

States' seats will rise 50% after delimitation: Centre

No State will lose current proportional strength in Parliament, says govt. functionary; while not mentioned in the draft Bills, Home Minister has assured party representatives of rise, official adds

Varghese K. George

NEW DELHI

All States will have their number of Lok Sabha seats increase by half after delimitation, and no State will lose its current proportional strength in Parliament, a senior government functionary told *The Hindu* on Wednesday.

He said Union Home Minister Amit Shah would clarify this in Parliament during the debate on the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill and the Delimitation Bill. The debate begins on Thursday.

"If there is any requirement for change in the language of the draft Bill, that too will be addressed," the government functionary said.

Mr. Shah had assured



INDIA bloc leaders after a meeting to discuss the proposed Bills on delimitation in New Delhi on Wednesday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

party representatives that the strength of the Lok Sabha would increase by 50%, to be distributed across States in their existing proportions – that is, a 50% increase in the number of Lok Sabha seats from each individual State.

However, this is not mentioned in the drafts of

the Bills circulated by the government. In fact, the Bills propose an inter-State redistribution of Lok Sabha seats, which could make it impossible for current proportionate shares to be maintained.

The senior functionary said this was a misreading of the drafts. "Those who

'INDIA bloc will vote against delimitation'

NEW DELHI

The Opposition INDIA bloc have decided to vote against the delimitation provisions in the proposed Bills, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said on Tuesday while underlining that the bloc's opposition was not against women's quota. » PAGE 12

are reading bits and pieces and interpreting them as reducing the relative strength of the South are missing the big picture," the functionary said.

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'States seats will rise 50% after delimitation'

Asked how this position squares with the proposed amendments to the Constitution and the provisions of the Delimitation Bill, the functionary said everything would be explained during the parliamentary debate. "There is no change in the assurance given by the government that all States will have their number of seats in the Lok Sabha increased by 50%. If Tamil Nadu has 39, it will have 58; Kerala has 20 and it will have 30," the functionary said, asking to wait for the mechanics of it to be explained in Parliament.

The drafts of the Bills have raised concerns that the States which have stabilised their population are set to lose their relative strength when the composition of the Lok Sabha is reapportioned between States as per the latest Census figures.

INDIA bloc rejects delimitation move

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge reiterates **Opposition's stance that it is not against women's reservation, but will not allow provisions in the amendment Bill to pass.** Rahul Gandhi urges all MPs from the alliance to attend the Special Session, tells Trinamool that any absence will help BJP

Sobhana K. Nair
NEW DELHI

The Opposition Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance (INDIA) took a unanimous decision to vote against the delimitation provisions in the Constitution (131st) Amendment Bill, 2026, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge said after a meeting of the alliance on Tuesday.

He said the Opposition was not against reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and Assemblies.

According to several members who attended the meeting both in person and online, the Trinamool Congress conveyed the message that not all its MPs might be able to be present in Parliament, drawing criticism.

Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said their absence "will help the BJP".

Detailing the "dangers of delimitation", Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said barring one seat in Jammu, all went to the BJP.

Assam's recent delimita-



Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge with members of the INDIA bloc after a meeting in New Delhi on Wednesday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

tion was also cited as an example of possible gerrymandering in the garb of redrawing constituencies.

On Union Territories

CPI(ML) general secretary Dipankar Bhattacharya, who joined the meeting virtually, highlighted the "alarming" rise in representation from Union Territories, from 20 to 35 members.

He said that the government could be planning to divide Bihar and West Ben-

gal to carve out Union Territories from Muslim-majority districts.

The Trinamool Congress was represented by its deputy leader in the Rajya Sabha, Sagarika Ghose.

Objecting to Ms. Ghose's remarks on the party's inability to ensure 100% attendance, Mr. Gandhi said such a position was not acceptable. He urged all Opposition members to be present and to vote to defeat the Bill. "Their absence will come at a politi-

cal cost, and will be seen as helping the BJP," he said.

The DMK, represented by T.R. Baalu, said that all its MPs would attend despite the ongoing election campaign in Tamil Nadu. Parties from Kerala pointed out that they were present for the debate on the FCRA law even amid the Assembly election in the State.

Ms. Ghose, sources said, argued that the Trinamool Congress alone is facing a head-on battle with the

BJP, unlike the DMK or the situation in Kerala.

At this point, sources said, Mr. Gandhi urged former Maharashtra Chief Minister Uddhav Thackeray, who had joined via video call, to speak to West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress president Mamata Banerjee on the issue. Hours after the meeting ended, Trinamool Congress Rajya Sabha leader Derek O'Brien wrote on X, "We are doing all that it takes to defeat the stunt

being presented as a Bill in the Lok Sabha."

The extended Budget Session in Parliament, reconvening on Wednesday, will deliberate on a legislative package comprising the Constitution (131st) Amendment Bill, the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2026, and the Delimitation Bill, 2026.

The government has said these are aimed at expediting the implementation of 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies.

"All of us are in favour of the women's reservation Bill, but have concerns about the way it is being brought. It is politically motivated. Just to gag and suppress Opposition parties, the government is doing this," Mr. Kharge told reporters, reiterating the Opposition's position that reservation should be implemented within the existing strength of 543 Lok Sabha seats for the 2029 Lok Sabha election.

"They (the BJP-led government) are playing tricks with delimitation," he said.

Centre's proposed delimitation move 'brazenly discriminatory against Punjab', says Akali Dal

The Hindu Bureau
CHANDIGARH

Shiromani Akali Dal (SAD) president Sukhbir Singh Badal on Wednesday opposed the proposed move on the delimitation of Lok Sabha seats.

He said that in the garb of the women's reservation Bill, the population-based delimitation exercise was "brazenly discriminatory against Punjab".

The former Deputy Chief Minister of Punjab said his party favoured an all-party initiative to oppose the delimitation move. In a statement, Mr. Badal said, "Punjab is predominantly a minority-character State. We will be the biggest victim of this population-based delimitation. Compared with a nominal increase in seats for Punjab, Haryana will witness a nearly 100% in-



Akali Dal chief Sukhbir Badal termed the move a death blow to the already weakened federal structure in the country. FILE PHOTO

crease and double the number of its seats in Lok Sabha. Where does that leave us? We are already a victim of systematic discrimination and injustice."

'A conspiracy'

He also termed the move a death blow to the already weakened federal structure in the country, saying, "This move is a conspiracy to hand over the control of India to just four Hindi

heartland States, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, and Rajasthan, almost doubling their strength in the Lok Sabha and giving them a combined strength of over 40% in the Lok Sabha. This will render all other States virtually irrelevant."

Mr. Badal, however, reiterated his party's unequivocal support for the proposed women's reservation Bill.

How proposed delimitation would redraw political map

On reallocation based on 2011 Census, southern and northeastern States stand to lose the most in seat share; Hindi-heartland States gain disproportionately

DATA POINT

Srinivasan Ramani
Sambavi Parthasarathy

If the Lok Sabha's strength is expanded to 850 and seats are allocated on the basis of the 2011 Census population, as the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill and the companion Delimitation Bill to be tabled in Parliament envisage, the southern States and the North-East would see a sharp erosion in their share of parliamentary representation, while the Hindi-heartland States of northern India would be the overwhelming beneficiaries.

The two Bills, to be introduced in Parliament from April 16, seek to do a) raise the Lok Sabha ceiling from 543 to 850 seats (815 from States, 35 from Union Territories), b) replace the constitutional freeze that pegged seat allocation to the 1971 Census with an open-ended formula allowing Parliament to choose the Census basis by ordinary law, and c) constitute a Delimitation Commission that would use the latest published Census, currently the 2011 Census, to redraw boundaries and reallocate seats. The stated purpose is to operationalise women's reservation under the Nari Shakti Vandana Adhinyam, 2023.

It is to be noted that Home Minister Amit Shah said in Coimbatore in February 2025 that southern States would not lose a single seat on a "pro rata basis". Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal told *The Hindu* on April 13, 2026 that concerns about southern States were a "silly concern", asserting there would be a "proportional increase across the country".

However, the Bills contain no mechanism to guarantee existing seat proportions. Article 81(2)(a) mandates population-proportional allocation and not a uniform

percentage increase. In other words, delimitation will be based on population proportion according to the latest available Census.

Who gains and who loses

Using 2011 Census population to allocate 850 seats proportionally and comparing against a uniform proportional increase (which preserves existing seat shares), the disparities become stark. The five States/UTs that gain the most seats compared to a proportional increase belong to the Hindi heartland. Four of the five States/UTs that lose the most belong to the South or the East. (Table 1)

Aggregated by region, the pattern is unmistakable. The Hindi heartland's (Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Uttarakhand and Delhi) share in the 850-seat House would rise from 38.1% to 43.1%. The South's share would fall from 24.3% to 20.7%. The North-East would decline from 4.4% to 3.8%. The Eastern States would slip from 14.4% to 13.7%. (Table 2)

The demographic roots of this asymmetry are visible in the latest fertility data. According to NFHS-5 (2019-21), all five southern States have total fertility rates between 1.5 and 1.8, well below the replacement level of 2.1 (Chart 3). Bihar (3.0), Meghalaya (2.9), Uttar Pradesh (2.4), Jharkhand (2.3), and Manipur (2.2) remain above replacement. The gap that drove the original 1976 freeze on seat allocation has narrowed over the decades, but it persists.

States that invested in health, education, and family planning would see their share of parliamentary power shrink, while States that lagged on these indicators would gain the most. The data lays bare the core tension in the delimitation exercise: Article 81(2)(a) rewards demographic weight, not developmental achievement.

Revising representation

The data for the tables were sourced from Census of India, 2011; NFHS-5 (2019-21); Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026; Delimitation Bill, 2026

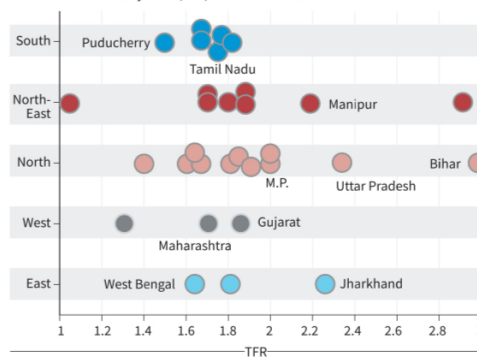


TABLE 2: Region-wise increase in seats, and region-wise share of seats in the current composition and as per the proposed delimitation exercise

Region	% increase in seats	As a share of 543 seats	As a share of 850 seats
East	48.7%	14.4%	13.7%
Hindi-heartland	76.8%	38.1%	43.1%
North-East	33.3%	4.4%	3.8%
North-non-Hindi	58.3%	4.4%	4.5%
South	33.3%	24.3%	20.7%
West	56.4%	14.4%	14.3%
Grand total	56.5%	100%	100%

The South's share in the post-delimitation Parliament will fall from 24.3% to 20.7%, while the Hindi heartland's share will rise from 38.1% to 43.1%.

CHART 3: Total fertility rates (TFR) across various States



The data for chart-3 is based on NFHS-5 (2019-21). As shown in the chart, all five southern States have TFR between 1.5 and 1.8, below the replacement level of 2.1

Calculations by The Hindu Data Team

TABLE 1: The table shows seats gained/lost due to the proposed delimitation exercise based on Census 2011 population, when compared with that of a proportional increase in seats. In the table, red depicts States that could lose seats, blue shows those with gains

States/UTs	Change in seats
Uttar Pradesh	13
Maharashtra	3
Bihar	10
West Bengal	-2
Madhya Pradesh	5
Tamil Nadu	-11
Rajasthan	8
Karnataka	-2
Gujarat	2
Andhra Pradesh	-5
Odisha	-3
Telangana	-2
Kerala	-8
Jharkhand	1
Assam	0
Punjab	-1
Chhattisgarh	1
Haryana	2
Delhi	5
Jammu & Kashmir	3
Uttarakhand	-1
Himachal Pradesh	-1
Tripura	0
Meghalaya	-1
Manipur	-1
Nagaland	-1
Goa	-2
Arunachal Pradesh	-2
Puducherry	-1
Mizoram	-1
Chandigarh	-1
Sikkim	-1
Dadra & NH and Daman & Diu	-3
Andaman & Nicobar Islands	-1
Ladakh	-1
Lakshadweep	-1

Mayawati advocates sub-quota for SC, ST, OBC women within 33% reservation

Press Trust of India

LUCKNOW

Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) chief Mayawati on Wednesday advocated a separate quota for women from SC, ST and OBC categories within the proposed 33% reservation for women in Lok Sabha and State Assemblies, saying the absence of such a provision would largely "negate" the real objective of the measure.

Addressing select media here, the former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister noted that the Centre has convened a three-day special session of Parliament on the issue of women's reservation.

She said while her party welcomes the move to advance the process of providing 33% reservation to women in Lok Sabha and State legislatures, there are serious doubts whether women from SC, ST and OBC communities would get the full benefit in the absence of a separate quota for them.

"Not having such a provision would be akin to negating the real objective of women's reservation to a large extent," she said.

The BSP supremo said women's reservation



BSP chief Mayawati addressing a press conference in Lucknow on Wednesday. PTI

should be viewed from the perspective of safety, dignity and upliftment rather than political considerations, warning that otherwise feudal and casteist elements may continue to dominate and deprive women of its intended benefits.

Congress criticised

She said now that Parliament has moved forward on providing reservation to women in legislatures, no obstacles should be created in its implementation.

Targeting the Congress, Ms. Mayawati questioned why the party was now raising the issue of sub-quotas for SC, ST and OBC women, alleging that it had ignored the matter during its tenure and overlooked BSP's demand due to "casteist bias".

Delink women's quota from Census, delimitation: activists

Break-up of 33% reservation could be as per the strength of State legislatures, reads plea to all MPs signed by 500 activists; 'deplore govt.'s failure to give time to women's groups to make suggestions'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

On the eve of the extended Budget Session of Parliament to deliberate on draft laws aimed at expediting the implementation of 33% reservation for women in the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies, women's rights activists on Wednesday sought amendments in the women's reservation law and delinking its execution from the Census and delimitation.

In a petition to all MPs, nearly 500 activists said the break-up of the 33% quota could be "according to the States" seat shares and revised following every expansion of the legislature".

The petition was signed



The Centre is looking to expedite the implementation of 33% quota for women in the Lok Sabha and the State Assemblies. FILE PHOTO

by 488 women's rights advocates and activists from 95 cities and districts.

The signatories included general secretary of the National Federation of Indian Women (NFIW) Annie Raja, writer and activist John Dayal, writer and policy analyst Radha Kumar,

professor of Sociology Nandini Sundar, senior journalist Pamela Philpote, writer and co-director of the Akshara Centre Nandita Gandhi and Sayeda Hamid of the NFIW.

"We women's groups and individuals deplore the hurried move to call

this joint session of Parliament when several State elections are ongoing and the model code of conduct is in force. We also deplore the failure of the government to give adequate time for women's groups to place their recommendations," read the petition.

'Form special panels'

It also stated that given "grave doubts over the impartiality" of the Election Commission (EC), "we propose that identification of 33% of women's seats be decided by Special State Committees" that comprise of at least 33% of women members. It added that all decisions must be taken by majority vote and that the EC must not have overriding powers.

'PM should address concerns of southern States on delimitation'

Press Trust of India
JAIPUR

Former Rajasthan Chief Minister and Congress leader Ashok Gehlot urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday to "seriously address" the concerns raised by southern States over delimitation, warning that the issue could become sensitive if not handled carefully.

Talking to reporters at the Jaipur airport, Mr. Gehlot said the concerns raised by several Chief Ministers of the southern States reflect growing unease that must not be ignored.

"The anger and apprehensions voiced by the leaders should be taken very seriously by the Prime Minister. I am repeating this deliberately - if people in the south start feeling that the north is imposing



Ashok Gehlot

itself on them and weakening their position, the situation can deteriorate," the Congress leader said.

'Dangerous signal'

Referring to Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin's remarks on the issue, Mr. Gehlot said, "He has hinted at developments reminiscent of the agitations of the 1950s and 60s in the south. This is a very dangerous signal and shows the depth of the sentiment there. It is a highly sensitive matter."

Women's reservation and delimitation should be delinked

Parliament is scheduled to discuss two far reaching Bills ostensibly for the implementation of the one-third reservation of seats for women in Parliament and State Assemblies. The Bills are the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill which seeks to raise the number of seats in Parliament to 850 seats with one-third reserved for women "after an exercise of delimitation is undertaken for this purpose", and The Delimitation Bill, 2026, which sets up the Delimitation Commission to redraw boundaries of existing seats on the basis of the "latest Census figures published on the date of the constitution of the commission", which is the 2011 Census. The government expects the Opposition to turn itself into a rubber stamp and approve utterly flawed proposals or be damned as being anti-women.

Unnecessary linkages

In September 2023, to blunt mounting criticism of its failure to legislate on women's reservation, the government hastily pushed through the Nari Shakti Vandan Adhiniyam (NSVA) in a so-called "special session", just months before the 2024 Lok Sabha elections. This legislation was markedly different from the Bill which had been adopted by the Rajya Sabha in 2010. If that Bill, which had gone through several rounds of parliamentary scrutiny, had been presented by the government, as it should have been, women's reservation could have been implemented from the 2024 elections itself. Instead, the Modi government, through the NSVA, linked women's reservation to the proposed Census and delimitation. During the ensuing debate almost all Opposition parties expressed concern that these unnecessary linkages would not only deny women the right of reservation in the 2024 Lok Sabha and subsequent Assembly elections but would put its implementation in limbo contingent on other factors. The government responded that Opposition fears were unfounded and that a Delimitation Commission would be set up after the 2024 elections and that the Census would be completed in time. None of this happened.

What did happen is that the number of women in Parliament after the 2024 elections decreased from 78 to 74 which is just 13.6% of the total House. Additionally, in 2024 and 2025, State Assembly elections were held in 10 States with a total of 1,276 assembly seats. Only 123 women, which is less than 10%, were elected. This is the real consequence of the unwarranted linkages introduced by the government.

The 131st Amendment Bill not only retains the flawed linkages of the NSVA, it adds a third linkage of increased seats. Thus in the name of women's reservation, the government wants to



Brinda Karat

is a senior leader of the Communist Party of India (Marxist)

Women's reservation is a stand-alone step which requires a stand-alone law

achieve three aims – first, it wants to scrap the principle of delimitation based on present population criteria by using the outdated 2011 Census as the base; secondly, by using the 2011 Census, it wants to take pressure off the urgency for a caste census; and finally, it wants women's reservation to be implemented only as part of a delimitation exercise whose aim is to redraw boundaries of seats to suit the ruling regime. That is, women's reservation is once again being held hostage to the fulfilment of other agendas.

The importance of Census data

Till now in India, all the four major national exercises of delimitation of the boundaries of seats have been based on the last available Census data. The number of Scheduled Castes (SC)/Scheduled Tribes (ST) reserved seats are based on the proportion of SC/ST communities in the total population. As per the 1971 Census, the absolute number of seats reserved for SCs and STs was 79 and 41 respectively. This increased by 11 seats after the 2001 Census and subsequent delimitation with 84 seats reserved for SCs and 47 for STs with their combined proportion in the population being 24.4%. From 2001 to 2026, the population would certainly have registered a bigger increase. In the name of urgency for women's reservation, implementing a delimitation exercise which ignores the current population of SCs and STs will be a *manuvadi* injustice to oppressed communities, denying them a fair increase in the proportion of reserved seats. It will negatively impact the women of these communities, since the numbers of seats constituting one-third of reserved seats for SC/ST women will also be less than their rightful share.

Delimitation is a highly politically and sensitive issue. The last national delimitation exercise took around six years to complete, from 2002 to 2008, and was implemented in the 2009 elections. Since then, two State-level delimitation exercises have been done for Assam and J&K, directly under the Election Commission of India. Both of these have been strongly criticised for the highly undemocratic and sectarian way in which the boundaries of the seats were redrawn violating the principles of the Delimitation Act, 2002. To put it plainly, in both States the interests of the central ruling regime were advanced by manipulating the creation of seats in such a way as to minimise the impact of voters of particular communities seen as being opposed to the ruling regime. It can be reasonably anticipated that the coming delimitation will be highly contested. Why should women's reservation be linked to such an exercise? Further, even if the proportion of the present

number of seats in different States is to be maintained according to the present government proposal, questions still remain as to the disadvantages of States where population growth is less. All this needs further discussion and cannot be pushed through.

Betrayal of women's reservation

Women's reservation is a stand-alone step which requires a stand-alone law. The 2010 Bill adopted by the Rajya Sabha and supported by the then Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had no such linkages. Former member Sushma Swaraj, then the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, rushing to congratulate us, then in the Upper House, for the historic passage of the Bill even though she knew that her party would get no credit. But there are no women leaders in the BJP today who would have the courage to call the government out for this; the second betrayal of the women's reservation issue. The only reason that the government is insisting on such a linkage is because it wants to rush through the delimitation process in the name of implementing women's reservation. The onus of delay will be shifted to all those who object to the delimitation boundaries suggested by a Commission packed with government supporters which is what the composition of the proposed Bill suggests.

It is time to say no to the instrumentalisation of the issue of women's reservation. Women's reservation has been fought for by millions of women across India, for decades, to strengthen democracy, not by the denial of rights of SCs and STs and not by bulldozing democratic norms. Those committed to women's reservation must vote against these Bills. The solution lies in going back to the 2010 Bill without linkages to delimitation and the Census. A simple amendment to the 106th Constitution Amendment law passed in 2023 will suffice: in Clause 334A, delete the sentence, one-third reservation for women will commence "after an exercise of delimitation is undertaken for this purpose after the relevant figures for the first census taken after commencement of the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-eighth Amendment) Act, 2023 have been published". This will break the link. As far as increase of seats and delimitation is concerned, these are separate issues which should be discussed. As and when Parliament decides on an increase in seats, automatically the framework of women's reservation too will change. Our message to the government is: stop your manipulations, one-third reservation for women without linkages now.



Implications of increasing the size of the Lok Sabha

The government has circulated a set of three Bills related to delimitation and women's reservation. These Bills are expected to be taken up in the extended Budget session from April 16-18, and could affect the working of Parliament in several ways. The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill proposes the following. The limit on the size of the Lok Sabha will be increased from 550 to 850. The number of seats for each State in the Lok Sabha will be based on its proportion in the population of all States. This population will be based on such Census (not necessarily the latest) that is specified by Parliament by passing a law. The Bill also clarifies that the reservation of one-third of seats for women will be effective after a delimitation, and will be valid for 15 years. The Delimitation Bill sets up a Delimitation Commission, and its provisions are similar to the last one set up in 2002. Importantly, it requires the latest published Census to be used. Therefore, the next delimitation is proposed to be based on the 2011 Census. The third Bill extends these provisions to the three Union Territories with legislatures: Delhi, J&K, and Puducherry.

Huge impact

There are several implications of these proposals. First, the freezing of seats until the first Census after 2026 has been removed. Instead, seats will be decided based on the 2011 Census. An immediate implication is that the relative share of seats in the Lok Sabha for each State will change. The biggest losers are Kerala and Tamil Nadu, while the main gainers are Rajasthan, Bihar and Uttar Pradesh. While the proposal will equalise the value of the vote of every citizen regardless of their State of residence, it will lead to MPs from U.P. and Bihar (25% of total seats, up from 22%) having significant power to shape national policy. Second, the Constitution Amendment Bill provides Parliament the flexibility to determine the periodicity of delimitation and the Census



M.R. Madhavan
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President of PRS
Legislative Research

These Bills will have significant impact on the composition of Parliament and its functioning and are being introduced with no public discussion

that will be used for the purpose. Currently, the Constitution requires delimitation after every Census, and to be based on that Census (currently, there is a freeze on this until 2026). The Amendment requires just a simple majority to determine whether to do delimitation, and which Census to use. The government of the day, as it would command the majority in the Lok Sabha, can effectively make this decision. They would need to pass it in the Rajya Sabha too, but that House will be weakened by the same Bill, which brings us to the third implication. While the size of the Lok Sabha is being increased, there is no proposal to change the size of the Rajya Sabha. This affects the relative importance of the two Houses. For example, if the two

Houses disagree on a Bill, the President may summon a joint sitting. In such a scenario, each member of Parliament has one vote, so the Lok Sabha with 543 seats has 2.2 times the votes of the Rajya Sabha with 245 seats. If we assume that the Lok Sabha will now have 815 seats (an increase of 50%), it will have 3.3 times the strength of the Rajya Sabha. The effect can be seen with an example. Say, the government has 53% seats in the Lok Sabha (433 out of 815) and just 40% in the Rajya Sabha (98 out of 245 seats). The government will still be able to get its Bills through a joint session as it has a majority of total seats. This imbalance will also play out in elections to the offices of the President and the Vice-President, where each MP across both Houses has an equal vote.

A fourth implication is that the limit on the size of the Council of Ministers will increase. The Constitution was amended in 2003 to limit the Council's size to 15% of the Lok Sabha. If Lok Sabha is expanded to have 815 MPs, the limit on the size of the Central cabinet also increases from 81 to 122. Fifth, the increased size of the Lok Sabha reduces the opportunity for an MP to

participate in the deliberations of the House. MPs ask questions to Ministers to hold them to account, and raise important issues in the zero hour. Questions and zero hour interventions are chosen by lottery, and an increased size of the Lok Sabha reduces the probability of getting balloted. The issue is exacerbated by the fact that Parliament sits for less than 70 days a year.

Global precedents

Other countries also have large legislatures. For example, the U.K. House of Commons has 650 members. It has evolved processes to provide opportunities to MPs to participate in discussions. It averages over 150 sittings a year, and also has a robust committee system. Parliamentary committees can supplement deliberations. However, the Indian Parliament is found lacking in this respect. For example, every Bill in the U.K. Parliament has to be examined by committees of both Houses. In India, less than a fifth of the Bills are referred to Committees.

Sixth, there could be a similar impact on State legislatures. Though these Bills do not have any provisions regarding the size of State legislatures, that decision will be taken by the Delimitation Commission. If they decide to follow the same rationale and increase the size by 50%, some States could have oversized legislatures. U.P. could end up having over 600 seats while West Bengal and Maharashtra could reach about 450.

These Bills will have significant impact on the composition of Parliament and its functioning, and are being introduced with no public discussion. It is imperative that such Bills go through intensive deliberation, both outside and inside Parliament. At the very least, they should be referred to a parliamentary committee, which can engage with experts and the wider public before giving its recommendations.



Samrat Choudhary sworn in as Bihar's first BJP CM

Amarnath Tewary

PATNA

The newly elected leader of the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA), Samrat Choudhary, was sworn in as the Chief Minister of Bihar on Wednesday, marking the end of Nitish Kumar's record tenure in the post.

Two senior leaders from the JD(U), Bijendra Prasad Yadav and Vijay Kumar Choudhary, took oath as Ministers. Both have been designated as Deputy CMs in the new BJP-led NDA government in the State.

Before being sworn in, Mr. Samrat Choudhary visited a famous Hanuman temple in the State capital, Patna, to offer prayers and seek blessings.

Senior BJP leaders, including party chief Nitin Nabin, Union Minister J.P. Nadda, and national general secretary (organisation) B.L. Santosh, along with Mr. Kumar, were present.

After taking oath, Mr. Samrat Choudhary went to the party headquarters to



Bihar Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary with former Chief Minister Nitish Kumar in Patna on Wednesday. ANI

meet party workers and leaders. "With the blessings of Nitish Kumar and Prime Minister Narendra Modi, I will take forward the work of development and growth in the State," he told presspersons.

Administrative issues

In his first meeting as Chief Minister of Bihar, Mr. Choudhary directed State officials to implement a policy of "zero tolerance" against corruption with absolute firmness.

He also told officials to ensure that the general public received proper facilities and that their issues

are resolved promptly at the block, circle, and police station levels. He asserted that corruption would not be tolerated at any cost, from the highest levels of administration to the grassroots.

"Whenever an issue concerning the public arises within any department, ensure that immediate action is taken to address it. There should be no bureaucratic complexities regarding the resolution of land-related disputes; instead, streamline procedures to ensure their speedy disposal," Mr. Choudhary said.

In workers' protests, a test of labour reforms

THE RECENT strike by gig workers and the protest by factory workers in UP against low wages and poor working conditions underlie the operational challenges of labour reforms in the country.

The four labour codes — Code on Social Security, Industrial Relations Code, and Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions Code — represent a major attempt to rationalise India's complex labour regulatory framework. Their impact on employment and wages is expected to be incremental, with outcomes that are heterogeneous across sectors, firm sizes, and worker categories. While the employment effects will be largely compositional through shifts in type and quality of employment, the productivity effects are likely to be moderately positive, depending critically on implementation quality. Against this backdrop, the policy implications become central to realising the potential gains of these reforms.

Specifically, the Code on Wages may correct wage suppression and reduce wage inequality at the lower end of the wage distribution. However, its effectiveness depends on where the national floor wage is set, relative to the current market wage. In terms of labour productivity, the codes create enabling conditions for improvement through better worker protection, reduced compliance, and more efficient labour allocation. Large firms are likely to benefit most, as they can absorb compliance costs while gaining from reduced worker turnover, improved health outcomes, and better workforce stability. In contrast, SMEs may face disproportionate compliance burdens, which can offset any labour productivity gains. Given these dynamics, the policy im-

plications are crucial for ensuring that the labour codes translate into meaningful improvements in work conditions, wages and labour productivity.

First, strengthening enforcement mechanisms is the critical priority. A persistent challenge in India's labour market is the weak enforcement of regulations, especially in the informal sector where the majority of workers are employed. Without credible enforcement, minimum wages remain non-binding, social security provisions fail to reach intended beneficiaries, and safety regulations are not adhered to. The government must invest in digital compliance systems, including mandatory digital wage payments, electronic maintenance of employment records, and data-driven inspection systems. Targeted inspections based on risk profiling can improve efficiency while reducing opportunities for rent-seeking. Building administrative capacity at both central and state levels is essential to ensure consistent and credible enforcement.

Second, careful calibration of wage policy is necessary. The national floor wage should be set at a level that is binding yet sustainable, taking into account regional variations in cost of living and sectoral differences in productivity. Periodic revisions, ideally linked to inflation and productivity growth, can prevent the erosion of real wages while avoiding sudden shocks to employers. A poorly calibrated wage floor — either too low or too high — can undermine the objectives of the Code on Wages.

Third, there is a strong need to support small and medium enterprises, which form the backbone of



FARZANA
AFRIDI

Strengthening enforcement mechanisms is the most critical priority. A persistent challenge in India's labour market is the weak enforcement of regulations, especially in the informal sector

India's employment structure but are also the most vulnerable to regulatory costs. Compliance subsidies, tax incentives, and simplified reporting requirements can help ease the transition to formalisation. Providing access to affordable credit and technology can further enable SMEs to improve productivity and absorb higher labour costs. Without such support, the labour codes risk having regressive effects, benefiting large firms while burdening smaller ones.

Fourth, expanding and deepening social security coverage is essential. Thresholds for schemes such as EPF and ESIC have eroded in real terms and exclude a large share of the workforce. They should be revised upward and indexed to inflation to maintain their relevance. Equally important is the operationalisation of provisions for gig and platform workers, including the establishment of a functional Social Security Fund, notification of contribution rates, and design of tangible benefit schemes. Bridging the coverage gap for informal workers requires proactive policy action rather than reliance on gradual formalisation. Fifth, policymakers must address threshold-based distortions that discourage firms from scaling up. Regulatory thresholds continue to create incentives for firms to stay small or fragment operations to avoid compliance. Smoother, graduated frameworks can encourage firm growth.

Sixth, labour reforms should be complemented by skill development and human capital investment. Higher wages and better working conditions must be supported by corresponding improvements in worker productivity. This

requires expanding access to vocational training, strengthening industry-academia linkages, and promoting continuous skill upgradation. Seventh, there is a need for policy coordination across sectors. Labour reforms alone cannot drive employment growth unless supported by broader economic policies, including industrial policy, trade liberalisation, infrastructure development, and investment promotion. This ensures that productivity improvements translate into expanded economic activity and job creation rather than merely cost savings for firms.

Eighth, improving administrative coordination and institutional integration is vital. Moving toward a true single-window system for compliance and benefit delivery can reduce transaction costs and improve user experience. Greater coordination between central and state governments is also necessary to avoid regulatory fragmentation and ensure uniform implementation.

Ninth, leveraging the digital architecture of the labour codes can create long-term gains. The development of integrated labour databases, real-time compliance monitoring systems, and publicly available data on workplace safety and employment conditions can enhance transparency, accountability, and evidence-based policymaking.

The new labour codes represent an important step toward modernising India's labour regulatory framework with the potential to improve efficiency, formalisation, and productivity at the margins. However, their success depends not on legislative design alone but on effective enforcement, supportive policies, and institutional capacity.

The writer is professor of Economics, ISI (Delhi), and visiting professor, NCAER

Iran says ceasefire is at risk, threatens to close Red Sea traffic

Agence France-Presse

TEHRAN

Iran's military threatened on Wednesday to shut down Red Sea trade unless the U.S. lifted its naval blockade on Tehran's ports, saying the ceasefire was at risk.

The head of Iran's military central command centre said a U.S. failure to lift the blockade would constitute "a prelude" to violating the two-week ceasefire. Unless the U.S. relents, Iran's armed forces "will not allow any exports or imports to continue in the Persian Gulf, the Sea of Oman, and the Red Sea," Iranian General Ali Abdollahi said.

The warning came after U.S. President Donald Trump indicated peace negotiations could resume this week, while Iran confirmed the sides had kept talking via Pakistan after a first round of negotiations



Pakistan's Army chief Asim Munir with Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi in Tehran on Wednesday. AP

fell flat. Iran on Wednesday welcomed a Pakistani delegation led by its Army chief Asim Munir.

Islamabad "has held discussions with the Americans and has also heard our stances. During this visit the views of both sides are to be discussed in detail," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmail Baghaei said.

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LEADERS FLOCK TO CHINA

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Iran threatens to close Red Sea traffic

Washington has sought to turn the screws on Tehran with the blockade, with U.S. Central Command saying that American forces “have completely halted economic trade going into and out of Iran by sea”.

Speaking to the *New York Post* on Tuesday, Mr. Trump said a new round of talks with Iran could take place in Pakistan “over the next two days”, while telling Fox Business the war was “very close to being over”. On the Iranian side, a Foreign Ministry spokesperson said “several messages” had been exchanged via Islamabad since the talks wrapped up on Sunday, while Tehran received a Pakistani delegation led by its Army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir on Wednesday.

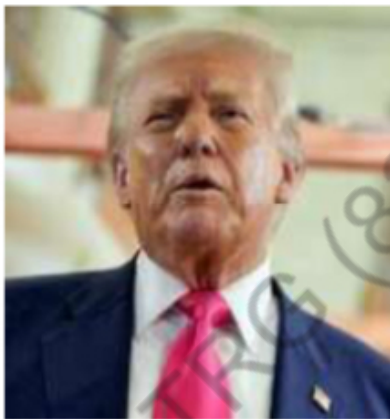
Trump 'asked China's Xi' not to give Iran weapons

Reuters

WASHINGTON

Donald Trump asked Chinese President Xi Jinping in a letter not to give Iran weapons, and Mr. Xi responded that China was not supplying Tehran, the U.S. president told *Fox Business Network* in an interview that aired on Wednesday. Mr. Trump, in the interview taped on Tuesday, did not say when the letters were exchanged. Last week, he threatened countries with an immediate 50% tariff if they supplied Iran with weapons.

"I wrote him a letter asking him not to do that, and he wrote me a letter saying that, essentially, he's not doing that," Mr. Trump told *FBN's* "Mornings with Maria" programme. He also said he did not expect



Donald Trump

shifts in the global oil market over the war on Iran and changes in Venezuela to impact the dynamics of his planned meeting with Mr. Xi next month. "He's somebody that needs oil. We don't," Mr. Trump said.

In a subsequent Truth Social post, Mr. Trump also wrote that he was "permanently opening" the Strait of Hormuz and China was very happy about it.

"I am doing it for them,

also - And the World," Mr. Trump wrote, adding: "President Xi will give me a big, fat, hug when I get there in a few weeks."

It was not immediately clear what Mr. Trump meant as shipping through the Strait of Hormuz remains constrained. The White House did not immediately respond to a request for clarification on the President's post.

Forty-five days after Iran's Revolutionary Guards declared the strait closed, effectively shutting in about 20% of global oil and liquefied natural gas shipments, transit through the waterway remains uncertain - even with the two-week ceasefire now in place. Traffic is at only a fraction of the 130-plus daily crossings seen before the war, sources said.

DIPLOMATIC DIALOGUE MAY RESUME IN PAKISTAN; BACK-CHANNEL TALKS HAVE MADE PROGRESS

Trump says war 'close to over'; Pak's Munir arrives in Tehran

US forces impose a blockade turning back vessels leaving Iran port

Jana Choukeir & Kanishka Singh

Dubai, Washington, April 15

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump said the war with Iran could end soon, telling the world to watch out for an "amazing two days", while US forces imposing a blockade turned back vessels leaving Iranian ports.

With the prospect of US and Iranian officials returning to Pakistan for more talks, Vice President JD Vance, who led the US delegation at negotiations that ended on Sunday without a breakthrough, said he felt positive about where things stood.

"I think you're going to be watching an amazing two days ahead," Trump told *ABC News* reporter Jonathan Karl, according to a post by the reporter on X, adding he did not think it would be necessary to extend a two-week ceasefire that expires next week. "I think it can be over very soon. It will end soon," Trump said in an interview taped on Tuesday with *Fox Business Network's* 'Mornings with Maria'.

Officials from Pakistan, Iran and several Gulf states also said negotiating teams from the US and Iran could return to Islamabad later this week. Iran's foreign ministry said it was likely a Pakistani delegation would arrive in Iran on Wednesday and pass on messages from Washington.

The talks last weekend broke down without an agreement to

E. EXPLAINED

Enrichment key to deal or no deal

US President Donald Trump says his negotiators can soon return to Pakistan, while Vice President JD Vance says Washington wants a 'grand bargain' with Iran. But mistrust remains. Nuclear enrichment is the main bone of contention, with the US seeking a 20-year halt and Tehran offering only a 3 to 5-year suspension instead.

end the war, which Trump launched alongside Israel on February 28, triggering Iranian attacks on Iran's Gulf neighbours and re-igniting a parallel conflict between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Tankers Intercepted

The US military said more vessels were being turned back under the blockade, including the US-sanctioned, Chinese-owned tanker *Rich Starry* which was seen heading back through the Strait of Hormuz on Wednesday. Eight Iran-linked oil tankers have been intercepted since the blockade began on Monday, the *Wall Street Journal* reported.

A US destroyer stopped two oil tankers attempting to leave the Iranian port of Chabahar on the Gulf of Oman on Tuesday, a US official said. An Iranian supertanker subject to US sanctions crossed the strait towards Iran's Imam Khomeini port despite the blockade, Iran's *Fars News Agency* said Wednesday.



Pakistan's Army Chief Field Marshal Asim Munir (right) greeted by Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi upon his arrival in Tehran on Wednesday. ANI

Trump: Asked China not to give Iran weapons, Xi told me 'not doing that'

Reuters
Washington, April 15

DONALD TRUMP asked Chinese President Xi Jinping in a letter not to give Iran weapons, and Xi responded that China was not supplying Tehran, the US president told *Fox Business Network* in an interview that aired on Wednesday. Trump, in the interview taped on Tuesday, did not say when the letters were exchanged. Last week, he threatened countries with an immediate 50% tariff if they supplied Iran with weapons.

"I wrote him a letter asking him not to do that, and he wrote me a letter saying that, essentially, he's not doing that,"

“China is very happy that I am permanently opening the Strait of Hormuz... They have agreed not to send weapons to Iran. President Xi will give me a big fat hug when I get there next week”

DONALD TRUMP,
U.S. PRESIDENT

Trump told *FBN*.

He also said he did not expect shifts in the global oil market

over the war on Iran and changes in Venezuela to impact the dynamics of his planned meeting with Xi next month. "He's somebody that needs oil. We don't," Trump said.

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It was not immediately clear what Trump meant as shipping through Hormuz remains constrained. The White House did not respond to a request for clarification on the president's post.

Why is the Strait of Hormuz critical to global energy flows?

What is a maritime chokepoint? How does international law govern these waters?

Smriti Sudesh

The story so far:

Since late February, the Strait of Hormuz has emerged as the centre of a deepening energy and security crisis. The escalation followed U.S. and Israeli strikes on Iran, after which Tehran tightened restrictions on the narrow waterway. The situation intensified further this week when President Donald Trump ordered a U.S. naval blockade of vessels sailing to or from Iranian ports. As of April, a ceasefire has allowed a limited number of ships to pass through. However, continued threats and the U.S. blockade have kept most tankers away, reducing daily transits from around 130 vessels to just a few on several days.

What is a maritime chokepoint?

A maritime chokepoint is a narrow stretch of sea through which a large share of global trade must pass, with no easy alternative route. These are natural geographic bottlenecks created by

coastlines, islands, or narrow channels that concentrate shipping into tight corridors. Because ships cannot easily reroute, these chokepoints become critical nodes in the global trading system.

Today, between 70 and 80% of the world's oil moves by sea, and much of it passes through such chokepoints. Even a single incident can disrupt traffic almost immediately. The consequences can be far-reaching. Energy prices tend to rise sharply, shipping costs increase and supply chains can be disrupted. This can lead to shortages of critical commodities, contributing to inflation and slowing economic growth.

Why is the Strait of Hormuz critical?

The Strait of Hormuz is widely regarded as the world's most important maritime chokepoint. It connects the Persian Gulf to the Gulf of Oman and the Indian Ocean and is a primary export route for oil producers in the region. At its narrowest, the strait is just 21 nautical miles (38 km) wide. Under normal circumstances, about

21 million barrels of oil – roughly one-fifth of global consumption – pass through it each day. In addition to crude oil, large volumes of liquefied natural gas from Qatar and the UAE also move through this route. Nearly 80% of these energy flows go to Asia, making countries such as India, China, Japan, and South Korea dependent on the route.

What are the other key global chokepoints?

Beyond Hormuz, the global trading system relies on a small set of equally critical maritime chokepoints. These include the Strait of Malacca, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, the Suez Canal, and the Panama Canal.

The Strait of Malacca runs between the Malay Peninsula and the Indonesian island of Sumatra. It forms the shortest sea route between the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea, making it a key route for trade between West Asia, Africa, and East Asia.

The Bab el-Mandeb Strait sits between the Arabian Peninsula and the Horn of

Africa. It acts as the southern gateway into the Red Sea, through which ships must pass before reaching the Suez Canal and the Mediterranean. This makes it a crucial link in the trade route between Asia and Europe.

The Suez Canal is an artificial waterway that cuts across Egypt, connecting the Red Sea to the Mediterranean. It allows ships to avoid the long journey around Africa.

Further west, the Panama Canal cuts across the narrow Isthmus of Panama, linking the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans. This makes it a vital route for trade between Asia, the Americas, and Europe, eliminating the need to sail around South America.

How does international law apply to these waterways?

The movement of ships through international chokepoints is governed primarily by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. Under its provisions, straits used for international navigation are subject to the principle of "transit passage", which allows ships and aircraft of all nations to pass continuously and without obstruction. However, countries along the strait can regulate shipping for safety and environmental reasons, but they cannot stop ships from passing through or impose selective restrictions. This right of passage is broadly recognised under international law, though in practice, enforcement depends on naval strength and coordination between countries.

India laps up most of Venezuelan, Russian crude oil

Debayan Tewari
M. Kalyanaraman
CHENNAI

Amid a global crude oil crisis triggered by the Iran war and the closure of the Strait of Hormuz, India is likely to have lapped up most of the increased crude oil shipments from Venezuela and Russia.

As per BIMCO, one of the world's largest shipping associations, global crude shipments fell 16% after the war began vis a vis first 9 weeks of the year.

"This represents a re-



The war roiled energy supplies.

duction of 7.6 million barrels per day (mbpd) to 38.4 mbpd," BIMCO said.

With global shipments down, Venezuela increased shipments of

crude oil by 0.4 million barrels per day, as did Russia from the Black Sea by 0.8 mbpd.

"Combined, this accounts for 85% of increased shipments from countries outside of the Persian Gulf. India has been the main destination for the increased shipments," BIMCO said.

The Hindu has been tracking open-source data for the past two weeks and found at least 17 tankers originating in Russia crossed the Suez Canal and bound for ports in India

carrying Russian crude. Some have reached India.

BIMCO said before the Iran war, the U.S. Energy Information Administration estimated global 2026 oil production at 79.9 mbpd. "The 7.6 mbpd reduction in seaborne shipments thereby means 9.5% of the previously expected crude oil production is currently not reaching markets. The reduction in shipments has naturally been driven by effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz."

"The United Arab Emirates managed to increase

loadings from ports east of the Strait of Hormuz by 0.7 mbpd while Saudi Arabia increased shipments from Yanbu in the Red Sea by 3.0 mbpd," it said, adding, shipments from the region fell 9 mbpd compared with earlier this year.

Even if the Strait of Hormuz is fully reopened, shortages may remain. "[I]t may take a long time for crude oil and other energy shipments to return to previous volumes," BIMCO's chief shipping analyst Niels Rasmussen was quoted as saying.

Israel strikes South Lebanon after truce talks in US

Associated Press

Tyre, April 15

ISRAELI STRIKES rocked southern Lebanon overnight and into Wednesday, a day after a first round of historic talks between Lebanese and Israeli officials in Washington. Smoke rose over the coastal city of Tyre, underscoring the fragility of diplomatic efforts.

Though Israeli strikes in Beirut have eased since last week's shattering 10-minute bombardment without warning that killed over 350 people across the country, areas in

southern Lebanon remain under frequent attack.

Israel's military has periodically issued warnings telling residents of wide swathes of southern Lebanon to flee, but thousands have stayed, either because they don't want to leave their homes or because they have nowhere to go.

Tyre was once viewed by many displaced families as a relative refuge from the heaviest fighting in areas closer to the Israeli border. Now many residents say there is little sense of safety anywhere as Israel targets the Iranian-backed Hez-

bollah militant group.

Across the city, the aftermath of bombardment was visible in shattered buildings, mounds of rubble and debris-strewn streets. Residents moved cautiously along roads lined with wreckage.

An Israeli drone struck a car overnight a few hundred meters from Tyre's city centre. It was not immediately clear who was targeted, but witnesses said it killed a young woman who was sitting outside her house nearby.

Mourners gathered Wednesday to bury the woman, 19-

year-old Ghadir Baalbaki, in a temporary cemetery for those killed during the war. Many families are unable to bury relatives in hometowns closer to the front lines.

"We prayed maghrib (the Islamic evening prayer) and went and sat outside. We were sitting for 10 minutes before the strike hit us," said Mariam Hamoud, Baalbaki's aunt.

"I hugged Ghadir because I thought she had fainted. I kept trying to wake her up." Her father, Mohammed Baalbaki, stood beside the grave in tears.

"We cannot adapt to life

without her," he said. "Since this tragedy took place yesterday we have been suffering."

The latest escalation between Israel and Hezbollah began when Hezbollah fired several rockets towards northern Israel, just days after the US and Israel launched their war on Iran. Israel responded with an intense aerial campaign and ground invasion.

More than 2,000 people have been killed in Israeli strikes, Lebanon's health ministry has said, and over one million Lebanese people have been displaced.

Xi meets Russian FM as leaders flock to China over West Asia war

Russia could help offset China's energy shortfalls if shipping through Strait of Hormuz stays disrupted, says Lavrov; experts say China has leverage over Iran and could use it to press for restraint and diplomacy, especially as Gulf states seek stability

Agence France-Presse

BEIJING

China's President Xi Jinping met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov on Wednesday, Chinese state media said, as a string of leaders of countries impacted by the West Asia war flock to Beijing.

Mr. Lavrov joins Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez, Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince Sheikh Khaled bin Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan and Vietnamese leader To Lam in meeting with Mr. Xi this week.

The Russian diplomat told a news conference after meeting Mr. Xi that



Close ties: Sergei Lavrov with Xi Jinping prior to their meeting at the Great Hall of the People, in Beijing, on Wednesday. AP

Moscow could "compensate" for China's energy shortages as shipping through the Strait of Hormuz remains choked by the Iran war. Mr. Xi, mean-

while, has sought to position China as a mediator and stable partner in the face of the U.S.- and Israeli-led conflict.

Mr. Xi told Abu Dhabi's

crown prince on Tuesday that China would play a "constructive role" in promoting peace talks in the West Asia.

In talks with Spain's Sanchez, Mr. Xi warned that the world was facing "chaos and turmoil" and "a contest between justice and force", urging closer cooperation. The Spanish Prime Minister welcomed China's role in seeking to resolve the conflict in the West Asia.

Though the level of diplomatic activity is normal for Beijing, the West Asia war and particularly the issue of energy security have taken on new urgency in diplomatic discussions, ac-

ording to Dylan Loh, associate professor at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University.

"China has got leverage and influence over Iran, and there are some hopes that China can use this influence in a more direct way," Mr. Loh said.

Countries, particularly in the Gulf, could be hoping China can pressure Iran to stop its attacks on Gulf countries and to persist with diplomatic negotiations, he said.

Beijing and Moscow are close economic and political partners, and the relationship has deepened further since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022.

Wang Yi, Lavrov to attend BRICS meet on May 14-15

Shubhajit Roy

New Delhi, April 15

AMID THE shaky ceasefire between Iran and the US and negotiations in Islamabad to reach a deal to end the war entered a deadlock, India is likely to host the BRICS Foreign Ministers' meeting on May 14-15, sources said on Wednesday, which is expected to be attended by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

Depending on the conflict's situation, Iran Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi might join the meeting in May — either in person or virtually.

Senior officials of the BRICS countries are in touch with each other for the Foreign ministers' meeting, which will ultimately lead to the BRICS leaders' summit in India, which holds the rotational presidency of the group for 2026, later this year.

Apart from the war, the BRICS Foreign Ministers are set to discuss the value and importance of multilateral and multipolarity in the international order — something which has

E. EXPLAINED

Diplomatic tightrope

India has pitched BRICS as a “non-west” platform, and will face a challenge of diplomatically balancing between the US and rest of the West on one side, and China-Russia on the other. The West Asia war has now deepened the divide — with Iran and the UAE on opposing sides.

been threatened by US President Donald Trump. Trump has not been well-disposed towards the BRICS, and had last year threatened an additional 10% tariff on “any country aligning themselves with the Anti-American policies of BRICS”. During a meeting with Argentine Prime Minister Javier Milei at the White House last year, Trump had said “BRICS was an attack on the dollar”.

EXPORTS TO THE WEST ASIA REGION FELL BY 57.95% AND IMPORTS BY 51.64%

March trade deficit eases to \$21 bn; goods export grew by 1% in FY26

India's goods exports in March slipped by 7.4% to \$38.92 billion while imports too declined 6.9% to \$59.59 billion

Ravi Dutta Mishra
New Delhi, April 15

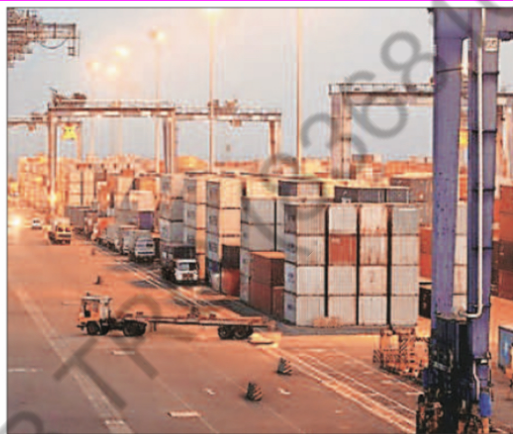
THE GOODS trade deficit in March eased marginally to \$20.67 billion in March compared to \$21.69 billion during last year, driven by a sharp decline in imports of petroleum products as well as exports of rice, gems & jewellery and electronic goods to the West Asia region, data released by the Commerce and Industry Ministry showed. While India's goods exports in March slipped by 7.4% to \$38.92 billion compared to \$42.05 billion in March last year, imports declined 6.9% to \$59.59 billion compared to \$63.74 billion, data showed.

"The key reason for the impact on trade is the West Asia crisis. Exports to the West Asia region slipped by 57.95% and imports by 51.64%. Our monthly exports to the West Asia region were about \$6 billion, which has come down to \$3.5 billion. Due to the crisis, April could also be a tough month, but our export industry is quick to adapt," Commerce Secretary Rajesh Agarwal said. Agarwal said that total exports

during the last financial year crossed \$860 billion, about 4.22% higher compared to the previous year. The imports driven primarily by gold prices also surged by 6.7% to \$974 billion. "There have been trade challenges during the last financial year due to tariffs, but goods exports have surged by 1% to \$441 billion compared to the previous financial year," Agarwal said.

Data showed that imports from the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Qatar in March slipped 66.32%, 37.32%, 64.30% and 47.89%, respectively. Exports to the UAE also declined by 61.93% and to Saudi Arabia by 45.67%. However, exports even to the US slipped by 20%.

Most labour-intensive sectors registered a steep decline in exports during March. While gems and jewellery exports slipped by nearly 30%, ready-made garments declined 19%. Drugs and pharma exports also slipped by 19% in March. Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) President SC Ralhan said that the increase in exports during the last financial year was driven by a diversified



Most labour-intensive sectors registered a steep decline in exports during March. REUTERS FILE

basket comprising engineering goods, petroleum products, electronics, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, textiles, gems and jewellery, rice and marine products, further strengthening India's position in global value chains. "The US, UAE, China, the Netherlands and the UK remained the main destinations for exports. FIEO stressed the need to effectively leverage free trade agreements to further diversify markets and expand India's global reach," he said.

Pankaj Chadha, Chairman, Engineering Exports Promotion Council (EEPC), said that the West Asia conflict that

started on February 28 has caused serious supply chain disruptions, leading to a spike in energy prices. In light of the above, we remain cautiously optimistic about the engineering exports growth outlook in FY27," Chadha said. "In March 2026, when one of the key sea routes was disrupted due to the West Asia conflict, engineering goods exports recorded a marginal growth of 1.1%. During this period, total engineering exports stood at \$10.94 billion against \$10.82 billion in March 2025," Chadha said.

FULL REPORT ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

China trumps US as India's largest trading partner in FY26

New Delhi: China has overtaken the US to emerge as India's largest trading partner in FY26, with bilateral trade reaching \$151.1 billion, while the country's trade deficit with Beijing widened to \$112.16 billion during the period, government data showed.

The US was India's largest trading partner for four consecutive years till 2024-25.

India's exports to China rose 36.66% to \$19.47 billion during the last fiscal year, while imports increased 16% to \$131.63 billion.

The trade deficit swelled to an all-time high of \$112.6 billion in FY26 as against \$99.2 billion in FY25.

On the other hand, the country's outbound shipments to the United States grew marginally 0.92% to \$87.3 billion during the last fiscal year, while imports increased 15.95% to \$52.9 billion.

The trade surplus declined to \$34.4 billion in FY26 from \$40.89 billion in FY25. PTI