualties were

recorded". Earlier, authorities in Abu Dhabi said they were battling fires at a petrochemical plant in Ruwais Industrial City on the UAE's northwest coast.

"Operations at the facility have been immediately suspended while damage is assessed. No injuries have been reported," Gulf emirate's media office said after the UAE's Defence Ministry earlier said it was responding to missile and drone attacks.

Bahrain's Gulf Petrochemical Industries Company said a fire at its operating units after an Iranian drone attack was brought under control. No injuries were reported.

Israel resumes strikes on Lebanon, killing at least 11

Agence France-Presse

BEIRUT

Israeli strikes on south Beirut and its suburbs killed at least four persons on Sunday, a day after Israel threatened to hit Lebanon's main border crossing with Syria, forcing it to close.

The Israeli military also carried out deadly attacks on Lebanon's south, one of which killed seven persons, including a family of six.

Hezbollah on Sunday claimed to have fired a cruise missile at an Israeli warship off the coast, but the Israeli military said it was "not aware" of such an incident.

One of Israel's strikes in Beirut on Sunday killed at least four persons and wounded 39 in the Jnah



Wiped out: People gather as rescuers work at the site of an Israeli strike in the Jnah area in Beirut, Lebanon, on Sunday. REUTERS

neighbourhood, the Lebanese Health Ministry said. It landed about 100 metres away from a public hospital, a medical source said.

Another attack struck a building elsewhere in Jnah that the Israeli military had warned it would target.

Meanwhile, Lebanese President Joseph Aoun reiterated on Sunday a call for

negotiations with Israel, saying he wanted to spare his country's south from destruction on the scale seen in Gaza. "It is true that Israel might want to do in southern Lebanon what it did in Gaza," Mr. Aoun said in a televised address, after Israel launched air strikes and a ground offensive against Hezbollah.

Water sharing, visa likely on Bangladesh Minister's agenda

Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman to visit India this week, say officials; newly elected BNP govt. indicates more willingness to negotiate water sharing treaty renewal, compared with interim govt.

Kallol Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

Sharing of river water, energy cooperation, normalisation of visa services, and war in West Asia are all expected to feature in bilateral talks with Bangladesh Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman, who is expected to visit India this week, according to diplomatic sources.

This will be the first visit by a Bangladeshi Foreign Minister since the fall of Sheikh Hasina's government in Dhaka on August 5, 2024 pushed bilateral relations downhill.

The Bangladeshi Foreign Ministry held internal meetings on Sunday in preparation for the visit, which is likely to take place on April 7 and 8, sources said.

Ganga treaty

Indian officials said it is important to fast-track negotiations to renew the Ganga water treaty of 1996, noting that subcommittees constituted for this purpose did not make much progress during the 15-month tenure of Dhaka's interim government headed by chief adviser Mu-



Bangladesh Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman, right, with Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma in Dhaka on February 22. ANI

hammad Yunus. The newly elected government of Prime Minister Tarique Rahman, who was sworn in to office on February 17, has, however, indicated that it is willing to take the dialogue forward and conclude negotiations ahead of December 2026, the deadline for treaty renewal.

Bangladesh Water resources Minister Shahid Uddin Choudhury Anee said on April 1 that the technical committee on the subject has started its work in Dhaka. Bangladeshi diplomatic sources have also hinted that, if necessary, temporary renewal of the treaty can be at-

tempted before the two sides commit to a long-term renewal. It is understood that both New Delhi and Dhaka are walking a tightrope in view of the upcoming Assembly election in West Bengal, where the sharing of the waters of the Ganga could become a political issue.

Mr. Rahman's visit also indicates New Delhi's willingness to engage with an elected government in Dhaka. Mr. Rahman, who served as the National Security Adviser under Mr. Yunus, is one of the few officials of the interim government who managed to retain significant positions in the elected government

of the Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP).

Given the delicate condition of bilateral relations, the Indian side has not yet announced the visit, and sources in Dhaka have described the visit as "transiting through Delhi" before Mr. Rahman proceeds to the Indian Ocean Conference in Mauritius that is being organised by the India Foundation, in association with the External Affairs Ministry and the government of Mauritius. Official sources, however, have indicated that during his stay in Delhi, Mr. Rahman will meet his counterpart, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, and other senior officials, senior editors, and Delhi-based diplomats.

The war in West Asia and the resultant energy insecurity that has emerged as a major challenge for the Tarique Rahman government is one of the issues that is expected to feature prominently in talks as well. Bangladeshi diplomats have also highlighted the need to normalise the Indian visa process for Bangladeshi tourists and business people as a high priority for Dhaka.

Taiwan Opposition leader Cheng on a 'peace' visit to China

Agence France-Presse

TAIPEI

Taiwan's main Opposition leader will make a rare trip to China on Tuesday, weeks before U.S. President Donald Trump, with Beijing expected to use the visit to increase its influence over the democratic island.

Cheng Li-wun, who will become the first sitting chairperson of the Kuomintang (KMT) to travel to China in a decade, said she wants to meet Chinese President Xi Jinping to build cross-strait "peace".

Taiwanese officials and experts, however, say Mr. Xi sees an opportunity to

The KMT has long advocated for closer relations with China, which claims Taiwan is part of its territory

reinforce Ms. Cheng's standing in the KMT and stymie further U.S. weapons sales to Taiwan. The KMT has long advocated for closer relations with China, which claims Taiwan is part of its territory and has threatened to use force to seize it.

The KMT leader faces deepening divisions inside her party over how to counter China's military threats.

Strait 'deadline' looms, Jaishankar talks to Iran counterpart Araghchi

Shubhajit Roy

New Delhi, April 5

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS Minister S Jaishankar spoke to the foreign ministers of Iran, Qatar and UAE on Sunday as US President Donald Trump threatened to resume attacks on Iran's energy infrastructure if the Strait of Hormuz is not re-opened by Tuesday.

Iran's Foreign Minister

Seyed Abbas Araghchi called up Jaishankar and they discussed the "present situation".

"Received a call from Foreign Minister @araghchi of Iran. Discussed the present situation," Jaishankar posted on X, after the call.

According to the Iranian embassy, "Seyed Abbas @araghchi, Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran,

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Strait 'deadline' looms, Jaishankar talks to Iran's Araghchi

held a phone conversation with Subrahmanyam Jaishankar @DrSJaishankar, India's Minister of External Affairs, discussing bilateral relations as well as regional and international developments." This was their sixth phone conversation since the war started on February 28.

After his phone conversation with UAE Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Jaishankar said, "Discussed the evolving situation in West Asia with DPM & FM @ABZayed of UAE."

UAE has been facing attacks from Iran — more than 2,500 in the form of missile and drone strikes in the last five weeks of the US-Israel war on the Islamic Republic.

Jaishankar also spoke to Qatar's Foreign Minister Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani. He posted: "Had a telecon on the ongoing

conflict with PM & FM @MBA_AlThani_of Qatar this evening". Qatar too had faced Iranian attacks due to the presence of the American military in the country.

Jaishankar has spoken to the foreign ministers of both UAE and Qatar at least twice in the past one month.

Delhi is engaging with the stakeholders as President Trump on Sunday escalated his threats to bomb Iranian power plants within the next two days.

India has been dealing with the consequences of the closure of the Strait and only a handful of ships have passed through in the last month. This has led to disruptions in the supplies of gas and energy.

Jaishankar's engagement on Sunday is part of Delhi's efforts to mitigate the impact of the war in West Asia and stabilise the situation.

US rescues airman; Trump goes ballistic, drops the f-bomb

Officer hid in mountain crevice as US and Iran forces fought to get to him

Phil Stewart
& Menna AlaaEldin
Washington, Cairo, April 5

US SPECIAL forces rescued an airman in a high-risk mission deep inside Iran while President Donald Trump threatened to rain "hell" on Tehran if it did not reopen the Strait of Hormuz for oil flows vital to the world economy.

Trump announced the rescue in the early hours of Sunday in a social media post that described the operation in a mountainous area as "one of the most daring" such missions in US history.

The airman — weapons officer of the F-15E Strike Eagle jet shot down on Friday — was wounded but "will be just fine", Trump said in a message on X. The pilot of the aircraft was rescued on Friday itself.

In another post, laden with expletives, Trump repeated a demand that Iran open the

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



An image on IRGC's website shows what state media claimed was the site of a downed American transport plane and two helicopters involved in rescue ops, in Isfahan. REUTERS [MORE REPORTS, P 9, 14](#)

Strait 'deadline' looms, Jaishankar talks to Iran counterpart Araghchi

Shubhrajit Roy
New Delhi, April 5

EXTERNAL AFFAIRS Minister S Jaishankar spoke to the foreign ministers of Iran, Qatar and UAE on Sunday as US President Donald Trump threatened to resume attacks on Iran's energy infrastructure if the Strait of Hormuz is not reopened by Tuesday.

Iran's Foreign Minister

Seyed Abbas Araghchi called up Jaishankar and they discussed the "present situation". "Received a call from Foreign Minister @araghchi of Iran. Discussed the present situation," Jaishankar posted on X, after the call.

According to the Iranian embassy, "Seyed Abbas @araghchi, Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran

»CONTINUED ON PAGE:

US rescues airman; Trump drops the f-bomb

Strait of Hormuz. "Tuesday will be Power Plant Day, and Bridge Day, all wrapped up in one, in Iran. There will be nothing like it!!! Open the F****n' Strait, you crazy bastards, or you'll be living in Hell - JUST WATCH! Praise be to Allah. President DONALD J. TRUMP," it read.

In an interview to *The Wall Street Journal* on Sunday, Trump said his deadline for Iran to open the Strait of Hormuz or face attacks on critical infrastructure is Tuesday evening.

"If they don't do something by Tuesday evening, they won't have any power plants and they won't have any bridges standing," Trump told the *Journal*. Trump later posted on social media, without mentioning Iran or any other details: "Tuesday, 8:00 P.M. Eastern Time!"

In a completely different vein, while talking to Fox News, Trump said that Iran was negotiating, with a deal possible by Monday.

The extraction

The US airman's extraction followed a frantic search-and-rescue operation as Iran also promised a reward for anyone who turned in an "enemy pilot."

After ejecting from the F-15E, the officer hid in a mountain crevice, his location unknown to both Americans and Iranians. He evaded Iranian forces for more than 24 hours, at one point hiking up a 7,000-foot ridgeline.

A US official said the operation, which Israel said it had assisted, involved dozens of military aircraft and encountered fierce resistance from Iranian forces.

A senior administration official in Washington said the rescue had involved a CIA deception campaign spreading word inside Iran that US forces had already found the missing airman and were moving him on the ground for exfiltration out of the country.

Iran said several US aircraft were destroyed during the op-

eration, including two military transport planes and two Black Hawk helicopters. Footage posted on social media showed burned-out aircraft wreckage, which Reuters verified was in the area.

Iran hits back

The Speaker of Iran's Parliament, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, condemned Trump's threats, saying he was being misled by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. "Your reckless moves are dragging the United States into a living HELL for every single family, and our whole region is going to burn because you insist on following Netanyahu's commands," he posted on X.

Iran's military joint command on Sunday warned of stepping up retaliatory attacks on regional oil and civilian infrastructure if the US and Israel attacked such targets in the Islamic Republic, according to state television. "We once again repeat: if you commit aggression again and strike civilian fa-

cilities, our responses will be more forceful," a spokesman said in comments run by IRNA news agency.

On Sunday, Tehran hit petrochemicals plants in Bahrain and Abu Dhabi. These followed similar attacks on oil facilities, a major aluminium plant and petrochemical sites in recent days. Iran also attacked an Israel-affiliated vessel with a drone in the Strait, setting the ship on fire.

Iran has so far shown no signs of complying with Trump's demand to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. Its chokehold over the narrow shipping lane off its southern coast has given it powerful leverage - crude prices have surged to a four-year high close to \$120 a barrel, squeezing consumers and businesses across the globe.

Putting pressure on Iran, a senior Israeli defence official said that Israel was preparing to attack Iranian energy facilities next week and was awaiting US approval.

-REUTERS, WITH AP INPUTS

KHERA, GOGOI ALLEGE 'RINIKI BHUYAN SARMA' HAS ASSETS IN UAE AND U.S.

Himanta says will file defamation suit as Cong claims wife has 3 passports

Express News Service
Guwahati, April 5

THE CONGRESS on Sunday alleged that Riniki Bhuyan Sharma, the wife of Assam Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma, possesses passports of three other countries and undisclosed properties and assets in the UAE and the USA, drawing sharp reaction from the CM who said the claims are "false" and "politically motivated".

Sarma said he and his wife would file defamation cases against Congress spokesperson Pawan Khera who made the allegations at a press conference in Delhi.

Khera shared purported images of what he alleged were three passports in "Riniki Bhuyan Sarma's name" issued by the United Arab Emirates, Antigua & Barbuda and Egypt.

"We want to know how the Chief Minister, whose entire politics revolves around hatred against Muslims, how his own wife keeps passports of two Muslim countries, and Antigua & Barbuda... We want to know if Riniki Bhuyan Sarma also keeps an Indian passport? How can an Indian national have three passports from three different countries?" asked Khera.



Assam Congress president Gaurav Gogoi with senior leader Pawan Khera at a press conference; (R) Assam CM Himanta Biswa Sarma interacts with supporters during an election campaign, in Guwahati on Sunday. PTI



He also alleged there were properties in her name in the UAE and a company registered in Wyoming in the United States, which he said were not disclosed in Sarma's affidavit. "They are preparing to leave the country if they lose the election," Khera said.

Dismissing the allegations, CM Sarma said, "These are malicious, fabricated and politically motivated lies aimed at misleading the people of Assam. My wife and I will be filing both criminal and civil defamation cases within the next 48 hours against Shri Pawan Khera. He will be held fully accountable for his reckless and defamatory statements... Once the truth is established in a court of law, Shri

Pawan Khera will face the consequences of his actions..."

Sarma also pointed to "multiple glaring inconsistencies" in the images of documents that the Congress circulated, calling them "a crude and poorly executed attempt at digital manipulation". He said while his wife's official surname is "Sharma", the documents shared use "Sarma". He also pointed out inconsistencies in all three passports. Claiming that the images shared are AI-generated, Riniki Sharma said: "I expected a spokesperson of a national party to exercise basic due diligence, rather than circulate poorly fabricated images of imaginary passports and documents. I will now be letting the

law take over. Criminal charges are being initiated. We can continue this in court."

Riniki, a businesswoman, owns Assam's largest media house and other ventures, including a school and a resort.

Khera's allegations follow a year-long campaign by CM Sarma, accusing Congress leader Gaurav Gogoi of being a "Pakistan agent" and constituting an SIT to probe the claim.

Later in the evening, Khera and Gaurav Gogoi asked Sarma to answer three questions on whether his family has properties and companies abroad.

The questions were asked at a press conference in Guwahati, hours after Sarma's threat of defamation case against Khera.

The Congress leaders asked the Assam CM whether his wife or family owns property in Dubai, has companies in Wyoming in the USA, or has placed their assets in shell companies.

Gogoi and Khera demanded that Sarma provide an affidavit to the Election Commission regarding his wife's alleged properties and investments. "These details are missing in the affidavit submitted to the EC, and his nomination is a fit case for disqualification," Khera said. Gogoi said Sarma has accused him of not divulging his wife's alleged bank accounts in Pakistan, adding, "I can put my hand on the Bhagwad Gita and say that this is not true; can he do the same?" WITH INPUTS FROM PTI

Moody's cuts India growth forecast to 6%

ENS Economic Bureau

New Delhi, April 5

MOODY'S RATINGS has trimmed India's growth outlook for the current fiscal year to 6% from 6.8% estimated earlier, flagging rising risks from the ongoing conflict in West Asia.

It is to be noted that Goldman Sachs has also turned more cautious, lowering its 2026 forecast to 5.9% from 7% before the conflict.

In contrast, S&P Global Ratings has taken a more optimistic view, raising its projections by 40 basis points (bps) to 7.1% for FY27. The divergence reflects the high degree of uncertainty surrounding the duration and intensity of the crisis.

In its latest credit assessment reported by PTI, Moody's pointed to India's deep reliance on the region for energy supplies as a key vulnerability. West Asia accounts for roughly 55% of the country's crude oil imports and more than 90% of its liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) needs.

Any prolonged disruption, particularly in LPG shipments, could translate into near-term shortages for households, pushing up cooking fuel and transport costs.

The impact could also spill over into food prices, given India's dependence on imported fertilisers.

While inflation remains within manageable levels for now, the risks are clearly skewed upward. FE

Artemis II crew speeds towards moon to break Apollo 13 record

Associated Press

Houston, April 5

THE ARTEMIS II astronauts are already the champions of a fresh new era of lunar exploration. Now it's time to set a new distance record. Launched last week on humanity's first trip to the moon since 1972, the three Americans and one Canadian are chasing after Apollo 13's maximum range from Earth.

That will make them our planet's farthest emissaries as they swing around the moon without stopping on Monday and then hightail it back home.

Their roughly six-hour lunar flyby promises views of the moon's far side that were too dark or too difficult to see by the 24 Apollo astronauts who preceded them.

A total solar eclipse also awaits them as the moon blocks the sun, exposing snippets of shimmering corona. "We'll get eyes on the moon, kind of map it out and then continue to go back in force," said flight director Judd Frieling.

The goal is a moon base re-



Artemis II astronauts (from left) Reid Wiseman, Jeremy Hansen, Christina Koch and Victor Glover en route to the moon. AP

plete with landers, rovers, drones and habitats. A look at Artemis II's up-close and personal brush with another world — our constant companion, the moon.

Apollo 13 holds the distance record from Earth. Apollo 13's astronauts missed out on a moon landing when one of their oxygen tanks ruptured on the way there in 1970.

Artemis II's astronauts are following the same figure-eight path since they are neither orbiting the moon nor landing on it. But their distance from Earth

should exceed Apollo 13's by about 4,000 miles (6,400 kilometers). Artemis II's Christina Koch said late last week that she and her crewmates don't live on superlatives, but it's an important milestone "that people can understand and wrap their heads around," merging the past with the present and even the future when new records are set.

During the flyby, the astronauts will split into pairs and take turns capturing the lunar views out their windows with cameras.