

SC denies Bengal's plea to delay locking of poll rolls

Top court says tribunal hearings cannot be 'compressed' and made hasty to fit a deadline; CJI says gheraoing of judicial officers on April 1 was a 'well-planned, calculated and deeply instigated' move

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Monday declined the West Bengal government's appeal to wait for a few more days before freezing the electoral roll so that many of the over 20 lakh voters, who could not pass the verification by judicial officers after being removed from rolls under the special intensive revision (SIR), get a chance to vote in the Assembly election on April 23 and 29.

On the gheraoing of judicial officers in the State's Malda district on April 1, the top court invoked powers under Article 142 of the Constitution and Chief Justice of India Surya Kant, heading a Bench, said the incident was not an emotional outburst, but a "well-planned, calculated, and deeply instigated" move. The court directed the National Investigation Agency to take over the investigation in the case.

The hearing began with senior advocate Shyam Divan, appearing for West Bengal, saying there were long meandering queues of voters in the State who, remain excluded from the



Last resort: People queuing up in Nadia, West Bengal, on Monday to submit their petitions before the special tribunal after their names were deleted from the voter list under the SIR. PTI

electoral rolls after failing to make their case against 'logical discrepancies' found in their details.

Mr. Divan said the 19 appellate tribunals should be asked to dispose of the appeals by April 15. A final supplementary electoral roll, including the names of voters who have won their appeals, could be published on April 18, five days ahead of April 23, the first polling date. Electors, whose appeals could not be decided by April 15, could be included in the electoral roll. Freezing the electoral rolls on April 6,

the last date of filing nominations for the first phase, would deprive lakhs of their right to vote and amount to ignoring the appellate process, he submitted. "Appeals are a continuation of the adjudication process, and no elector should be disenfranchised. These are mapped electors. They had voted in the 2002 elections," he said.

But Justice Joymalya Bagchi, on the Bench, said a tribunal hearing cannot be "compressed". Principles of natural justice were involved and the hearing of appeals cannot be made

into a hasty exercise to fit a pre-conceived deadline, as suggested by the State.

The court said the issue of logical discrepancies was "peculiar" to West Bengal, prompting the use of judicial officers to verify objections. The court noted that out of over 60 lakh objections, 59.15 lakh were disposed of by the judicial officers.

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Sharad Pawar among 19 new Rajya Sabha members sworn in

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

NCP(SP) leader Sharad Pawar and Union Minister Ramdas Athawale were among 19 newly elected members who took oath in the Rajya Sabha on Monday.

The oath was administered by Rajya Sabha Chairman C.P. Radhakrishnan in the presence of Deputy Chairman Harivansh and Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju. Floor leaders of various parties were also present during the ceremony.

The members were a mix of those who won re-nomination and first-timers among the 19 who took oath. DMK leader Tiruchi Siva who entered the Rajya Sabha in 2000 will be beginning his fifth term.

The new members include five from Maharashtra, six from Tamil Nadu, five from West Bengal and



Sharad Pawar

three from Odisha. The oath was taken in multiple languages – Marathi, Hindi, Tamil, English, Bangla and Odia.

Maya Chintaman Ivate of the BJP's Maharashtra unit was the first to take oath, followed by Mr. Pawar, who entered the House in a wheelchair. This is Mr. Pawar's third term. Ramrao Sakharam Wadkute (BJP), Jyoti Nagath Waghmare (Shiv Sena) and Mr. Athawale (RPI-A) also took oath as members from Maharashtra.

'New Bangladesh-India ties will avoid mistakes of past'

Bangladesh has left era of Sheikh Hasina behind, says adviser to Prime Minister Tarique Rahman; calls for frequent exchanges at the level of political parties and officials to deal with difficult issues

Kallol Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

Bangladesh wants to build a relation with India that will be focused on "people-to-people" ties and that will not be limited to individuals and political parties, said a senior official of the current government led by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman on Monday.

Humayun Kobir, Foreign Affairs Adviser to Prime Minister Rahman, said the "new" relation between the two sides will avoid the repeat of "past mistakes".

"Our bilateral relation should be focused on people-to-people ties so that it will not be focused on individuals. This is what we want and this is also what India desires. We want to ensure this relation avoids the mistakes of the past," Mr. Kobir said. The remarks were made after Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma called on Prime Minister Tarique Rahman on Monday. Briefing the media after the meeting, Mr. Kobir said the two sides discussed energy cooperation through the India-Bangladesh Friendship Pipeline.



Indian High Commissioner Pranay Verma pays a courtesy call on Bangladesh PM Tarique Rahman in Dhaka on Monday. ANI

India had sent 5,000 tonnes of high-speed diesel on March 10 and the two sides are in talks to deal with the energy crunch that is growing in Bangladesh against the backdrop of the U.S.-Israel war against Iran. Mr. Kobir is expected to accompany Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman during his visit to India that is scheduled to start on Tuesday. This will be the first Foreign Minister-level visit from the Bangladeshi side since the fall of the government of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on August 5, 2024 in a student-people uprising.

Mr. Kobir said Bangladesh has left the era of

Sheikh Hasina behind and added, "We have to create a new space for a new relation because Hasina-India relation will no longer be possible. Hasina is a spent force in Bangladesh and her influence is non-existent." He said that the two sides should do more frequent exchanges at the level of political parties and officials to deal with "difficult issues" so that misunderstandings are avoided.

High-level meetings

Officials here said that the visit of Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman remains on track and that he is expected to arrive here on Tuesday for a visit that will

include a number of high-level meetings. The two sides have kept a tight lid over the preparations for the talks in view of the delicate nature of the ties that are yet to fully recover from the setbacks suffered during the interim government because of the presence of Ms. Hasina in India and frequent mob attacks on the Indian missions and visa centres in Bangladesh.

The Dhaka daily *Prothom Alo* reported on Monday that apart from the Ganga water treaty's renewal and energy cooperation, the Bangladeshi team is expected to raise the need for removal of restrictive measures that India had imposed on the use of Indian sea and airports for Bangladeshi export items during April-June 2025. That apart, Mr. Khalilur Rahman and Mr. Humayun Kobir are also likely to press India for reducing border firing against Bangladeshi civilians.

While India says such actions are aimed at criminal gangs and smugglers, Bangladesh maintains that such gangs need to be apprehended and subjected to judicial processes and should not be fired at.

'16 India-flagged vessels in Persian Gulf, 2 LPG vessels en route India'

Saptaparno Ghosh

NEW DELHI

There are 16 Indian-flagged vessels operating in the Persian Gulf with 433 seafarers onboard, Mukesh Mangal, Additional Secretary at the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways told the media.

"The Directorate General of Shipping (DG Shipping) is closely monitoring the situation," he added.

The senior official informed in the last two days, two Indian-flagged LPG vessels, Green Sanvi and Green Asha, have safely crossed the Strait of Hor-



Indian-flagged LPG have safely crossed the Strait of Hormuz.

muz with the former carrying about 46,650 MT and latter 15,405 MT.

Green Sanvi is expected to reach its destination in India April 7, whilst Green

Asha, on April 9.

More gas for fertilizers

Allocation of natural gas to the fertilizer industry has been raised from 70-75% to 90% based on average monthly usage in the past six months.

Other industrial and commercial sectors, including city-gas distributors, would get an additional 10% allocation, taking the total allocation to 90% from the March 9 order from 80%. The additional allocation would be a boost to the fertilizer sector ahead of the Kharif season and is expected to

shield from spot market purchases.

C. Shikha, Joint Secretary, Department of Food and Public Distribution, said India's 222 lakh metric tonne (LMT) of buffer stock of wheat and 380 LMT of rice "is enough to take care of [the country's] PDS requirements as well as emergency requirements."

'Comfortable' stocks

She said domestic availability of edible oil was 'comfortable' adding that imports from key partners, such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Argentina and Brazil "continue steadily".



VANSHIKA SARAF

FOR MUCH of the last decade, the “Indo-Pacific” has been discussed as though its defining pressures lie almost entirely to its east: The Taiwan Strait, the South China Sea, the Korean Peninsula, and the uncertain future of American power in East Asia. But the ongoing war in West Asia is a reminder that the Indo-Pacific is not insulated from instability to its west.

The most immediate shock is energy. A large share of oil and LNG moving through the Strait of Hormuz, roughly 80 per cent,

is for Asia-Pacific markets. For more than two decades, these nations got used to oil arriving predictably, affordably, and in quantities that kept the wider economy functioning. Even if countries can adapt and switch to alternative suppliers, the current crisis has pushed them out of their comfort zone. The second is maritime shipping. It has pushed up insurance premiums, affected tanker availability, delayed delivery schedules, and forced refiners to adjust to substitute crude grades. That has had a ripple effect on aviation, fertilisers, petrochemicals, and food supply chains. The third effect is geopolitical. The redeployment of the THAAD system components from the Korean Peninsula and

the repositioning of carriers and munitions from Japan towards the Gulf have Indo-Pacific allies concerned about their deterrence capabilities.

Japan has already started tapping its strategic oil reserves. South Korea has increased nuclear plant utilisation above 80 per cent and scrapped seasonal caps on coal power. Unlike the Ukraine war, grave as its consequences have been, the war in

Unlike the Ukraine war, the war in West Asia cuts far closer to the region's core strategic and economic interests

West Asia cuts far closer to the region's core strategic and economic interests. Yet crises of this sort also clarify priorities and should prompt governments to rethink existing policy responses. First, the acceleration of energy diversification efforts and investments in renewables must be viewed through a hard security lens, not just a climate or economic rationale. Second, the crisis should deepen maritime coordination among Indo-Pacific states. India, Japan, Australia, and ASEAN countries share a common interest in securing critical sea lanes. Third, the disruption may create selective commercial opportunities for countries with refining flexibility or alternative export capacity to supply deficit

markets with surplus petroleum products as trade flows adjust to the crisis.

Robert D Kaplan argued that the Indian Ocean would become central to global power politics, precisely because it links West Asia, East Africa and East Asia through the movement of energy and trade. An Indo-Pacific strategy that ignores West Asia is incomplete, as the region's prosperity and stability still depend on developments there. The true lesson of this war is not only that the region is vulnerable in myriad ways, but that its map is wider than many policymakers have been willing to admit.

The writer is research analyst, Indo-Pacific Studies programme, Takshashila Institution

For China, trade risks spur larger diplomatic role

China has stakes in ending the war as it does business with all involved. Also, the Strait of Hormuz situation draws focus on its Malacca problem



EXPERT EXPLAINS

G VENKAT RAMAN

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AMID THE West Asia conflict, China and Pakistan have proposed a joint peace initiative, calling for a ceasefire, protection of commercial shipping, and dialogue. Announced last week, the plan marks a shift in Beijing's diplomatic posture. While China had so far limited itself to statements and selective engagement on the events unfolding in Iran, the proposal signals a more active, though cautious, role in crisis management. **G Venkat Raman** explains China's stakes and motivations in the war. He spoke to **Rishika Singh**.

What is the geopolitical significance of the China-Pakistan peace plan?

The joint proposal outlines a broad framework for de-escalation, including humanitarian access and dialogue through multilateral platforms. The plan focuses on stabilising maritime routes and preventing escalation rather than offering a detailed political settlement, making it more a mechanism for crisis management than conflict resolution.

The initiative reflects an attempt to expand the role of non-Western actors in managing regional crises. It signals a move toward Global South-led diplomacy, with China bringing institutional weight, including its position on the UN Security Council, and Pakistan offering regional access and political channels in the Islamic world.

What has China's diplomatic engagement with West Asia been?

China's West Asia engagement has evolved from a largely economic presence to a more active diplomatic role in recent years, driven by its dependence on regional stability. It is a major importer of energy from both Iran and Saudi Arabia, and disruptions in chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz directly affect its growth and connectivity ambitions.

Diplomatically, China has deepened ties with Iran through a long-term strategic cooperation agreement signed in 2021. Its



China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi with his Pakistani counterpart Ishaq Dar in Beijing on March 31. CHINA STATE MEDIA

credentials as a mediator were highlighted in 2023, when it facilitated the restoration of ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Their engagement has grown more significant with the expansion of BRICS (initially comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), in which both countries are now members, giving Beijing an added institutional stake in ensuring that tensions do not undermine a platform it has actively promoted. The current initiative with Pakistan builds on this expanding diplomatic profile.

Why has China chosen to step in with this plan now?

China's move reflects a mix of economic pressures, diplomatic cues, and strategic calculation.

Spillover effects on energy markets and trade flows have raised direct concerns, as disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz have affected supply chains, shipping costs, and price stability. As a critical chokepoint for industrial supply chains, its effective blockade is affecting the movement of raw materials and intermediate goods essential for manufacturing — a sector that has powered China's growth for decades.

Hormuz-linked disruptions have disrupted energy and petrochemical inflows

critical to sectors such as plastics and electronics. At the same time, instability in the Strait of Bab el-Mandeb, the gateway to the Red Sea and the Suez Canal, has slowed exports along the Asia-Europe route, hitting European markets whose biggest external supplier is China.

European markets are now structurally exposed to the re-timing of inbound manufactured goods, machinery, electronics, components, and consumer products from China. Shipping rerouting around the Cape of Good Hope has further increased transit times and freight rates. The combined effect is a dual chokepoint shock on China's trade flows. Price volatility has also prompted tighter controls on the export of materials, such as fertilisers, to safeguard the domestic supply.

The region also matters for China's export connectivity, linking its goods to markets in West Asia and Africa, with instability threatening infrastructure investments. China's emphasis on safe passage reflects its dependence on stable global trade flows.

The move also follows renewed engagement with Pakistan, including a recent visit by Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, which appears to have created an opening for China's involvement.

Add to this the recent signals from the

Trade links

China's interests include routes linking it to the Arabian Sea and West Asia through the Gwadar port in Pakistan

Last year, a London-based think tank reported that China overtook the West as the largest trading partner of the Gulf nations for the first time in 2024

US, including remarks by President Donald Trump suggesting that regional actors should ensure the Strait of Hormuz remains open. They reflect a broader shift in American posture — with greater energy self-reliance domestically, Washington appears less directly exposed to disruptions in West Asian supply routes.

They also suggest a recalibration of US leadership, from direct security provision to more selective engagement. Such shifts create space for other actors to step in diplomatically, and China's initiative with Pakistan can be seen in this context.

Why are concerns being raised about the Bab el-Mandeb Strait?

The Houthis, an Iran-aligned group in Yemen, have been targeting vessels transiting the Bab el-Mandeb Strait using drones and missiles. Shipping detours, rising freight and insurance costs, and strained supply chains are already evident.

On Saturday, MB Ghalibaf, Speaker of the Iranian Parliament, wrote on X, "What share of global oil, LNG, wheat, rice, and fertilizer shipments transits the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait?" This is being read as Iran potentially threatening passage through the strait if the war continues.

Crucially, even if tensions in Hormuz ease, there is no assurance that disruptions in Bab el-Mandeb will subside simultaneously, prolonging uncertainty.

What lessons might China draw from Hormuz?

For China, the current events have parallels to a core vulnerability, or the "Malacca dilemma," as termed by then Chinese President Hu Jintao in 2003. It concerns the Strait of Malacca, one of the world's most critical maritime chokepoints, located near Malaysia and Indonesia and carrying a large share of global trade between the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

A significant portion of China's energy imports and trade flows — and about a quarter of global trade — passes through it. In a potential crisis over the control of Taiwan, which China claims as its own territory, Beijing would face risks to its sea lines of communication, including external pressure that could affect trade and energy flows.

A disruption here would have wider consequences than Hormuz, affecting energy and manufacturing supply chains and forcing longer, costlier shipping routes. For China, then, the Hormuz experience reinforces the need to diversify routes and reduce dependence on vulnerable chokepoints.

SURPASSES THE DISTANCE 'MILESTONE' OF 400,171 KILOMETERS SET BY APOLLO 13 IN APRIL 1970

Artemis II breaks Apollo 13 record for farthest human travel

Associated Press
Houston, April 6

WITH THE moon now filling their windows, the Artemis II astronauts set a record Monday as the farthest humans from Earth during a lunar flyby promising magnificent views of the farside never before witnessed.

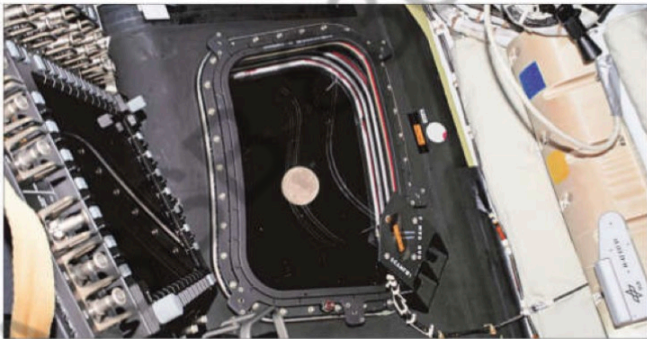
The six-hour flyby is the highlight of NASA's first return to the moon since the Apollo era with three Americans and one Canadian, a step toward landing boot prints near the moon's south pole in just two years. First came a prize, and bragging rights, for Artemis II.

Less than an hour before kicking off the fly-around and intense lunar observations, the four astronauts surpassed the distance record of 248,655 miles (400,171 kilometers) set by Apollo 13 in April 1970.

They kept going, hurtling ever farther from Earth. Before it was all over, Mission Control expected Artemis II to beat the old record by more than 4,100 miles (6,600 kilometers).

The astronauts woke up to the voice of Apollo 13 commander Jim Lovell, who recorded the message just two months before his death last August. "Welcome to my old neighbourhood," said Lovell, who also flew on Apollo 8, humanity's first lunar visit. "It's a historic day and I know how busy you'll be, but don't forget to enjoy the view."

They took up with them the Apollo 8 silk patch that accompanied Lovell to the moon, and showed it off as the crucial flyby approached. "It's just a real honor to have that onboard with us," said commander Reid Wiseman. "Let's go have a great day."



The moon is seen through the window of the Orion spacecraft in this photo taken by the Artemis II crew, at the end of day 5 of their journey, on Monday. AP

Artemis II is using the same maneuver that Apollo 13 did after its "Houston, we've had a

problem" oxygen tank explosion wiped out any hope of a moon landing. Known as a

free-return lunar trajectory, this no-stopping-to-land route takes advantage of Earth and

the moon's gravity, reducing the need for fuel. It's a celestial figure-eight that will put the astronauts on course for home, once they emerge from behind the moon Monday evening.

Wiseman, pilot Victor Glover, Christina Koch and Canada's Jeremy Hansen were on track to pass as close as 4,070 miles (6,550 kilometers) to the moon, as their Orion capsule whips past it, hangs a U-turn and then heads back toward Earth.

It will take them four days to get back, with a splashdown in the Pacific concluding their test flight on Friday. Their expected speed at closest approach to the moon: 3,139 mph (5,052 kph).

Wiseman and his crew spent years studying lunar geography to prepare for the big event, adding solar eclipses to their repertoire during the past few weeks.

Strait of Hormuz will never return to its old status: IRGC

The Guards say they have made plans to establish a new security architecture in the Gulf based on the principle that the region's security and stability must be guaranteed by the littoral states

Stanly Johny

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) said on Monday that the Strait of Hormuz, a critical international waterway connecting the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman, has undergone "irreversible strategic changes" and will never return to its previous status.

"The era of foreign hegemony over this critical waterway is definitely over," the IRGC Navy said in a

statement. Recent regional developments have established a new reality so that the U.S. can no longer dictate terms in Iran's immediate maritime environment, it said.

"The Strait of Hormuz will never return to its previous status, especially for the U.S. and the Zionist regime," the IRGC said, adding that Iran would continue to defend its sovereignty and the security of the Persian Gulf.

The IRGC statement came hours after U.S. President Donald Trump put out an expletive-ridden post on social media asking Iran to open the Strait.

"Tuesday will be Power Plant Day, and Bridge Day, all wrapped up in one, in



Firm stand: The Guards say the U.S. cannot dictate terms in Iran's maritime environment after recent regional developments. AFP

Iran. Open the F*** Strait, you crazy b****, or you'll be living in Hell," the U.S. President said. Mr. Trump in the past had issued several deadlines to Iran to re-open the Strait or face severe bombing.

On Sunday, Mr. Trump said the U.S. was in talks with Iran and a deal could be possible by April 6, threatening to "blow up everything" if a deal is not reached.

New plans

The IRGC said the Guards have made plans to establish a new indigenous security architecture in the Persian Gulf based on the principle that the region's security and stability must be guaranteed by the litto-

ral states. "These preparations include enhanced naval deployment, advanced monitoring systems, and coordinated rapid-response capabilities, all designed to safeguard Iran's territorial waters and ensure the uninterrupted flow of energy through the strait," the Guards said.

Iran's Foreign Ministry on Monday dismissed Mr. Trump's ultimatum. "Washington's supposed pursuit of diplomatic engagement with Tehran runs counter to continuing its crimes against the Iranian nation and threatening the nation with even more war crimes," Foreign Ministry spokesman Esmaeil Baghaei said. He added that the U.S. Special

Operations forces raid in Iran on Sunday to rescue an airman of an F-15E fighter that was shot down over Iran was a cover "to steal enriched uranium".

Unanswered questions

There are "many questions and uncertainties" about the operation," he said.

"The area where the American pilot was claimed to be present in Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad Province is a long way from the area where they attempted to land or wanted to land their forces in central Iran," Mr. Baghaei said.

"The possibility that this was a deception operation to steal enriched uranium should not be ignored at all."

An Iranian army spokesperson said Iran's ongoing attacks would continue until "the enemy is brought to a point of genuine remorse". "The Islamic Republic of Iran's system stands with authority, has responded to threats, and in some cases has been able to reciprocally operationalize threats against the opposing side," Brig. Gen. Mohammad Akrami-niathe said in a statement. "The opposing side has, in fact, been defeated."

Trump says Iran could be 'taken out' in one night

Agence France-Presse

WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump on Monday told reporters that Iran could be taken out in one night, "and that night might be tomorrow night", warning Tehran it had to make a deal by Tuesday night or face the consequences.

Mr. Trump had earlier vowed to enforce a Tuesday night deadline for Iran to agree to a ceasefire deal or face broad attacks on power plants and other critical infrastructure.

"The entire country can be taken out in one night, and that night might be tomorrow night," he told a White House press conference.

Asked about accusations of war crimes if the U.S. widens attacks against Iran's bridges and power plants, Mr. Trump responded, "No, not at all." Asked why Iranians would want him to carry out the threat, he said citizens are "willing to suffer...in order to have freedom."

Truce proposal

Mr. Trump also said the proposal offered by Iran was inadequate.

"They made a proposal, and it's a significant proposal. It's a significant step. It's not good enough," Mr. Trump said.



Tall claims: President Donald Trump speaks with reporters during a news conference at the White House on Monday. AP

Mr. Trump said the five-week conflict could end quickly if Iran does "what they have to do."

"They have to do certain things. They know that, they've been negotiating I think in good faith," he said.

U.S. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth told the briefing that the largest volume of strikes since day one of the operation against Iran would take place on Monday and warned Tuesday would have even more.

Mr. Trump, joined by senior national security advisers, described in detail the operation to recover a downed American airman over the weekend from Iranian territory.

He said the unidentified airman was hiding in mountains and kept climbing in order to improve the chances for recovery. "It was like finding a needle in a haystack," Mr. Trump said. Hundreds of Ameri-

can forces were involved in the search and recovery mission and to prevent the Iranians from finding him first, he said.

CIA director John Ratcliffe, who joined Mr. Trump at the event, said the agency had engaged in a "deception campaign" to convince the Iranians the airman was somewhere else.

The pilot, shot down on Friday, was recovered on Sunday morning.

Mr. Hegseth said the lost airman used an emergency transponder to show where he was and his first message was: "God is good."

Meanwhile, Mr. Trump also threatened an unspecified media outlet with jail time if it does not reveal the person who leaked information about the U.S. pilot who went missing in Iran.

(With inputs from Associated Press, Reuters)

Trump reveals rescue details of behind-enemy-line airman

Associated Press

Sidon, April 6

TRUMP THREATENED to jail the journalist who first reported that US forces were searching for an F-15 weapons officer shot down in Iran, if they don't reveal their sources. "The person that did the story will go to jail if he doesn't say, and that doesn't last long," Trump said.

He didn't name the journalist or news organisation. Trump said the leak tipped off the Iranians, endangering the officer and his rescuers. He called the leaker "a sick person."

Trump said the F-15E fighter jet that set off a two-day search-and-rescue operation was downed by a shoulder-launched rocket. Trump described the weapon as a "hand-held shoulder missile—heat-seeking missile."

The president described the scale of the operation undertaken by the US to rescue the second airman from the downed aircraft - which included 155 aircraft.

More specifically, it in-



President Donald Trump at the White House press meet with Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth and General Dan Caine on Monday. AP

cluded four bombers, 64 fighters, 48 refueling tankers, and 13 rescue aircraft, among others, Trump said.

Much of it was an effort to throw off the Iranians, who were also looking for the missing crew member, the president said.

"We were bringing them all over and a lot of it was subterfuge," Trump said. "We wanted to have them think he was in a

different location."

Trump says the downed weapons officer followed his training to get as far away from the crash site as possible. When a plane crashes in hostile territory, "they all head right to that site, you want to be as far away as you can," Trump said.

Trump says the officer was "bleeding profusely" but was able to climb mountainous terrain and contact US forces to

communicate his location. Rescuers mobilized a massive response that included subterfuge to confuse the Iranians about where they were looking.

The president began describing the rescue efforts from Friday and over the weekend after two airmen ejected and landed alive "deep in enemy territory" in Iran.

Trump said 21 aircraft were deployed to help with the search and rescue in the first wave, flying for hours under "very, very heavy enemy fire." He said the US has one helicopter with many bullets in it.

Speaking at a White House press conference, Ratcliffe said the agency used "exquisite technologies that no other intelligence service" possesses to locate the aviator after the F-15 was shot down in Iran.

At the same time, the CIA mounted a deception operation to mislead Iranians who were looking, Ratcliffe said the search and rescue operation was "comparable to hunting for a single grain of sand in the middle of a desert."

Iran intel chief killed as Trump's deadline to open Strait looms

Associated Press

Agence France-Presse

JERUSALEM/PARIS

The intelligence chief of Iran's Revolutionary Guards (IRGC), Major General Majid Khademi, was killed in U.S.-Israeli strikes on Tehran on Monday, according to Iranian state media and Israel's Defence Minister. He was sanctioned by the U.S. earlier this year citing a role in suppressing anti-government protests.

Israel said it also killed Asghar Bakeri, the leader of the IRGC's undercover unit in its expeditionary Quds Force. Announcing the killing of the intelligence chief, Israeli Defence Minister Israel Katz said Iran's steel and petrochemical industries were "severely damaged" as well.

Major General Khademi, who, according to a statement by the IRGC, was killed in an airstrike at dawn, was one of several senior figures within the force to be killed so far in the war in West Asia that began on February 28 with the assassination of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in U.S-Israeli strikes.

The IRGC praised the Major General's role in paving the way for Iran to confront "foreign enemies" and vowed to avenge his



Majid Khademi WIKI COMMONS

death. "The malicious and desperate enemy should know that a major retaliatory strike... under Operation 'crushing revenge', awaits the planners and perpetrators of this crime," it said in a statement on its official media site Sepah News.

Confirming the killing of Mr. Bakeri, the Israeli military said the undercover leader had planned attacks on Israeli and U.S. targets as well as operations in Syria and Lebanon.

With U.S. President Donald Trump's Tuesday deadline for Tehran to reopen the Strait of Hormuz looming, Israel and the U.S. on Monday carried out a wave of attacks, killing more than 25 people in Iran. Tehran responded with missile fire on Israel and its Arab neighbours.

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TRUMP'S THREATS

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Iran intel chief killed as Trump's deadline looms

Major General Khademi, who spent much of his career in the intelligence apparatus of the IRGC, was promoted to be the chief when his predecessor Mohammad Kazemi was killed last year in an airstrike in Israel's 12-day war against Iran.

This meant the intelligence chief was in his role during nationwide protests in January which according to rights groups were suppressed by forces including the Revolutionary Guards in a crackdown that left thousands dead.

That month the U.S. Treasury sanctioned the Major General, saying that under his leadership the Guards' intelligence arm "has played an instrumental role in violently suppressing protests".

The Guards' intelligence branch, it added, "has underpinned the Iranian security forces' national campaign of mass violence, arbitrary detentions, and intimidation aimed at crushing Iran's protest moment".

The Guards had already been hit before the killing of Major General Khademi. Their commander in chief, Mohammad Pakpour, was killed on the first day of the war on February 28 but then replaced by former interior minister Ahmad Vahidi.

The chief spokesman of the Guards, the head of its naval branch and the head of its Basij militia division have also been killed.

But several key figures have survived and the Islamic republic has shown resilience in rapidly replacing killed leaders and also keeping up the war against the U.S. and Israel.