

# SC rejects Trinamool claim of bias by Central govt. staff

Dismissing plea, it questions need for proportionate representation; Trinamool had said that EC was skewing playing field in favour of BJP by appointing more Central officers at counting centres

**Krishnadas Rajagopal**

NEW DELHI

**T**he Supreme Court on Saturday called it a “fallacy” nursed by the Trinamool Congress that West Bengal Government services’ employees owe allegiance to it and Central employees were loyal to or controlled by the party ruling the Centre.

They are employees of the government and are part of the Election Commission in the exercise of their electoral duties during the poll time, it said.

The oral observations were made while disposing of a petition filed by the Trinamool, which alleged that the EC was deliberately skewing the playing field in favour of the rival Bharatiya Janata Party by appointing more Central of-



This is yet another fallacy, that is those belonging to State government services have a different allegiance... These are but employees of the government. Give them some credit

**JUSTICE P.S. NARASIMHA**  
Supreme Court judge

icers, disregarding State employees, at counting centres across West Bengal.

## Questions party

Justice P.S. Narasimha, heading a Special Bench, questioned the Trinamool’s perceived need to have a “proportionate representation” of officers drawn from both Centre and State services at counting centres on May 4. “This

is yet another fallacy, that is those belonging to State government services have a different allegiance... These are but employees of the government. Give them some credit,” Justice Narasimha said.

Justice Joymalya Bagchi, the associate judge on the Division Bench, said that once these officers were deployed for poll duties, they belonged to the EC. “All these persons, wheth-

er Central or State employees, are in the control of the EC in the discharge of electoral duties,” Justice Bagchi said.

The special sitting, merely 48 hours before counting started in West Bengal, was convened on a petition filed by the Trinamool challenging an April 13 circular issued by the State’s Additional Chief Electoral Officer directing that at least one counting supervisor and assistant at each counting table would be a Central government or Central Public Sector Unit employee.

The party, represented by advocates Kapil Sibal and Sanchit Garga, said the circular was a “textbook example of an unjust executive action”.

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# SC rejects Trinamool claim of bias by staff

“The Trinamool is the main opponent to the BJP, which admittedly runs and controls the Central government. It is obvious and well known that the Central government employees would be directly under the control of the Centre and likely to be susceptible to the control of persons in the BJP. Such direct control of the BJP over them gives rise to an apparent risk of bias, influence, and partisan conduct during the process of counting of votes,” the Trinamool submitted.

He read out from the April 13 circular, which said that in view of the “apprehensions expressed from various quarters regarding possible irregularities during the process of counting of votes”. He asked the court about the source of the EC’s “so-called apprehensions” that the counting process would be marred by irregularities.

Mr. Sibal said the Trinamool was informed of the April 13 circular only on April 29.

The court disposed of the Trinamool petition, recording in its short order that the EC must follow the April 13 circular in “letter and spirit”.

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# Shanti law in, US nuclear 'mission' on its way to tap new tie-ups

Series of meetings being lined up in New Delhi and Mumbai

Anil Sasi

New Delhi, May 2

A HIGH-POWERED US nuclear 'executive mission' is headed to India later this month with a two-pronged agenda: Taking stock of India's nuclear energy landscape less than six months after a landmark legislation opened up this critical sector and to communicate the American industry's interest, as well as coordinate US government messaging, on the emergent opportunities in this field.

Organised by the Washington DC-based Nuclear Energy Institute, a lobby group of America's commercial nuclear energy industry, and the US India Strategic Partnership Forum, the industry delegation's visit is expected to have meetings with External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Union Power Minister Manohar Lal, besides likely meetings with Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N Chandrababu



EXPLAINED

## Looking at future

The SHANTI law aims to transform the country's energy landscape. Private players will be allowed into operations and fuel management, accelerating capacity while breaking state monopoly. The focus on imported light water reactors and small modular reactors suggests a move towards next-generation technology that is simpler to finance and deploy.

Naidu, Maharashtra Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis and Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Patel.

Deliberations planned during the course of the delegation's five day schedule (May 17-21) include meetings with the

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# US nuclear 'mission'

Department of Atomic Energy top brass, NITI Aayog, other energy ministries and representatives of state-owned Nuclear Power Corporation of India Ltd (NPCIL) and NTPC Ltd.

The delegation would likely land in New Delhi on May 17 and stay until May 19, before heading to Mumbai on May 20 for a series of meetings spanning two days. US Ambassador Sergio Gor and the US Embassy staff are likely to set the agenda for the delegation's series of formal meetings that get underway on the morning of May 18.

The Mumbai leg is likely to include meetings with India's private sector energy players including Reliance Industries Ltd, the Adani Group, Tata Power Company Ltd, JSW Energy, Vedanta, Larsen & Toubro Ltd, Tata Consulting Engineers and Hindalco Industries.

Last December, Parliament had passed the Sustainable Harnessing and Advancement of Nuclear Energy for Transforming India (SHANTI) Act, 2025, marking a major shift in how India's tightly-controlled nuclear power sector will be governed in the coming years. For the first time, the Act enabled private players to enter the operations side of this critical sector as well as areas such as fuel management, which had remained under tight public-sector control for decades.

Alongside the increased role for the private sector in nuclear plant operations, the deployment of imported Light Water Reactor-based projects, aided by foreign funding, are two outcomes in the wake of the passage of the new legislation, which opens up the possibility of more imported LWR-based nuclear projects of the kind that are being set up by the Russians in Kudankulam, Tamil Nadu. India is also keen to look at the possibility of the deployment of small modular reactors or SMRs.

Although India's civil nuclear programme has expertise

in manufacturing pressurised heavy water reactors – from 220MWe PHWRs to the new 700MWe reactors – an impediment of sorts for the country's nuclear establishment is its reactor technology. Based on heavy water and natural uranium, the PHWRs are a technology that India's nuclear establishment has a mastery over, but one that is increasingly out of sync with the LWRs that are now the most dominant reactor type across the world. The Americans, the Russians and the French are among the leaders in LWR technology. Also, India's dominant nuclear technology – its mainstay PHWRs – has scalability issues.

The government's move to look outwards for collaborations on nuclear is driven by two clear policy imperatives: the desperate need for base load alternatives to coal-fired capacity to tide over the limitations of renewables; and more importantly, the external outreach for nuclear collaborations is driven more by the need for capital than the need for technology, a top government official had indicated ahead of the passage of the nuclear amendments.

The SHANTI Act was passed amid Opposition's concern over allowing private players and changes in the liability regime, particularly the whittling down of provisions fixing responsibility on equipment suppliers in the event of a nuclear accident. This new Act replaced two earlier legislations – the Atomic Energy Act, 1962 (AE Act) and the Civil Liability for Nuclear Damage Act, 2010 (CLNDA) – and effectively redrew the rules that govern India's nuclear power sector. From who can build and operate plants and how accident liability is capped, to the role of the safety regulator and the mechanisms for dispute resolution and compensation, all of these have been tweaked or changed.

# U.S. not committed to pacts, 'renewed conflict likely': Iran

Agence France-Presse  
Associated Press

TEHRAN

A senior Iranian military officer said on Saturday that renewed fighting with the U.S. was "likely", hours after President Donald Trump said he was not satisfied with an Iranian negotiating proposal. In a letter to U.S. Congressional leaders, Mr. Trump said hostilities with Iran "have terminated" as the ceasefire was holding.

Iran delivered the new draft to mediator Pakistan on Thursday evening, state media reported, without detailing its contents. The war, launched by the U.S. and Israel, has been on hold since April 8, with one failed round of peace talks having taken place in Pakistan since then.

Mohammad Jafar Asadi, a senior figure in the Iranian military's central command, said "a re-



U.S. warns shipping firms against paying Iran for safe passage through Strait. REUTERS

newed conflict between Iran and the U.S. is likely", in quotes published by Iran's Fars news agency. "Evidence has shown that the U.S. is not committed to any promises or agreements," he said.

The U.S. has warned shipping firms that they could face sanctions for making payments to Iran to safely pass through the Strait of Hormuz.

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# Renewed conflict with the U.S. likely, says Iran

Iran's judiciary chief Gholamhossein Mohseni Ejei said on Friday that his country had "never shied away from negotiations", but would not accept an "imposition" of peace terms.

The White House has declined to provide details on the latest Iranian proposal, but news site Axios reported that U.S. envoy Steve Witkoff had submitted amendments to a previous one putting Tehran's nuclear programme back on the negotiating table. The changes reportedly include demands that Iran not move enriched uranium from bombed sites or resume activity there during talks. News of the Iranian proposal briefly pushed oil prices down nearly 5%, though they remain about 50% above pre-war levels.

ANY KIND OF MONEY TRANSFER WON'T BE TOLERATED, U.S. AUTHORITIES HAVE WARNED

# US warns shipping firms over paying Iran to transit the Strait

Sarah El Deeb & Adam Shreck  
Beirut, May 2

THE UNITED States is warning shipping companies they could face sanctions for making payments to Iran to safely pass through the Strait of Hormuz.

The US Office of Foreign Assets Control alert posted Friday adds pressure in the standoff between the US and Iran over control of the strait at the mouth of the Persian Gulf, where about a fifth of the world's trade in oil and natural gas typically passes.

Iran effectively closed the strait by attacking and threatening ships after the US and Israel launched a war on February 28. It later began offering some ships safe passage by detouring them through routes closer to its shore, charging fees at times.

That "tollbooth" effort is the focus of the US sanctions warning, which said payment demands could include transfers not only in cash but also "digital assets, offsets, informal swaps, or other in-kind payments," including charitable donations and payments at Iranian embassies.

The US responded to Iran's closure of the strait with a naval



A woman walks past an anti-US billboard depicting US President Donald Trump and the Strait of Hormuz, in Tehran, on Saturday. REUTERS

blockade of Iranian ports on April 13, preventing Iranian tankers from leaving and depriving Tehran of oil revenue it needs to shore up its ailing economy.

The US Central Command has said 45 commercial ships have been told to turn around since the blockade began.

US President Donald Trump has rejected Iran's latest proposal to end the war.

"They want to make a deal, I'm not satisfied with it, so we'll see what happens," Trump said Friday. He didn't elaborate but expressed frustration with Iran's leadership, calling it "very disjointed".

Iran's state-run IRNA news agency said Tehran handed over its plan to mediators in Pakistan on Thursday night.

The shaky three-week ceasefire between the US and

Iran appears to be holding, though both countries have traded accusations of violations.

Negotiations continued by phone after Trump called off his envoys' trip to Pakistan last weekend, the president said. Trump this week floated a new plan to reopen the Strait of Hormuz. Iran on Saturday said it handed two men convicted of spying for Israel. AP

Iranian Nobel laureate in hospital as health worsens



Narges Mohammadi. AP

Beirut: Iran's imprisoned Nobel Peace Prize laureate Narges Mohammadi has been urgently transferred from prison to a hospital in northwestern Iran after a "catastrophic deterioration" of her health, her foundation said Friday.

The Narges Mohammadi Foundation described the condition of the rights lawyer as "very high risk," with fluctuating blood pressure and severe nausea.

But medical teams in Zanjan have requested her medical records before performing any treatment, while recommending that she be transferred to Tehran for treatment by her own doctors, the foundation said. AP

# Why did the UAE quit OPEC and OPEC+?

What explains the years of simmering competition between Riyadh and Abu Dhabi? How will the UAE's decision impact oil prices? How has its decision to leave impacted OPEC and OPEC+? Will this move benefit India and if so, how?

M. Kalyanaraman

## The story so far:

**I**n May 1, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) officially exited the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and OPEC+. While OPEC is a permanent intergovernmental organisation founded in 1960 to coordinate the petroleum policies of its member countries and stabilise global oil markets, OPEC+ is a broader alliance formed in 2016 that includes the core OPEC members along with 10 additional major oil-producing nations, most notably Russia. The UAE's decision dealt a heavy blow to the oil exporting groups and their de facto leader, Saudi Arabia, at a time when the Iran war has caused a historic energy shock and unsettled the global economy.

## Why did the UAE leave OPEC and OPEC+?

Differences between the UAE and OPEC, in particular Saudi Arabia, have been simmering for a while. Saudi Arabia deferred recognition of the UAE after the latter became independent from the U.K. in the 1970s, until some disputed territory it claimed was ceded.

The political structure and society of the two countries are different. While Saudi Arabia, though a monarchy, acts slowly and builds through consensus within the large extended royal family, the UAE has historically sought to be nimbler and quicker-acting.

However, the UAE has so far formally banded with Saudi Arabia, especially in energy production, because of a large and powerful Iran seen as a common adversary.

OPEC allocates quotas for oil production to control global oil prices. Saudi Arabia plays a key role in fixing these quotas and functions as a swing producer. Currently, it has a quota of

India can leverage enhanced flows from Fujairah port at reduced rates if the UAE's increased production drives down global oil prices

around 10 million barrels a day but has spare capacity of another 2 million. Saudi Arabia can ramp up or ramp down production quickly to counteract any volatility in oil prices. The UAE has a quota of some 3.5 million barrels but has a capacity of 4.85 million. By 2027, its capacity is expected to increase to 5 million.

A cautious Saudi Arabia seeks to even out and prolong fossil fuel use partly by curtailing production and benefiting from it; for instance, it has actively worked against efforts to decarbonise global shipping and to retain the use of crude oil-based shipping fuel.

The UAE recognises the inevitability of energy transition, involving the use of renewables and green fuels. It seeks to quickly boost oil profits and funnel them into its economy. The UAE has a much more diversified economy and is seeking to expand it even further.

In foreign policy, too, the UAE and Saudi Arabia have been at loggerheads. In Yemen, the two, which cooperated against the Iran-backed Houthis, fought a proxy battle recently through the groups they were supporting. In Yemen, Saudi Arabia supports the country's internationally recognised government and works with the Islamist group, Al-Islah, while the UAE is backing a separatist force, the Southern Transitional Council. In Sudan, the two are again on opposing sides. The UAE has been active in seeking leverage in Libya, now an emerging alternative to the Persian Gulf for oil and gas.

In 2021, the differences came to a head with the UAE raising major objections to OPEC decisions. But a consensus was reached and the UAE was given a bigger slice of the oil pie to convince it to stay in the group.

In the aftermath of the war on Iran, the UAE, which has in recent times become more assertive in its economic, political, and foreign policy goals, has announced its decision to quit OPEC. While it is unclear whether the UAE expects the crisis to reduce in intensity, its OPEC announcement did not have much impact on oil prices, given that oil transport has stalled across the Strait of Hormuz.

## How will the UAE act next?

The UAE will review its relationships with nations and reset them as per its priorities. Emirati officials have said some of the Arab states did not do much by way of support even as the UAE bore the brunt of Iranian attacks, which were more than what even Israel faced.

When normalcy returns, even if only in stages, there will be an immediate demand for more oil and the UAE can take advantage of that.

The country seeks to increase its production by 1 million barrels through this year in stages. U.S. President Donald Trump has welcomed the UAE's move to leave the cartel as he believes it could help lower oil prices.

As the war began, the UAE and Saudi Arabia sought to use alternatives to restore some 4.5 million barrels out of the 15 million that had stopped flowing across the strait. While Saudi Arabia used its East-West Pipeline to send oil to the Red Sea port of Yanbu, the UAE sent its oil to Fujairah port downstream of the strait. Fujairah, though hit hard by attacks, saw near capacity utilisation of 1.8 million barrels being sent out per day as the war progressed. It will continue to be a key exit point for greater UAE oil flows.

## What will happen to OPEC?

So far, there is no panic. Russia, the other major oil producer which is part of OPEC+, is in sync with Saudi Arabia on oil production goals. Neither wants booms and busts inevitable in a freer market and wants to manage the market.

In the past, Angola and Qatar left the cartel but it must be said that both nations were smaller players. The UAE, on the other hand, was OPEC's third-largest producer. But cranking up production may ruffle feathers among its neighbours that the UAE may not want. Kazakhstan, Algeria, and Russia have all reaffirmed their commitment to OPEC+.

## Will India benefit?

India likely enjoys the greatest comfort with the UAE among Arab nations. As Trucial States, the sheikhdoms reported to the British in India and the rupee was recognised there.

Since independence, the UAE has been a big employer of the Indian diaspora. While the Emirati population is only a little over 10% of the total UAE population, Indians constitute almost half of non-Emiratis who prosper in the country.

The UAE has recently strengthened its security relations with India as well. India can leverage enhanced flows from Fujairah port at reduced rates if the UAE's increased production drives down global oil prices. Indian refineries are well adapted to processing UAE crude and can pursue flexible, long-term contracts.

V. R. Krishnaswamy, who has served in the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company for nearly 45 years including as a top executive, points out that the Indian rupee continues to be in demand in the UAE. The UAE has put in place a state-of-the-art system for payments in other currencies, particularly in Yuan. So far, across the world, oil payments are typically paid in the U.S. dollar, reinforcing the perception that the dollar's strength comes in-part from its role as the petro-dollar. "Not just the yuan, the UAE may accept payments in other currencies such as the rupee, as well," he adds, recalling India paying Russia and the Soviet Union in rubles.



The logo of OPEC outside its headquarters in Vienna, Austria. REUTERS

# U.S. to withdraw 5,000 troops from Germany, fulfilling Trump's threat

German Chancellor Merz had said the U.S. was being 'humiliated' by Iran and it lacked a strategy in the ongoing war; the U.S. has 36,000 service members deployed in the country; NATO says it is 'working with Washington to understand details'

**Associated Press**

WASHINGTON

**T**he United States will withdraw about 5,000 troops from Germany in the next six to 12 months, the Pentagon said on Friday, fulfilling President Donald Trump's threat as he clashes with the German leader over the U.S. war with Iran.

Mr. Trump had threatened to withdraw some troops from the NATO ally earlier this week after Chancellor Friedrich Merz said the U.S. was being "humiliated" by the Iranian leadership and criticised Washington's lack of strategy in the war.

Pentagon spokesperson



**Force posture:** An AH-64 Apache attack helicopter stands in front of a Galaxy C-5 transport plane at the U.S. Air Base in Ramstein. AFP

Sean Parnell said in a statement that the "decision follows a thorough review of the Department's force posture in Europe and is in recognition of theatre requirements and conditions

on the ground".

Germany hosts several U.S. military facilities, including the headquarters of its European and Africa commands, Ramstein Air Base and a medical centre

in Landstuhl, where casualties from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were treated. U.S. nuclear missiles are also stationed in the country.

The number of troops leaving Germany would be 14% of the 36,000 American service members stationed there.

## **'Foreseeable' move**

German Defence Minister Boris Pistorius called it "foreseeable" that the U.S. would withdraw troops from Europe and Germany, while he sought to stress mutual benefit from the U.S. military presence on the European continent.

"The presence of Amer-

ican soldiers in Europe, and especially in Germany, is in our interest and in the interest of the U.S.," Mr. Pistorius told the German news agency *dpa*, while adding that European allies needed to adjust their defence postures – and were doing so.

NATO said it was "working with the U.S. to understand the details of their decision on force posture in Germany".

"This adjustment underscores the need for Europe to continue to invest more in defence and take on a greater share of the responsibility for our shared security," NATO spokesperson Allison Hart wrote on X.

# U.S. sanctions are 'collective punishment,' says Cuban Minister during May 1 rallies

Agence France-Presse

HAVANA

Cuba said on Friday that U.S. President Donald Trump's fresh sanctions on the island amounted to "collective punishment," as an enormous May 1 procession outside the American embassy in Havana vowed to "defend the homeland".

Mr. Trump has mused about taking over Cuba, which lies 145 km from Florida and has been under a nearly continuous U.S. trade embargo since Fidel Castro led a communist re-



**United voices:** People march while holding a giant Cuban national flag during a May Day rally in Havana, Cuba, on Friday. REUTERS

volution in 1959.

Late Friday, he told an audience in Florida that the U.S. would be "taking over" the Caribbean island

"almost immediately".

In an executive order on Friday, the U.S. leader said he would impose sanctions on people involved in

sweeping sections of the Cuban economy, which is steered by the government.

The latest sanctions constitute "collective punishment" of the nation's people, Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez said.

"We firmly reject the recent unilateral coercive measures adopted by the #UnitedStates government," he posted on X in English. "These actions demonstrate an intention to impose, once again, collective punishment on the Cuban people."