

South's seat share won't be cut, say PM and Shah

Amit Shah slams those **spreading misconceptions**; he tells Lok Sabha seats of five southern States will increase from 129 to 195 and reassures people of Tamil Nadu that their 'power is increasing'

The Hindu Bureau

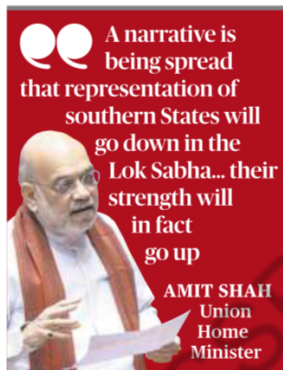
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday told the Lok Sabha that the Bills to amend the women's reservation law and carry out a fresh delimitation exercise will keep current proportional representation of southern

States intact while increasing the absolute number of seats for each State approximately by 50%.

While the Prime Minister gave an assurance that the proportional distribution of seats among States will be maintained, the Home Minister gave a detailed scenario for each southern State after the three Bills become law.

The debate followed the introduction of three Bills:



the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill, 2026, to enable implementation of the women's reservation by the 2029 Lok Sabha polls; the Delimitation Bill, 2026, to readjust parliamentary and Assembly constituencies through a Delimitation Commission; and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill,

Proposed figures

The table shows the estimated number of seats for southern States as announced by Union Home Minister Amit Shah

State	Current seats	As a share of current 543 seats	50% increase (approx.)	New status (as a share of 816 seats)
Karnataka	28	5.15%	42	5.14%
Andhra Pradesh	25	4.60%	38	4.65%
Telangana	17	3.13%	26	3.18%
Tamil Nadu	39	7.18%	59	7.23%
Kerala	20	3.68%	30	3.67%
Total	129	23.76%	195	23.87%

2026, to extend the reservation to the legislatures of Delhi, Puducherry, and Jammu & Kashmir.

Mr. Shah said that as the Minister piloting the Bill, **he was placing this interpretation before the House officially. "I understand my responsibility. Those who are spreading misconceptions perhaps do not un-**

derstand," he said.

The Minister showed how the representation of the southern States would **not go down. The Lok Sabha will have 816 seats after the delimitation exercise.**

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Stalin sets fire to a copy of the Delimitation Bill at a protest in Namakkal on Thursday. PTI

Stalin burns Delimitation Bill copy as T.N. protests

The Hindu Bureau

NAMAKKAL

Tamil Nadu Chief Minister M.K. Stalin burnt a copy of the Delimitation Bill in Namakkal as part of the State-wide protest on Thursday.

The Chief Minister urged people to hoist black flags in every home and public place on Thursday. He hoisted a black flag at Nallipalayam in Namakkal and raised slogans that 'Tamil Nadu will protest and Tamil Nadu will win'.

South's seat share won't be cut, say PM and Shah



Several DMK MPs had worn black in Parliament on Thursday to protest the delimitation move. ANI

He said that in a House of existing 543 members, Karnataka has 28 seats, or 5.15% of MPs. After the Bill is passed, Karnataka's share will become 42, and its percentage of seats in a Lok Sabha of 816 members will be 5.14%. Andhra Pradesh, with its 25 seats (4.60%), will have 38 MPs (4.65%). Likewise, Telangana's 17 seats (3.13%) will become 26 (3.18%), Kerala's 20 seats (3.68%) will touch 30 (3.67%), and Tamil Nadu's 39 seats (7.18%) will become 59 (7.23%).

Noting that many MPs from Tamil Nadu have come wearing black clothes, he reassured the people of the State that "your power is not decreasing, it is increasing."

He said the number of Lok Sabha seats in the five southern States will go up from the existing 129 to 195, with the percentage share increasing from 23.76% to 23.87%.

Participating in the debate, Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra slammed the delimitation and that "if the Constitution Amendment Bill is passed in Parliament, democracy will be finished in India".

Former Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister and Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav, while expressing support for the women's reservation law, said it should be implemented only after the ongoing Census is complete.

The Home Minister said he would give his detailed reply in the Lok Sabha on Friday. "I will explain, provided they sit to listen and do not walk out. I will explain it with such simplicity that even a child in KG would understand," Mr. Shah said.

Priyanka says delimitation move is an 'open attack on democracy'

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Thursday said the government in the guise of implementing women's reservation wanted to slice and dice constituencies to ensure its victory in the next election, and that this was an "open attack" on democracy.

Participating in the debate on the three Bills seeking changes to the women's quota law, and the setting up of a Delimitation Commission, Ms. Gandhi alleged the first steps towards weakening democracy had been taken when the government made the media and the Election Commission of India captive, and was now taking



Priyanka Gandhi Vadra

that assault a step further. "If this Constitution Amendment Bill is passed, democracy will be finished in India," she said.

Questioning the government's intent, the Congress MP asked why 33% reservation for women could not be implemented immediately on the exist-

ing strength of 543 Lok Sabha seats. Instead, she noted, the Bill proposed increasing the strength of the House to up to 850 members after delimitation, to be carried out on the basis of the 2011 Census. She also alleged that the government was not waiting for Census 2027 because it did not want to account for the caste count that would for the first time provide data on the strength of all caste groups. "This Bill is aimed at snatching the rights of OBCs [Other Backward Class]," Ms. Gandhi said. She alleged that the proposed Delimitation Commission would give three members the power to decide the fate of States and their parliamentary representation.

'Women's quota a disguise for altering electoral process'

Sreeparna Chakrabarty
NEW DELHI

The Trinamool Congress on Thursday said amendments being brought in for implementing the women's reservation Act were actually a "disguise" for altering the electoral process of the country and bringing in delimitation of constituencies.

Questioning the "hurriedness" in bringing in the Constitutional Amendment Bill for implementation of the women's quota, Trinamool Congress MP Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar, while participating in the discussion in the Lok Sabha, said her party demanded that 50% of seats should be reserved for women, because Trinamool Con-



Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar

gress supremo Mamata Banerjee had given more than 33% of seats to women whenever there had been an electoral contest.

She questioned why the government had suddenly brought the Bill. "Our leader Ms. Banerjee had demanded 28 years ago in this very House that wo-

men's quota be enacted. The Budget session began on January 28 and if this was so important for you, then why wasn't this law brought in before".

Ms. Ghosh Dastidar said her party had demanded a special session during Pahalagam as well as Operation Sindoor, but it was not done and what was so important about the law that it had to be brought in the middle of ongoing spate of polls. "Women's reservation is a disguise to alter election process and harm democracy," she added.

She also expressed apprehensions that the proposed delimitation commission would be "authoritarian just like the Election Commission of India".

Priyanka, Akhilesh lead Opp charge: Using women quota to change poll map, ignore OBCs

**Divya A, Asad Rehman,
Nikhil Ghanekar
& Anonna Dutt**

New Delhi, April 16

MOUNTING A scathing attack on the government over its decision to bring the Bills to the House in the middle of Assembly elections, leaders of Opposition parties Thursday accused the BJP of using the plank of reservation of seats for women to push for delimitation of constituencies to seek electoral advantage.

The Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill to amend the



**Congress MP Priyanka Gandhi
Vadra speaks in Lok Sabha. PTI**

women's quota law was introduced in Lok Sabha after a division of votes demanded by

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Opp charge

the Opposition.

Opposition leaders, including Congress MPs Priyanka Gandhi Vadra and Gaurav Gogoi and SP MP Akhilesh Yadav, led the Opposition onslaught, questioning the true intentions of the government and the timing of the Bills.

While reiterating their support for reservation of seats for women in Parliament and Assemblies, Opposition leaders asked why the delimitation process could not be done based on fresh data of the 2026-27 Census.

Vadra and Yadav accused the government of undermining reservation by not finishing the caste Census prior to the delimitation process.

Speaking on the Bills, Vadra pointedly responded to Prime Minister Narendra Modi's address, saying that the legislation had nothing to do with women. She alleged the move raised serious concerns about representation and fairness.

Countering the Prime Minister's claim of a 30-year delay in implementing women quota in Parliament, she drew attention to the 1928 Motilal Nehru report listing 19 fundamental rights, including equal rights for women. She said that while the Prime Minister claims he does not want credit, women cannot be misled. "Baar baar behkaane wale purushon ko mahilaayein jhat se pehchan leti hain (women can quickly identify men who repeatedly mislead)," she said.

"The Prime Minister's remarks today suggested that the BJP have been the champions, proponents, and biggest supporters of women's reservation. This was the theme throughout his speech, even while claiming he didn't want any credit for it... A few years after reading Rahul Gandhi's letter in 2023, finally, when the government of respected Prime Minister Narendra Modi unanimously passed this Act in 2023, the Indian National Congress fully supported it, in keeping with its

ideology," she said.

Akhilesh Yadav accused the BJP of "trying to make nari (women) into a nara (slogan)" and demanded that other backward classes (OBC) and Muslim women be given reservation under the provisions of the women's quota law.

Alleging a "silence" by the BJP on OBC women, he said: "... The rush (to get the Bills passed) is because they (the BJP) don't want to make any reservation based on the caste census. We will not accept it until it is implemented properly. If we count that OBCs are 66%, then OBC women will be 33%. They don't want to give rights to OBC women."

"We are for women's reservation, but we are against the BJP's trickery," Yadav said, adding that he agreed with Congress MP Gaurav Gogoi's remark that the BJP, through delimitation, was seeking to change the "electoral map of the country".

Gogoi, who initiated the debate on behalf of the Opposition, said, "We support women's reservation in the current strength of House of 543. But you do politics in everything – you do symbolism. This is a backdoor Bill for delimitation, not women's reservation. You have put a label of women's reservation on this delimitation."

K C Venugopal of the Congress accused the government of delaying implementation of the women's quota law. "The entire Opposition is giving a blank cheque to the government: implement the reservation as per the 2023 law, as per existing strength of the Parliament. Who is opposing it? It is very clear that the government is trying to delay it," he said.

TMC's Kakoli Ghosh Dastidar said that if the government was serious about the issue, it would have introduced the Bill during the Budget session and not in the middle of ongoing Assembly elections.

"We are doubting their purpose and intent for doing this in the middle of elections... women's reservation is a disguise to alter the election process and harm democracy," she said.

Census 2027 gets under way, door-to-door survey up next

Exercise scheduled to continue until May 15; first phase focuses on gathering data on housing conditions and access to basic amenities; each enumerator to be paid ₹25,000 in two instalments

Suruchi Kumari

NEW DELHI

The first phase of Census 2027 kicked off on Thursday in the New Delhi district under New Delhi Municipal Council (NDMC) and Delhi Cantonment, with enumerators fanning out across 571 blocks to digitally map and geotag households ahead of a month-long door-to-door survey.

Census officials said the exercise commenced primarily with the mapping and numbering of houses within each block. "The mapping work will be completed in a couple of days, after which enumerators will begin the household listing operations," said Kapil Chaudhary, New Delhi district census officer.

The first phase, involving house-listing and housing census, focuses on gathering detailed data on



Enumerators, all government school teachers, collecting data for Census 2027 in New Delhi on Thursday. SHASHI SHEKHAR KASHYAP

housing conditions, household composition, and access to basic amenities. The second phase, which will include caste enumeration, is scheduled for February 2027. The questionnaire for that phase is yet to be notified.

The exercise is scheduled to continue until

May 15. Officials said only around 5,000 households opted for self-enumeration during the window that closed on April 15. In areas under the Municipal Corporation of Delhi (MCD), the self-enumeration facility will open from May 1 while the house-listing exercise will be conducted

from May 16.

As many as 571 enumerators, all government school teachers, have been assigned one block each, covering roughly 180 to 200 houses and an estimated population of 700 to 800 people. "We first map houses, roads and surroundings on paper, then geo-reference them on the app. After visiting each household, we assign numbers and verify those already assigned with the digital map," said an enumerator in Chanakyapuri.

Enumerators are using their mobile phones for the exercise with the app enabling geotagging within a radius of 100 metres. Officials said each enumerator will be paid ₹25,000 in two instalments for work carried out beyond school hours and on weekends. Verification remains a key step before the door-to-door survey begins.

Electors cleared by tribunals till April 21 and 27 can vote: SC

Invoking extraordinary powers under Article 142, the CJI-led Bench issues directions to EC to publish a 'supplementary revised electoral roll' ahead of both phases of polling in West Bengal

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has declared that electors, who were purged from the voter list during the West Bengal special intensive revision, but subsequently cleared by Appellate Tribunals by April 21 or April 27, must be allowed to vote in the Assembly election.

The order by a Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant spelt a huge reprieve for citizens whose right to vote was denied in the SIR under the "logical discrepancy" category. Over 34 lakh appeals were filed as on April 11.

The court, issuing directions in exercise of its extraordinary constitutional powers under Article 142, ordered the Election Com-



Members of Votadhikar Raksha Mancha staging a protest demanding voting rights for deleted voters in Kolkata. PTI

mission to publish a "supplementary revised electoral roll" containing the names of those who won their appeals by April 21, ahead of the first phase of polling in the State on April 23, or by April 27, prior to the second phase on April 29.

"Wherever the Appellate Tribunals are able to decide

the appeals by April 21 or April 27, as the case may be, such appellate orders shall be given effect to by issuing a supplementary revised electoral roll, and all necessary consequences with respect to the right to vote shall follow. However, it goes without saying that the mere pendency of appeals preferred by excluded per-

sons before the Appellate Tribunals shall not entitle them to exercise their right to vote," the court ordered.

However, those whose appeals remain pending before the tribunals would not be allowed to vote. The order is dated April 13, but published on April 16.

On April 13, the court had orally observed that the right to be on the electoral roll and to vote in one's own country was not only constitutional but sentimental. It had referred to thousands of voters excluded for "logical discrepancies" and lined up for appeal hearings in West Bengal barely a few days ahead of the Assembly election.

SC OFFERS FRESH HOPE TO EXCLUDED VOTERS

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'TEHRAN HAS AGREED TO GIVE UP ENRICHED URANIUM'

Iran has pledged not to have nukes; may visit Pak if deal ready: Trump

Says if deal with
Iran happens, 'oil
goes way down...
you won't have a
nuclear holocaust'

Reuters

Washington, April 16

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump said on Thursday that if a deal with Iran to conclude the war is reached and signed in Islamabad, he might go, and that Iran has agreed to almost everything. "If a deal is signed in Is-



US President Donald Trump at the White House, Thursday. AP
ISRAEL, LEBANON AGREE TO TRUCE: TRUMP, PAGE 16

lamabad I may go," Trump said. "They want me."

Trump struck an optimistic tone about Iran as he spoke with reporters on the White House

Happening today

● **FRENCH PRESIDENT** Emmanuel Macron and British PM Keir Starmer will co-host a meeting to discuss a plan to secure the Strait of Hormuz.

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lawn on his way to a trip to Nevada and Arizona. He said he could extend a US-Iran ceasefire set to expire next week, but may not need to do so.

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Trump on Iran deal

“We’re going to see what happens. But I think we’re very close to making a deal with Iran,” he said, adding: “I think we have a chance. And if that happens, oil goes way down, prices go way down, inflation goes way down, and... much more importantly than even that, you won't have a nuclear holocaust.”

“We have a very good relationship with Iran right now, as hard as it is to believe,” Trump said. “And I think it's a combination of about four weeks of bombing, and a very powerful blockade.”

He also said, without providing evidence, that Iran has agreed to give up the enriched uranium believed buried from US-Israeli airstrikes last year.

The US President claimed that Tehran has offered to not have nuclear weapons for more

than 20 years. “We have a statement, a very powerful statement, that they will not have, beyond 20 years, that they will not have nuclear weapons,” he said.

Iran's nuclear ambitions were a sticking point at last weekend's talks. The US proposed a 20-year suspension of all nuclear activity by Iran, while Tehran suggested a halt of three to five years.

Washington has pressed for any highly enriched uranium (HEU) to be removed from Iran. Tehran has demanded that international sanctions against it be lifted.

Two Iranian sources said there were signs of a compromise emerging on the HEU stockpile, with Tehran considering shipping part, but not all, of it out of the country — something it had previously ruled out.

Pak.'s Munir meets Iran's Ghalibaf; Sharif visits Qatar in four-day tour

Pakistan is acting as a mediator, with Gen. Munir 'delivering a message' from United States, says media; while White House indicates the next round of talks will 'very likely' return to Islamabad, Pak. Foreign Ministry says no date has yet been set

Agence France-Presse
TEHRAN/DOHA

Pakistan's army chief met Iran's Parliament Speaker on Thursday, Iranian state television said, after Pakistani mediators travelled to Iran to press efforts to end the war with the United States and Israel.

"Field Marshal Asim Munir, Commander of the Pakistan Army, who travelled to our country yesterday, met and held talks with Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf... this Thursday morning, April 16," the report said.

After more than five weeks of war that saw the killing of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei and top security official Ali Larijani,



Close ties: Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, right, shaking hands with Gen. Asim Munir before their meeting in Tehran. AFP

Mr. Ghalibaf is widely seen as Iran's top negotiator, and he travelled last weekend to Pakistan for a first round of talks with the United States.

There were no further details on the contents of the latest meeting, which came a day after Gen. Mu-

nir arrived in Tehran with his delegation, bringing what Iranian state television described as a message from the United States.

The first round of talks in Islamabad ended without any breakthrough, but White House Press Secre-

tary Karoline Leavitt told presspersons on Wednesday that further talks "would very likely" be in Islamabad.

Gen. Munir wore military fatigues in the meeting and Mr. Ghalibaf, a veteran of Iran's Revolutionary Guards ideological army, a dark suit and white shirt without a tie as is customary for Iranian officials, pictures broadcast by state media showed.

Pakistani Foreign Ministry spokesperson Tahir Andrabi said no date had been set for the next round of talks.

Meanwhile, Pakistan's Prime Minister met Qatar's ruler on Thursday.

Shehbaz Sharif's office said the premier had discussed with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad

Al Thani "the latest regional and international developments, particularly in the Middle East".

The Qatari ruler praised Pakistan's role and, according to the Pakistani statement, the pair also voiced support for "de-escalation efforts and enhancing international coordination to ensure the security and stability of the region, particularly ensuring the maintenance of smooth flow of energy supply chains".

The Pakistani premier was later due in Turkiye, the last stop in a four-day tour.

Qatar, which shares the massive South Pars gas field with Iran, is one of the leading producers of LNG along with the U.S., Australia and Russia.

Govt. on 'wait and watch' mode as U.S. declines to extend waivers on Russia, Iran crude purchases

Saptaparno Ghosh
Suhasini Haidar

NEW DELHI

A day after the U.S. declined to extend the duration of waivers for procurement of Russian and Iranian crude, officials with knowledge of the development informed that the Centre was in a "wait and watch" mode given the frequent changes in the United States' policies.

The U.S. Department of Treasury, on March 12 and March 20, had extended waivers on purchase of oil from the two countries amid the impact on oil supplies globally because of the escalating tensions in West Asia, especially at the crucial energy route Strait of Hormuz.

The waiver on purchase of Russian oil, which also included from sanctioned entities, expired on April



Scott Bessent

11, while the waiver on Iranian oil stranded at sea is set to expire on April 19.

On Wednesday, Scott Bessent, Secretary of the U.S. Treasury, categorically denied renewing the waiver on both Russian and Iranian crude.

The official told *The Hindu* that procuring energy from sanctioned entities of the two countries had become virtually impossible for private refiners in India. He added that Indian oil companies were seeking out companies that had

not been sanctioned although they may not fill the shortfall in energy demand.

'Actively diversifying'

As a result, the official said the government was actively diversifying energy purchases from more countries, including Africa, South America, and increasingly from the U.S. itself.

In fact, on Wednesday, Sergio Gor, Washington's Ambassador to India met Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri seeking to "advance the U.S.-India energy partnership".

In a social media post, the Ambassador to India mentioned, "Expanding access to reliable American energy will further deepen our economic ties and support long-term energy security and diversity for both nations."

'Iran used Chinese spy satellite to target US bases'; Beijing denies report

FT cites leaked Iranian papers on satellite use

Reuters
April 16

IRAN SECRETLY acquired a Chinese spy satellite in late 2024 that has allowed it to target U.S. military bases across the Middle East during the current war, the

Financial Times reported on Wednesday, an account Beijing dismissed as untrue.

The TEE-01B satellite, built and launched by Chinese company Earth Eye Co, was acquired by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps' Aerospace Force after it was launched into space from China, the report said, citing leaked Iranian military documents. Iranian military commanders directed the satellite to monitor major US military sites, the newspaper said, citing time-stamped coordi-

nate lists, satellite imagery and orbital analysis. The images were taken in March before and after drone and missile strikes on those locations, the *Financial Times* said.

As part of the deal, the IRGC received access to commercial ground stations operated by Emposat, a Beijing-based provider of satellite control and data services with a network across Asia, Latin America and other regions, as per the report.

The Chinese foreign ministry on Wednesday denied the re-

port, calling it untrue.

"Recently, some forces have been keen on fabricating rumors and maliciously associating them to China," the ministry said in a statement to *Reuters*. "China firmly opposes this kind of practice driven by ulterior motives," read the statement. *Reuters* could not verify report.

The White House, CIA and the Pentagon did not respond to *Reuters*' requests for comment. Earth Eye Co and Emposat also did not immediately respond to *Reuters* queries.

The report said the White House did not comment on the relationship between Emposat and the IRGC, but a spokesperson referred to comments US President Donald Trump made at the weekend when he warned that China would face "big problems" if it provided Iran with air defence systems.

When asked about the matter, the Chinese embassy in Washington told the newspaper: "We firmly oppose relevant parties spreading speculative and insinulative disinformation

against China."

The satellite captured images of Prince Sultan Air Base in Saudi Arabia on March 13, 14 and 15, the report said. On March 14, Trump confirmed US planes at the base had been hit.

According to the report, the satellite also monitored the Muwaffaq Salti Air Base in Jordan and locations close to the U.S. Fifth Fleet naval base in Manama, Bahrain, and Erbil airport, Iraq, around the time of IRGC-claimed attacks on facilities in those areas.

Trump announces ceasefire between Lebanon and Israel

Stanly Johny

U.S. President Donald Trump on Thursday announced a 10-day ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon, effective from midnight.

“I just had excellent conversations with the Highly Respected President Joseph Aoun, of Lebanon, and Prime Minister Bibi Netanyahu, of Israel. These two Leaders have agreed that in order to achieve PEACE between their Countries, they will formally begin a 10-day ceasefire at 5 P.M. EST,” Mr. Trump wrote in a social media post.

The ceasefire, if comes into effect, could strengthen the two-week U.S.-Iran ceasefire that was announced on April 8. Extending the truce to Lebanon has been one of the key demands of Iran. When Mr. Trump announced the Iran truce, Is-



Smoke rises from Kfar Tibnit, a Lebanese village attacked by Israel, on Thursday. AFP

rael said Lebanon was not part of it and stepped up strikes on the country.

Mr. Trump said the ceasefire would include Iran-backed Hezbollah. “Today they’re going to be having a ceasefire, and that’ll include Hezbollah,” Mr. Trump told presspersons at the White House.

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MUNIR MEETS GHALIBAF

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Trump announces **Lebanon-Israel ceasefire**

Mr. Netanyahu said that the 10-day ceasefire with Lebanon offered an opportunity for a “historic peace agreement” with Beirut, but insisted that the disarmament of militant group Hezbollah remained a precondition.

“We have an opportunity to make a historic peace agreement with Lebanon,” he said in a televised speech, adding that Israel will maintain a 10-km “security zone” along the border in southern Lebanon.

Hezbollah lawmaker Ibrahim al-Moussawi told *AFP* that the Lebanese group would respect a ceasefire if Israeli attacks on the militants stopped.

“We in Hezbollah will cautiously adhere to the ceasefire on the condition that it is a comprehensive halt to hostilities against us and that Israel not use it to carry out any assassinations,” he said.

“We express thanks to Iran for having applied pressure in Lebanon’s favour,” he said, adding that “the ceasefire would not have happened without Iran considering the ceasefire as equal to closing the Strait of Hormuz,” he added.

Mr. Trump also said on Thursday that Iran has agreed to hand over its store of enriched uranium and that the two sides were “close” to a peace deal ending six weeks of conflict.

The latest phase of the war between Israel and Hezbollah, a Lebanese Shia militant group and political party, began on March 2, two days after the U.S. and Israel launched the Iran war. Israel has carried out widespread strikes on Beirut and invaded southern Lebanon.

Cuba is 'ready' for possible U.S. attack, says Diaz-Canel

Agence France-Press

HAVANA

Cuban President Miguel Diaz-Canel said on Thursday his country was "ready" for a possible U.S. attack on the communist island following months of mounting pressure from President Donald Trump.

"We don't want that [confrontation] but it is our duty to be ready to avoid it, and if it were unavoidable, to win it," Mr. Diaz-Canel told thousands of people attending a rally in Havana to mark the 65th anniversary of the failed U.S. invasion of the island at the Bay of Pigs.

Cuba has been bracing for a possible attack following repeated warnings from Mr. Trump that Cuba is "next" after he toppled Venezuela's leader Nicolas Maduro and went to war against Iran.

Washington and Havana have held talks on de-escalating tensions but the discussions between the arch-enemies have failed to make significant headway, according to U.S. media reports.



Miguel Diaz-Canel

Mariela Castro, daughter of late President Raul Castro, said Cubans "want dialogue" with Washington but "without putting our political system up for debate".

She said her 94-year-old father – who oversaw a historic 2015 rapprochement with the United States under Barack Obama that Mr. Trump later reversed –

was indirectly involved in the talks. Raul's grandson Raul Rodriguez Castro, a colonel, is reportedly among the negotiators.

Mr. Diaz-Canel admitted that the current moment was "very grave" but stressed Cuba's "socialist" nature, as proclaimed by Fidel Castro on April 16, 1961.

The 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion was launched two years after Castro's revolutionaries took control of the island and began nationalising U.S.-owned properties and businesses.

After Mr. Maduro's capture in Caracas, Mr. Trump imposed an oil blockade of Cuba, aggravating the impoverished island's worst economic and energy crisis in decades.

Mr. Diaz-Canel rejected what he referred to as a U.S. portrayal of Cuba as a "failed state". "Cuba is not a failed state, it's a besieged state," he said.

Pak-based Lashkar co-founder injured in Lahore gun attack

Press Trust of India

Lahore, April 16

PAKISTAN-BASED Lashkar-e-Taiba terror group's co-founder Amir Hamza suffered bullet injuries in an attack by motorcycle-borne unidentified gunmen in Lahore on Thursday, police said.

Hamza is regarded as LeT's second most important leader after its chief Hafiz Saeed, who has been in Lahore's Kot Lakhpat Jail since 2019 after getting convicted for several years in terror financing cases.

According to police, unidentified gunmen opened fire on the vehicle of the private TV channel 24NewsHD TV, owned by Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi. The channel's religious programme host Justice (retd. Nazir Ahmed Ghazi and Hamza were in the vehicle.

"Two unidentified armed men riding a motorcycle opened fire on the white car in which Ghazi and Hamza were travelling at Peco Road in Lahore near the TV channel's office. In the at-

tack, Hamza suffered bullet injuries while Ghazi remained unhurt," the police said.

Hamza has been shifted to a hospital, where he is being treated, they said. Police said they have launched a probe into the incident with the help of CCTV footage.

"TV host Justice Nazir Ghazi unhurt, Maulana Amir Hamza injured in Lahore gun attack. Unidentified gunmen opened fire on vehicle of 24NewsHD TV channel's religious programme host Justice Nazir Ahmed Ghazi in Lahore, leaving Maulana Amir Hamza injured," the TV channel said in a statement.

It said Ghazi hosts the programme 'Noor-e-Sehar' on 24NewsHD. "Ghazi had just finished recording his show at the City News office, Lahore and was on his way home at the time of the incident," it said.

It said Ghazi remained unharmed in the attack, while Tehreek-e-Hurmat-e-Rasool Pakistan Chairman Maulana Hamza sustained a bullet injury to his arm.