

# Bengal electorate shrinks 12% as 27 lakh out after judicial reviews

Latest exclusions take total names deleted from the rolls in the poll-bound State since SIR began to 91 lakh; highest number of voter deletions after adjudication in Muslim-majority Murshidabad district, followed by North 24 Parganas and Malda

**Shrabana Chatterjee**  
**Shiv Sahay Singh**  
KOLKATA

Over 27 lakh West Bengal voters who were put under adjudication were excluded from the electoral rolls following the completion of the judicial reviews on Tuesday, with over a quarter of such deletions occurring in two Muslim-dominated districts.

In all, 91 lakh names have been deleted from the State's voter list since the special intensive revision (SIR) began, meaning that West Bengal's electorate has shrunk almost 12%, from 7.66 crore electors in October 2025 to 6.75 crore now, days ahead of the Assembly election. In the Assembly election in 2021, 7.34 crore voters were eligible to cast their ballot.

## Falling numbers

The table shows the top-five (red) and bottom-five (blue) West Bengal districts in deletion of voter names that were under adjudication for 'logical discrepancies'



**Choice on the line:** People whose names were deleted from voters' lists queue up to present their cases before judicial officers in Nadia, West Bengal, on Tuesday. PTI

District Name	Deletions
Murshidabad	4,55,137
North 24 Parganas	3,25,666
Malda	2,39,375
South 24 Parganas	2,22,929
Purba Bardhaman	2,09,805
Purba Medinipur	19,572
Bankura	6,533
Purulia	5,942
Kalimpong	2,407
Jhargram	1,240

■ Highest number of deletions was recorded in the **Muslim-majority Murshidabad district, and the Bangladesh-bordering North 24 Parganas district**

27.1 lakh

voters under adjudication were removed from electoral rolls

91 lakh

electors were removed from voter rolls in West Bengal since October last year

SOURCE: ELECTION COMMISSION OF INDIA

About 63 lakh electors were removed from the voter list under the SIR in the State till February 28. In addition, 60.06 lakh were put under adjudication; of these, 27.16 lakh, or 45%, remained excluded on

**Tuesday**, according to data shared by the Chief Electoral Officer of West Bengal. The highest number of such deletions was in Murshidabad, the district with the highest percentage of Muslim population in West

Bengal. Of the 11.01 lakh names from the district which went for judicial scrutiny over the past few weeks, over 4.55 lakh were excluded. North 24 Parganas, a district which borders Bangladesh and sends

the highest numbers of MLAs to the Assembly, has registered deletion of about 3.25 lakh electors under adjudication, followed by Malda, another Muslim-dominated district, with 2.39 lakh deletions.

## Last chance

The fate of the 27 lakh excluded voters now lies with 19 appellate tribunals set up across the State, and people started thronging them even before the exclusion list was released. However, for this election where polling is held on April 23 and 29, these voters have run out of chances to exercise their franchise.

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'HOW CAN POLLS BE FAIR?'

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# Six-month-old baby among two children dead as fresh violence erupts in Manipur

**The Hindu Bureau**

GUWAHATI

Four people, two of them minors, were killed in fresh violence in Manipur's Imphal Valley on Tuesday.

Officials in Bishnupur district said two children – a five-year-old boy and a six-month-old girl – were killed and their mother injured when suspected extremists hurled a bomb at their house in the Moirang Tronglaobi area around 1

a.m. The low-lying Meitei-inhabited area is close to the hills of the Kuki-Zo-dominated Churachandpur district. The killings triggered protests, and a



People blocking a road in protest in Bishnupur district, Manipur, after two children were killed in a bomb attack on Tuesday. PTI

mob attacked a Central Reserve Police Force camp close to Tronglaobi.

Manipur Home Minister Konthoujam Govindas said five sustained bullet inju-

ries (in firing by the security forces), and two of them died later.

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# More than 70% of the funding for R&D comes from government, says panel

Experts from government, academia, venture capital firms say private sector's limited stake reveals both caution and a systemic gap; they add that for early-stage start-ups, the pathway is clearer than before, but not necessarily easier, and caution against losing originality in race to follow trends

**Siddhi Nawar**  
CHENNAI

Commencing conversations on day two of *The Hindu Deep Tech Summit 2026* on Tuesday, a familiar question took on a new urgency: who carries the risk of innovation in India, and who should? At the panel, "The State as a De-risker: Aligning Academic Excellence with National Strategic Mission", voices from government, academia and venture capital firms converged to confront diverging issues. The session was moderated by N. Nagaraj, Vice-President of Digital Media at *The Hindu*.

At the heart of the conversation was a striking imbalance. "More than 70% of R&D funding comes from the government," noted Ramanan Ramanathan, Chairperson of the National Expert Advisory Council on Technology, Innovation and Incubation, Department of Science and



**Leading voices:** (From left) Vibha Malhotra Sawhney, Head, Technology Management Directorate and Innovation Protection Unit, CSIR; Sridhar Bharathwaj, Founder, Exponential Integration VC Pvt Ltd; Ramanan Ramanathan, Chairperson - National Expert Advisory Council on Technology, Innovation and Incubation of Department of Science and Technology; Rishi Dewan, Associate, StartUp India; Ashwin Mahalingam, co-founder, Okapi Research Advisory and Professor, IIT-Madras; and N. Nagaraj, Vice-President, Digital Media, *The Hindu*. S.R. RAGHUNATHAN

Technology, calling it a "sad fact". For a country aspiring to lead in deep-tech, the private sector's limited stake reveals both caution and a systemic gap.

Yet, the state is stepping in decisively. Sridhar Bharathwaj, founder, Exponential Integration VC Pvt. Ltd., pointed out that the

government is now absorbing early-stage technological risk – Technology Readiness Levels (TRL) 1 to 3 – validating ideas before they reach the market. But the real gap, he argued, lies beyond validation, where founders must translate research into business. Innovation alone is not enough; founders must

think in terms of value, returns and scale.

For early-stage start-ups, the pathway is clearer than before, but not necessarily easier. Rishi Dewan, Associate at Startup India, emphasised that the first step is often recognition – formal acknowledgement that unlocks funding, mentorship and infrastructure.



Still, access remains layered, requiring founders to navigate an evolving policy ecosystem.

## The bigger risk

Vibha Malhotra Sawhney, Head, Technology Management Directorate (TMD) and Innovation Protection Unit, CSIR, offered a long-term view. India's risk appetite, she said, had grown significantly over the past decade, particularly among young entrepreneurs. But capital is only one part of the equation. The bigger risk, she cautioned, is losing originality in the race to follow trends.

Ashwin Mahalingam, Professor at IIT-Madras, and co-founder of Okapi

Research and Advisory Pvt Ltd., introduced a necessary provocation. Universities, he argued, must remain spaces for "unabashedly theoretical" inquiry, because fundamental science underpins every major technological leap – from semiconductors to artificial intelligence.

The danger lies in chasing incremental, "substitute innovations" instead of pursuing breakthroughs.

Dr. Ramanathan called for a cultural shift within universities, urging institutions to move beyond publications and placements toward problem-solving ecosystems.

# Sri Lanka rolls out 'relief package' to help citizens amid West Asian crisis

**Meera Srinivasan**

COLOMBO

Sri Lanka on Tuesday rolled out relief measures to help citizens cope with the impact of war in West Asia.

Addressing Parliament, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake announced fuel and fertilizer subsidies, and a temporary increase in the government's targeted cash transfer programme for the poor.

Further, the government will bear the cost of electricity for consumers using less than 90 units over the next three months. "The total relief package is valued at 100 billion rupees (roughly \$317 million) over three months," he said, adding that the "relief pack-



Anura Kumara Dissanayake

age" was being funded through the existing Budget.

Mr. Dissanayake's announcement comes a week before Sri Lankans mark the Sinhala and Tamil New Year, one of the biggest festivals celebrated on the island. It also coincides with the government's ongoing talks with a visiting delegation of the International

Monetary Fund (IMF). A staff-level agreement for the next tranche of the Fund's \$2.9 billion-assistance to Sri Lanka – extended following the 2022 economic crash – is expected this week. Meanwhile, ordinary citizens, already grappling with IMF-linked austerity, are now forced to contend with sharp hikes in fuel, LPG, and electricity prices.

Amid the persisting uncertainty in fuel supplies and global oil prices, Sri Lanka is in talks with Russia and China to augment supplies in the coming months. On March 28, India delivered 38,000 metric tonnes (MT) of petroleum to Sri Lanka, including 20,000 MT of diesel and 18,000 MT of

petrol, following a telephone call between President Dissanayake and Prime Minister Narendra Modi. A top official at the state-run Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC) said the country's current fuel stocks will ensure smooth supply until end of May. "We have been talking to Russia, and we are now in discussion with China, to augment supply going forward," Mayura Neththikumarage, Managing Director of CPC, told *The Hindu*. "The QR-code system introduced last month to manage supplies has helped us," he added. Sources at Lanka IOC, the second largest supplier on the island, said it had stocks to last until mid-May.

PRESIDENT PEZESHKIAN SAYS 14 MILLION PEOPLE, INCLUDING HIMSELF, ARE READY TO FIGHT

# Iran calls for human chains to protect its power plants as Trump's deadline nears

Associated Press  
Dubai, April 7

**AIRSTRIKES POUNDED** Tehran on Tuesday, and Iranian officials urged young people to form human chains to protect power plants, hours before the expiration of US President Donald Trump's latest deadline for the Islamic Republic to reopen the crucial Strait of Hormuz or face punishing strikes on its infrastructure.

Trump has extended previous deadlines but suggested the one set for 8pm in Washington was final, and the rhetoric on both sides reached a fever pitch, leaving Iranians on edge. Trump threatened to destroy all of Iran's power plants and bridges if Tehran does not allow traffic to fully resume in the strait, through which a fifth of the world's oil transits in peacetime.

Iran's president Masoud Pezeshkian said 14 million people, including himself, have volunteered to fight. World leaders and experts warned that strikes as destructive as Trump threatened could constitute a war crime.

Iran called on "all young people, athletes, artists, students and university students and their professors" to form human chains around power plants. "Power plants that are our national assets and capital," Alireza Rahimi, identified by Iranian state television as the secretary of the Supreme Coun-

cil of Youth and Adolescents, said in a video statement. Iranians have formed human chains in the past around nuclear sites at times of heightened tensions with the West. President Pezeshkian posted on X that 14 million Iranians had answered state media and text message campaigns urging people to volunteer to fight. "I too have been, am, and will remain ready to give my life for Iran," Pezeshkian wrote.

A Revolutionary Guard general also urged parents to send their children to man checkpoints, which have been repeatedly targeted in airstrikes.

Meanwhile, France joined a growing chorus calling for restraint. Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot said attacks targeting civilian and energy infrastructure "are barred by the rules of war, international law." "They would without doubt trigger a new phase of escalation, of reprisals, that would drag the region and the world economy into a vicious circle that would be very worrying and, most of all, very damaging to our own interests," the minister said on France Info television.

UN Secretary-General António Guterres also warned the US that attacks on civilian infrastructure are banned under international law, according to his spokesperson. Such cases are notoriously difficult to prosecute, and Trump told reporters he's "not at all" concerned about committing war crimes.

## • Operation Epic Fury: The US Assets Deployed



B-2 Stealth Bombers

### AIR

- B-1 Bombers
- B-2 Stealth Bombers
- B-52 Bombers
- F-18 Fighter Jets
- F-22 Stealth Fighters
- F-35 Stealth Fighters
- F-16 Fighter Jets
- A-10 Attack Jets
- F-15 Fighter Jets
- EA-18G Electronic Warfare Aircraft
- EC-130H Electronic Warfare Aircraft
- U-2 Reconnaissance Aircraft
- RC-135 Reconnaissance Aircraft
- E-11A Communications Aircraft
- EA-37B Electronic Warfare Aircraft
- C-17 Globemaster Cargo Aircraft
- C-130J Cargo Aircraft
- KC-135 Refueling Aircraft
- KC-46 Refueling Aircraft
- KC-130 Hercules Tankers
- AH-64 Apache Helicopters
- MH-60 Sea Hawk Helicopters
- V-22 Osprey Tilt-Rotor Aircraft
- E-2D Airborne Early Warning & Control Aircraft
- MQ-9 Surveillance & Attack Drones
- LUCAS One-Way-Attack Drones

### TYPES OF TARGETS

- Command and Control Centers
- IRGC Headquarters Buildings
- IRGC Intelligence Sites
- Integrated Air Defence Systems
- Ballistic Missile Sites
- Iranian Navy Ships & Submarines
- Iranian Air Defence Systems
- Anti-ship Missile Sites
- Military Communication Capabilities
- Ballistic Missile & Drone Manufacturing
- Weapons Production & Storage Bunkers
- Surface-to-Air Missile Facilities
- Military Support Infrastructure

SOURCE: @CENTCOM/X

### LAND

- Patriot Interceptor Missile Systems
- THAAD Anti-Ballistic Missile Systems
- M-142 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems
- Counter-Drone Systems



### SEA

- Nuclear-Powered Aircraft Carriers
- Nuclear-Powered Submarines
- Guided-Missile Destroyers
- Refueling and Supply Ships
- Amphibious Assault Ship
- Amphibious Transport Dock Ship

## China, Russia veto UNSC resolution to open the Strait

Associated Press  
United Nations, April 7

AT A vote in the UN Security Council on Tuesday, China and Russia vetoed a Bahraini resolution encouraging states to coordinate efforts to protect commercial shipping in the Strait of Hormuz.

The 15-member Security Council voted 11 in favor of the resolution, with two against — China and Russia — and two abstentions.

"The draft resolution has not been adopted, owing to the negative vote of a permanent member of the Council, Bahrain's Foreign Minister Abdullah bin Rashid Al Zayani told the Council.

The US ambassador to the UN, Mike Waltz, condemned the Russian and Chinese vetoes, saying they marked "a new low" when Iran's shutting of the Strait was preventing medical aid and supplies reaching humanitarian crises in the Congo, Sudan and Gaza.

China and Russia used their vetoes even though Bahrain had significantly weakened its draft after China opposed authorizing force.

# Share of West Asia oil imports rose to 54% just before war

Latest govt. data show India imported nearly 91% of its crude oil requirement in February 2026, a historic high; Of this, more than half came from West Asia, supplies that are now constrained

**T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan**  
NEW DELHI

India entered the energy crisis brought on by the Iran war particularly susceptible to disruptions in West Asia, the latest government data show.

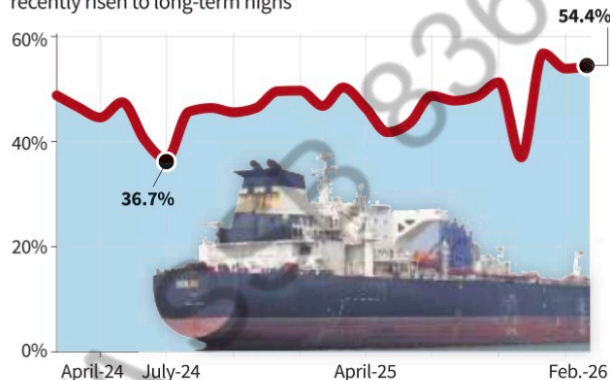
Not only was India importing nearly 91% of its crude oil requirements as of February 2026, a historic high, but more than 54% of these imports came from West Asian countries – their second-highest share in nearly 3.5 years.

The analysis by *The Hindu* of data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry shows that the volume of India's total oil imports in February 2026 increased nearly 33% to 205.3 lakh tonnes over February last year.

That is, India imported a third more oil in February 2026 than it did a year earlier. Further, according to data with the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, India's oil imports accounted for 90.8% of the total oil processed by In-

## Risky Rise

The share of West Asian countries in India's oil imports has recently risen to long-term highs



SOURCE: PETROLEUM PLANNING AND ANALYSIS CELL

dian refineries in February 2026, up from an already historically-high 90.2% in the first half of 2025-26.

Not only has India's dependence on oil imports risen, but it has also recently increased its dependence on the West Asian region. This has come as it had, until the outbreak of the war in West Asia, sought to reduce Russian oil imports in line with demands from the U.S. Russia's share in the volume of oil India im-

ports rose to 26.5% in February 2026, but was still significantly lower than the peak of 40.2% it had reached in May last year.

On the other hand, the share of oil imports from India's West Asian sources – Iraq, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Kuwait, and Qatar – rose to a combined 54.4% in February 2026. Apart from December 2025, when this figure hit 56.8%, this was their highest share since September 2022.

However, those sources are now constrained due to the war, with officials in the Ministry of Commerce and Industry confirming to *The Hindu* that India's oil imports from Russia have increased "big time" in March 2026, but this time without the benefit of the discount Russia was earlier providing. The official data on India's oil imports in March will be released in early May.

## Expensive oil

The data show that not only was India importing a large quantity of oil in the lead up to the U.S.-Israel war on Iran, but that it was also benefiting from a crash in prices. The price of the Indian basket of crude oil in February 2026 stood at \$69 per barrel.

Prices had averaged about \$78 in the previous financial year.

The Indian basket comprises a weighted average of prices of different grades of oil in Oman and Dubai, along with the price of Brent.

IT IS THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF VENEZUELA CRUDE PURCHASE IN THE LAST 6 YEARS

# 12 mn barrels of Venezuelan oil may reach India this month

Sukalp Sharma  
New Delhi, April 7

INDIA IS likely to take delivery of around 10-12 million barrels of Venezuelan crude oil this month, the highest in over six years, according to data from commodity market analytics firm Kpler. It comes as the raging war in West Asia has affected global oil and gas flows.

This month will also be the first since May of last year to see Venezuelan crude oil being delivered at Indian ports, the data shows. These barrels, although just a fraction of the country's crude oil imports, are expected to provide some relief and strengthen its crude diversification strategy.

India depends on imports to meet over 88% of its requirement, and processes over 5 million barrels a day of crude.

Over 40% of the imports come from West Asia through the Strait of Hormuz, where vessel movements have been on halt since early March.

Notably, the India-bound Venezuelan oil cargoes were most likely purchased before the West Asia war began, underscoring how diversification of crude supply sources is coming in handy at a time of global crisis.

India imports oil from over 41 countries, with the sourcing slate having expanded considerably over the past few years. This has helped reduce dependence on West Asian crude, which is why the crude oil and petrol, and diesel stocks in the country have been adequate. "The development comes at a time when In-



India depends on imports to meet over 88% of its requirement, and processes over 5 million barrels a day of crude.

REUTERS

dian refiners are actively diversifying their crude slate, particularly in response to uncertainties surrounding the Strait of Hormuz. However, April-arriving cargoes were likely secured well before the recent disruptions, underscoring a longer-term strategic shift rather than a purely reactive move.

"This trend highlights the growing importance of proactive diversification in global energy markets. Securing an alternative supply in advance is increasingly seen as a competitive advantage," said Sumit Ritolia, manager, modelling & refining at Kpler.

With the US capturing Venezuela's then president Nicolás Maduro early January, Trump had said that Washington would take control of Caracas's oil sector. After that, global commodity traders Vitol and Trafigura were authorised by Washington to sell Venezuelan oil globally, which had been

under US sanctions.

"More importantly, heavier Venezuelan barrels tend to yield higher proportions of distillates, particularly middle distillates such as diesel and jet fuel. This is significant in the current environment, where distillate markets remain structurally tight. As a result, these imports not only diversify sourcing but also strengthen India's ability to sustain strong distillate output," Ritolia added.

India — specifically private sector refining giant Reliance Industries Ltd (RIL) — was a regular buyer of Venezuelan crude prior to the imposition of US sanctions on Caracas in 2019. Following the sanctions, oil imports from Venezuela stopped within a few months.

According to India's official trade data, Caracas was New Delhi's fifth-largest supplier of oil in 2019, providing close to 16 million tonnes, or about 117 million barrels, of crude to

## • LONG HAUL

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VENEZUELA WAS New Delhi's fifth-largest supplier of oil in 2019, providing close to 16 million tonnes, or about 117 million barrels, of crude to Indian refiners

Indian refiners. The bilateral trade between India and Venezuela was \$6.40 billion in 2019-20, of which Indian imports — primarily crude oil — were worth \$6.06 billion.

In October 2023, the US eased sanctions on Venezuela's petroleum sector, authorising oil exports without limitation for six months. This led RIL and a few other Indian refiners to restart oil imports from Venezuela. But then, imports stopped as the sanction waiver was not extended by Washington after its understanding with Caracas on the conduct of free and fair presidential elections in Venezuela broke down.

A few months later, RIL was able to restart Venezuelan oil imports after obtaining a sanctions waiver from the US. But in the summer of 2025, the company halted oil imports from Venezuela after Trump administration threatened higher tariffs on countries buying Venezuelan crude.

# A Lebanese seafarer caught in a double-whammy amid war

**M. Kalyanaraman**

For Akkad Soubhi, the West Asia war has been what the Americans would call a double-whammy. Chief engineer on a car carrier ship anchored off Khor Fakkan, Mr. Akkad has been caught in the middle of the West Asia war. His family in Lebanon too wakes up to missiles and bombs every day. Fearful of a civil war breaking out, they are planning to move to Turkey or Syria.

Mr. Akkad has been stuck in his ship carrying more than 1,000 cars for over a month – off Fujairah first, now off Khor Fakkan. His ship was about to enter the Strait of Hormuz on March 2 when they got the message that Jebel Ali port,

their destination, had been attacked. And they decided to stay near Fujairah.

Unlike other seafarers, Mr. Akkad's home country is also in distress. Though he says that he lives in Sunni-dominated north Lebanon that often escapes Israeli attacks, he fears a civil war may break out once again in the country.

He cites the recent killing of a Christian leader by drones looking for a Hezbollah operative in central Lebanon.

"Christians are now stuck against them and refugees," he says, recalling the devastating civil war of the 1980s.

"Every 10 years, there is a big conflict. We are used to that. But this time may

be different. It's all push-button now and war is easy to do."

He says the second officer on his ship is from South Lebanon. "His house was completely destroyed recently. I tried to console him that at least his family was safe," he says.

## Seeking sanctuary

Mr. Akkad says his mother will be moving to Turkey soon. And his wife and daughter will move there after a month once his daughter's university education is over.

"We are considering moving to Syria. Though there are low-intensity troubles there, the country is relatively more peaceful than Lebanon," he adds.

In the Gulf of Oman,



**Stuck in limbo:** Cargo ships in the Gulf, near the Strait of Hormuz, as seen from northern Ras al-Khaimah. REUTERS

too, it has been a daily dance of death. Mr. Akkad talks of missiles hitting another ship just one nautical mile away and destroying it. He saw the Fujairah port attacked and one large fuel tank hit. "We saw the blaze for nearly a

week." Hundreds of merchant ships are stuck in the Gulf unable to move up or down the Strait of Hormuz. Nearly 30,000 seafarers are estimated to be on-board these ships. Long anchorages often mean ship crew doing major

maintenance work on equipment. But this is war. The ship needs to be always ready to move, which means all the equipment are ready for operation.

On March 21, for instance, the owners asked them to move to Khor Fakkan port for discharging. After 100 cars rolled out, suddenly, the harbour master came to them and said there was information that the port was going to be attacked and ships had to leave. Since then, Mr. Akkad's ship has been anchored off Khor Fakkan port.

Typically, ships make fresh water on board using water used to cool the engines. When a ship is not sailing, there is no source of hot water from the en-

gine and no water can be made. But ships are being supplied water and food supplies by owners.

"We have told our crew that if they want to leave, repatriation can be arranged. But we are all staying," he says proudly, pointing out that his ship has 19 Indians out of a total of 24 crew. They all have Internet and are talking to their families. "We even had a near miss when a missile that seemed to be coming at us was intercepted."

Humour often helps alleviate the tension on board. A form of gallows humour, almost. "We have learned to shout hello to the drones. They fly so close that they can hear us if they have ears," he says.

# Artemis II Moon crew flies farther than humans have ever gone before

Reuters

Houston, April 7

THE FOUR astronauts of NASA's Artemis II mission flew deeper into space on Monday than any humans before them, as they cruised through a rare flyby of the shadowed far side of the Moon that revealed a lunar surface under cosmic bombardment.

The six-hour survey of the normally hidden hemisphere of Earth's only natural satellite was highlighted by the astronauts' direct visual observations of "impact flashes" from meteors pelting the darkened and heavily cratered lunar surface.

About two dozen scientists packed a conference room adjacent to mission control at NASA's Johnson Space Center in Houston to record the lunar phenomena witnessed by the Artemis crew in real time as their Orion spacecraft, about the size of an SUV, sailed around the moon roughly a quarter million miles (402,000 km) from Earth.

The six-hour flyby, which swooped to within 4,070 miles of the lunar surface, came six days into a spaceflight marking the world's first voyage of astronauts to the vicinity of the moon since NASA's Cold War-era Apollo missions more than half a century ago.

Six of those missions landed two-man teams on the moon between 1969 and 1972 - the only 12 humans ever to walk on its surface. Artemis, a successor to the Apollo program, aims to repeat that achievement by 2028, ahead of China's first landing, and to establish a long-

term US lunar presence over the next decade, including a moon base to serve as a proving ground for potential future missions to Mars.

While designed as a crewed dress rehearsal for future lunar excursions, Artemis II generated a wealth of new material for lunar scientists to study, including meteor impact flashes recorded during Monday's flyby that were reminiscent of sparks and streaks of light described by some of Apollo's astronauts.

The Artemis II crew, riding in their Orion capsule since launching from Florida last week, began their sixth day of spaceflight as they awoke on Monday to a pre-recorded message from the late NASA astronaut Jim Lovell, who flew aboard the Apollo 8 and Apollo 13 moon missions.

"Welcome to my old neighbourhood," said Lovell, who died last year at age 97. "It's a historic day, and I know how busy you'll be, but don't forget to enjoy the view... good luck and Godspeed." Hours later, the crew consisting of U.S. astronauts Reid Wiseman, Victor Glover and Christina Koch along with Canadian astronaut Jeremy Hansen, made spaceflight history by venturing farther from Earth than any humans have before, at 2,52,756 miles.

The previous record, roughly 2,48,000 miles, was set in 1970 by Apollo 13 after a nearly catastrophic spacecraft malfunction cut short that mission, forcing Lovell and his two crew members to use the moon's gravity to help return them safely to Earth.