

CREDIT LINE GUARANTEE SCHEME

Union Cabinet clears Rs 2.55 lakh-cr lifeline for MSMEs, airlines hit by West Asia war



Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw at a Cabinet briefing Tuesday. PTI

Aanchal Magazine
New Delhi, May 5

THE UNION Cabinet on Tuesday approved a credit support scheme to meet the needs of industries in distress due to the West Asia conflict, targeting an additional credit flow of Rs 2.55 lakh crore, including Rs 5,000 crore for airlines.

Modelled on similar lifelines for distressed sectors during Covid, the Government's new Emergency Credit Line Guarantee Scheme 5.0 (ECLGS 5.0) has an estimated outlay of Rs 18,000 crore.

According to an official release, additional credit will be available to MSMEs and non-MSMEs, excluding aviation, up to 20% of peak working capital utilised during Q4 FY26, capped at Rs 100 crore. For airlines, the credit will be up to 100%, capped at Rs 1,500 crore

● BENCH STRENGTH OF SC TO RISE TO 38

● The Cabinet cleared a proposal for introducing The Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026, in Parliament to increase the court's strength from the existing 34 Judges to 38, including the Chief Justice of India.

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per borrower, subject to certain specific conditions, it said.

Guarantee fees will be waived under the scheme. For MSMEs and non-MSMEs, except aviation, the loan tenure would be five years from the date of first disbursement, including a moratorium of one year. For airlines, the loan tenure would be seven years from

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Rs 2.55 lakh-cr lifeline

the date of first disbursement, including a moratorium of two years. The rate of interest by banks will be capped at 9% and by non-banking financial companies (NBFCs) at 13% or 0.75% above benchmark rate, whichever is lower, Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said.

Taking to X, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said ECLGS 5.0 “reflects our commitment to supporting India’s businesses, especially the MSME sector in challenging global times”.

“By enabling additional credit flow with strong guarantee coverage, this initiative will help a wide range of sectors. Our focus remains on empowering enterprises, sustaining growth momentum and safeguarding livelihoods,” Modi posted.

According to Vaishnaw, “The scheme has been approved to tackle the stress being faced by MSMEs and the aviation sector as a result of the ongoing West Asia conflict. The credit guarantee scheme was established during Covid and the benefit of this

scheme is that there is no moral hazard. Only those who need (credit) in real, (they) utilise this scheme and there is very less probability of it being misused. It is a very well thought through scheme.”

About 1.1 crore MSMEs have benefitted so far from existing credit guarantee schemes and Rs 3.7 lakh crore has been extended under these schemes, Vaishnaw said.

ECLGS 5.0 aims to provide credit guarantee coverage of 100% for MSMEs and 90% for non-MSMEs, along with the airline sector, to Member Lending Institutions (MLIs) by National Credit Guarantee Trustee Company Limited (NCGTC) for the amount in default under the additional credit facility to the eligible borrowers to tide over any short-term liquidity mismatches, the official release said.

Borrowers eligible for the scheme will include MSMEs and non-MSMEs with existing working capital limits and scheduled passenger airlines having out-

standing credit facilities as of March 31, 2026, provided their accounts are standard, the release stated.

The maximum period of guarantee cover shall be co-terminus with the tenor of the loan, it said. The scheme will apply to all loans sanctioned during the period from the date of issue of these guidelines by NCGTC upto March 31, 2027.

The scheme aims to enable businesses to tide over the challenges arising from the West Asia conflict, the release said.

“Additionally, this is expected to help businesses maintain their operations, protect jobs, and sustain supply chains. The proposed credit guarantee scheme is a major step to help businesses, particularly MSMEs and airline sector, to ensure their additional working capital needs are catered by the Banks & FIs (financial institutions),” it said.

“By providing timely liquidity, the scheme will sustain the businesses and prevent job losses. It will also promote uninterrupted domestic production and maintain the resilience of the ecosystem,” the release said.

Cabinet approves Bill to increase SC judges strength from 34 to 38

Express News Service

New Delhi, May 5

AHEAD OF the Monsoon Session of Parliament, the Union Cabinet on Tuesday approved a Bill to increase the strength of judges in the Supreme Court from the existing 34 to 38.

Highly placed sources said Chief Justice of India Surya Kant had recommended to the government in March this year to increase the strength of judges so that a permanent constitution bench can be put in place. With a host of constitution bench matters pending hearing, the CJI is learnt to have flagged the shortage of judges to hear regular matters as and when these benches are set up.

A nine-judge bench of the court is currently hearing constitutional questions arising out of the Sabarimala review

petitions. The CJI had earlier indicated that soon after the hearing is completed, he will constitute a constitution bench to hear 7-judge bench matters.

In a statement, the government said the Cabinet, chaired by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, approved the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Amendment Bill, 2026, which seeks to amend the Supreme Court (Number of Judges) Act, 1956, to increase the strength of the court by four. Currently, the Act provides for a maximum of 33 judges of the Supreme Court, excluding the Chief Justice of India (CJI). The amendment increases that to 37 judges, excluding the CJI.

"The increase in the number of Judges will allow the Supreme Court to function more efficiently and effectively, ensuring speedy justice. The

expenditure on salary of Judges and supporting staff and other facilities will be met from the Consolidated Fund of India," the government said.

Welcoming the move, Union Home Minister Amit Shah said it will boost speedy justice, provide relief to poor and remote petitioners, and expedite the resolution of constitutional matters. Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw said a Bill will be brought in the next session of Parliament to raise the apex court's strength by four judges.

The Supreme Court currently has a strength of 32 judges, with at least four judges expected to retire in 2026. While Justice Rajesh Bindal retired in April, Justices J K Maheshwari and Pankaj Mithal are set to retire in June, Justice Sanjay Karol will retire in August and Justice Satish Sharma will retire

in November. Effectively, the SC Collegium headed by CJI Kant will have to make at least nine recommendations this year, if the Bill is cleared. He has a tenure till February 2027.

The last time the strength of the court was increased was in 2019, when an amendment raised it from 30 to 33, excluding the CJI. Originally, the Act had provided for a maximum of 10 judges, excluding the CJI, which was increased to 13 in 1960 and then 17 in 1977.

"The working strength of the Supreme Court was, however, restricted to 15 Judges by the Cabinet, excluding the Chief Justice of India, till the end of 1979, when the restriction was withdrawn at the request of the Chief Justice of India," the government said.

The strength was further increased in 1986, 2008 and 2019.

CJI: Original PIL on Sabarimala should have been thrown in dustbin

Bench questions locus, intent of original petitioner

Ananthakrishnan G
New Delhi, May 5

HEARING CONSTITUTIONAL questions arising out of petitions seeking a review of its 2018 judgement on the Sabarimala issue, a nine-judge bench of the Supreme Court Tuesday questioned the locus and intent of the original petitioner, with Chief Justice of India Surya Kant saying that the PIL should have been "thrown outright in the dustbin".

On September 28, 2018, a five-judge bench of the Supreme Court, in a 4-1 verdict,

ruled that the practice of banning women of menstruating age from entering the Sabarimala temple in Kerala was unconstitutional. That bench was headed by then Chief Justice of India Dipak Misra.

On Tuesday, while questioning Advocate Ravi Gupta's submission that the then CJI had provided police security to him and Naushad Ali, president of the NGO Indian Young Lawyers Association (IYLA) which had filed the Sabarimala PIL in 2006, Justice B V Nagarathna said, "Since you are referring to the learned former Chief Justice, with great respect, rather than ensuring there was security provided to the advocates, he could have ensured that there was no need for a security threat at all by not

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CJI on Sabarimala

entertaining this petition. With great respect, we are saying this.”

While CJI Surya Kant said the PIL ought to have been “thrown outright in the dustbin”, Justice M M Sundresh described the filing of the petition as “a clear abuse of the process of law”.

The bench made these remarks as they questioned Gupta, representing the IYLA, on the organisation’s locus standi as the PIL petitioner.

Gupta said there were several threats at that time to him and Ali though the latter hardly had anything to do with the matter. “So far as Naushad Ali was concerned, he was only a name-lender president. He did not know anything about Sabarimala... And he started getting threats from all over the world. Chief Justice Dipak Misra was shocked,” he said.

He said the affidavit filed with the petition was sworn by IYLA general secretary Advocate Bhakti Pasrija. “So these threats were there and CJI Dipak Misra was very annoyed, that you cannot stop the judicial process with these kinds of threats. He provided police protection to me, to

the president also. I refused.”

Justice Sundresh said, “Naushad is very smart... If he had made an attempt to clean his own house, he would not have been available to file this PIL.”

Justice Nagarathna asked, “If he (Ali) had no interest in the matter, then why was it (PIL) entertained by this court?”

The CJI, referring to a news report annexed to the PIL about the priest of the temple being allegedly found in a compromising position, said, “And we entertain a PIL based upon this kind of document? It should have been thrown outright in the dustbin.”

“How does this article give you a cause of action to rake up the issue ultimately which is adjudicated?” he asked Gupta.

Justice Nagarathna said, “Every day, the CJI receives hundreds of letters. Can all those be converted into PILs?... Public Interest Litigation has now become Private Interest Litigation, Publicity Interest Litigation, Paise Interest Litigation and Political Interest Litigation, all are called PILs. We entertain only real and genuine PILs.”

She also sought to know how

the organisation was concerned with a question of freedom of conscience. “How does a juristic body have any beliefs? ... How are you concerned with all this?... We want to know why you filed this PIL at all? What was it that you wanted to achieve? What good has come out of it?” she said.

“Are you the chief priest of the country,” the CJI asked Gupta.

Meanwhile, the bench also questioned the practice of barring a Parsi woman from a fire temple if she marries outside the religion, wondering how freedom of conscience, which accrues upon birth, can be taken away by marriage.

“The right to conscience under Article 25(1) is a right by birth, and it can’t be taken away by marriage... In this case, marriage as a basis for classification is discriminatory against women,” Justice Nagarathna asked Senior Advocate Darius J Khambata, appearing for Goolrokh Gupta, in related petitions concerning a Parsi woman’s religious identity.

Justice Sundresh said, “This practice presupposes once there is inter-marriage, faith is given up.” Justice Nagarathna said, “It’s virtually excommunication.”

Bengal: SIR deletions higher than victory margins in 26 of BJP seats and 21 of TMC

Damini Nath

New Delhi, May 5

THE WEST Bengal Assembly elections results declared on Monday shows that out of 293 seats, 49 had winning margins lower than the number of electors deleted after adjudication during the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls that saw removal of over 90 lakh names in the state.

Of the 49 constituencies, 26 were won by the BJP, 21 by the TMC and two by the Congress. The West Bengal Assembly has 294 seats of which results have been declared for 293; one seat (Falta) is scheduled for repolling on May 21. The BJP, which won 207 seats, had 26 such constituencies where the number of deleted electors was higher than the victory margin.

Twenty-five of those seats the BJP wrested from the Trinamool Congress, while it retained Darjeeling from the 2021 elections. On five seats, the number of electors deleted was over 10,000 more than the victory margin — Jangipur's deletions were 26,039 more than the margin; Rajarhat New Town had 23,816 more deletions; Karandighi saw a difference of 11,693; Bhatar 10,953 and Raina 10,450.

Overall, the BJP's average margin of victory in the 207 seats was 27,805, while the TMC, which won 80 seats, had an average margin of 29,095 votes.

There were 16 seats out of 293 where the difference between the deletions and the margins was over 10,000 votes each. For the TMC, 21 of its 80 seats had recorded more deletions in the adjudication phase of the SIR than the victory margins, ranging from 67,188 more in Samsenganj to just 119 more in Kamarhati. The TMC won nine seats where the gap between deletions and margins was over 10,000 each.

The Congress and the Aam Janata Unnayan Party (AJUP) won two seats each, and the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and All-India Secular Front got one each. Both the Congress wins — Farakka and Raninagar — were in seats where the margin was lower than the number of deleted electors. While over 90 lakh names were deleted from the electoral rolls in West Bengal during the SIR that started last year, 27.16 lakh of those deletions came during adjudication by judicial officers appointed on the order of the Supreme Court.

The SC, which is hearing a batch of petitions challenging the Election Commission's SIR exercise, appointed 19 appellate tribunals in March this year. Over 34 lakh appeals against exclusions and inclusions during the adjudication are pending with the tribunals even now, with less than 2,000 appeals cleared before polling in the state.

Rahul backs Mamata, says BJP's victories in Bengal and Assam were theft of mandate

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Tuesday described the Bharatiya Janata Party's victory in the West Bengal and Assam Assembly elections as "theft" of the popular mandate.

He alleged that it marked a significant step in the party's purported attempt to "destroy" Indian democracy.

'Destroy democracy'

In a post on X, Mr. Gandhi expressed support for the Trinamool Congress, which was unseated by the BJP in West Bengal, and cautioned against political schadenfreude over the



 We agree with Mamataji. More than 100 seats were stolen in Bengal. We have seen this playbook before in Madhya Pardesh, Haryana...

RAHUL GANDHI
Congress leader

party's defeat. "Some in the Congress, and others, are gloating about the Trinamool's loss. They need

to understand this clearly – the theft of Assam and Bengal's mandate is a big step forward by the BJP in its mission to destroy Indian democracy," the Congress leader said.

Urging the political parties to rise above partisan considerations, Mr. Gandhi added, "Put petty politics aside. This is not about one party or another. This is about India."

"We agree with Mamataji. More than 100 seats were stolen in Bengal. We have seen this playbook before: Madhya Pradesh, Haryana, Maharashtra, Lok Sabha 2024 etc," Mr. Gandhi said.

He had spoken to Trinamool Congress chief Mamata Banerjee on Monday.

Mamata says she will work to strengthen Opposition INDIA bloc

The Hindu Bureau
KOLKATA

A day after her party suffered a humiliating defeat in the West Bengal Assembly polls, Trinamool Congress chairperson Mamata Banerjee on Tuesday said that several leaders of the INDIA bloc, including Sonia Gandhi, reached out to her and added that she will work to "strengthen" the Opposition alliance.

"Thankful to all INDIA [Indian National Developmental, Inclusive Alliance] bloc leaders. Sonia Gandhi, Rahul Gandhi, Akhilesh (Yadav), Hemant Soren, Tejaswi (Yadav), leaders called me. Akhilesh will come to meet me tomorrow. Now my target is clear. I am a free bird, I had

made it clear what will I do with other INDIA bloc leaders. I will strengthen the INDIA bloc," she said at a press conference.

During the election campaign for the recently concluded polls, Rashtriya Janata Dal leader Tejashwi Yadav, Aam Aadmi Party leader Arvind Kejriwal and Chief Minister of Jharkhand Hemant Soren had campaigned for the Trinamool.

Ms. Banerjee's remarks on strengthening the bloc are significant as these come after her defeat.

Asked whether she will return to the State Assembly, the Trinamool chairperson said, "I am not going there. I do not care about the chair. I only care about the people."

Building bridges

Battery storage capacity must keep pace with solar energy generation

India scaled a record peak demand of 256.1 GW on April 25 with solar plants supplying 21.5% of the afternoon load – an all-time high, and the clearest signal yet that the country's installed solar fleet can do real work when the sun is overhead. But the same day's full 24-hour ledger told a more sobering story. When there was accounting for the whole day of April 25, solar contributed only about 10.8% of daily generation, and just 0.1% of the evening's needs after sunset. Solar's share of India's installed electric capacity has nearly doubled from about 15% in 2022 to nearly 28% in early 2026. However, solar accounted for roughly 5.6% of generation on India's peak-demand day in 2022 and only increased to the 10.8% of April – a clear indication of the yawning gap that remains between the realities of the present and what is possible. The bottleneck is not panels, land or ambition but the inability to use the vast stores of generated electrons through batteries. In fact, such is the paucity of battery storage that States which are prolific producers of solar power are being asked to halt their supply, lest it compromise the stability of India's electric grid. In 2025, India had to curtail 2.3 terawatt hours of solar generation between late May and December, equivalent to 18% of average monthly solar output, with 0.9 TWh (terra-watt hours) wasted in October alone. Given that producers of such electricity must be compensated, this ends up being a cost to the public exchequer which pays for power that was never delivered. The India Meteorological Department's forecast of a below-normal monsoon at 92% of the Long Period Average – the first such warning in 11 years – only sharpens the argument: a hotter, drier summer means greater daytime demand, which is precisely when solar should be doing the heavy lifting.

The encouraging news is battery economics. Standalone two-hour battery storage tariffs fell from around ₹2.21 lakh per MW per month in early 2025 to ₹1.48 lakh by year-end. The challenge is execution. Only 0.7 GWh of battery storage was operational in India by end-2025, with another 2 GWh expected by December 2026. The Centre and States must now focus less on tendering and more on commissioning – pairing every fresh solar auction with mandatory co-located storage and resolving the financing wall facing aggressively bid low-tariff projects. Solar capacity without storage is a half-built bridge.

Consider Teesta water deal under 'current circumstances': Bangladesh

Kallol Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

In the wake of the Bharatiya Janata Party's victory in the West Bengal Assembly election, Bangladesh has issued an urgent call to consider the long-pending Teesta water sharing agreement under the "current circumstances."

Outgoing Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee has long been seen as a hurdle in efforts to resolve the dispute between India and Bangladesh.

In Dhaka's first-high level response to the poll results, Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman on Tuesday reiterated Bangladesh's demand for a greater share of the Teesta's waters.

In case of any further "push in" from the Indian



Khalilur Rahman

side, he said, Bangladesh will take "whatever measures are necessary".

India and Bangladesh had reached an in-principle agreement to seal the deal on the Teesta's waters in 2011 during the Manmohan Singh-era, but the matter remained unresolved for several reasons including an alleged lack of coordination between the

Centre and the Trinamool government in West Bengal led by Ms. Banerjee.

Referring to the 2011 agreement, Mr. Rahman said, "We hope that the agreement reached at that time can be 'considered' again under the current circumstances."

Talks with Beijing

Mr. Rahman was speaking to journalists in Dhaka before leaving for Beijing, where he is expected to meet his counterpart Wang Yi. He indicated that, during his meetings there, he would discuss the Teesta River Comprehensive Management and Restoration Project that China has been campaigning for.

"Of course, Teesta will be discussed. This is a matter of life and death for the people of that region".

Earlier on Monday, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs Shama Obaid had described the election as a "domestic development" of India.

This was followed by Bangladesh Nationalist Party's Media Cell member Syrul Kabir Khan, who had expressed hope for positive developments in Dhaka-Delhi relations.

Meanwhile, commentators in Dhaka have expressed concern about the role played by the BJP's Suvendu Adhikari, who has complained about illegal immigrants from Bangladesh in West Bengal. Mr. Adhikari had earlier supported ousted Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina, saying she had received a death sentence in October 2025 due to influence of Pakistan in Bangladesh.



Vietnamese President To Lam visits Gaya Ji in Bihar

Vietnamese President To Lam, who is on a three-day tour of India, meditated under the sacred Bodhi Tree in Gaya, Bihar and prayed at the Mahabodhi Temple on Tuesday, officials said. Mr. Lam was received at the airport here by Chief Minister Samrat Choudhary and other senior officials. “The spiritual, cultural, and heritage city of Gaya Ji warmly honours the arrival of the esteemed President of Vietnam. This historic arrival will undoubtedly take already deep India-Vietnam relations to new heights,” the Chief Minister said in a post on X. Mr. Lam is scheduled to leave for New Delhi to hold wide-ranging discussions with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Wednesday, and also meet President Droupadi Murmu, the officials said. This is Lam’s first visit to India after being elected. PTI

Truce with Iran holds despite fresh attacks: U.S.

Associated Press

DUBAI

U.S. military leaders said on Tuesday that a ceasefire with Iran remains in effect, a day after Tehran was blamed for new attacks in the Strait of Hormuz and against the UAE.

The fragile truce, reached nearly a month ago, appeared to be holding as U.S. forces pressed ahead with efforts to reopen the vital waterway for global energy. On Monday, the U.S. said it sank six small Iranian boats that had threatened commercial ships. So far, only two merchant ships are known to have passed through a new U.S.-guarded route,



Rising defiance: A woman waving an Iranian flag in front of an anti-U.S. billboard at Valiasr Square in Tehran, on Tuesday. AFP

with hundreds more bottled up in the Persian Gulf.

The UAE, a key American ally, said it came under attack by Iranian missiles and drones for a second straight day on Tuesday. At least three people were

wounded in attacks the day before, and a drone sparked a fire at a key oil facility in Fujairah.

U.S. Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth and Gen. Dan Caine, the U.S. military's top officer, told a news

conference on Tuesday that Iran's renewed aggression hadn't reached the threshold of what Gen. Caine called "major combat operations". He said Tuesday marked a "quieter" day in the strait. "No, the ceasefire is not over," Mr. Hegseth said.

Iran has said the new effort does violate the ceasefire. Iran's Parliament Speaker and chief negotiator, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, accused the U.S. of undermining regional security. In a post on X, he signalled that Iran has yet to fully respond to the U.S. attempt to reopen the waterway. "We know full well that the continuation of the status quo is intolerable

for America; while we have not even begun yet," he said.

Disputing Washington's claim of sinking six boats, an Iranian military commander said two small civilian cargo boats were hit on Monday, killing five civilians, state TV reported.

"Since the ceasefire was announced, Iran has fired at commercial vessels nine times and seized two container ships, and they've attacked U.S. forces more than 10 times – all below the threshold of restarting major combat operations at this point," Gen. Caine said.

MODI CONDEMNS ATTACKS

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PM 'strongly' condemns attacks on oil hub in UAE

External Affairs Ministry calls Iran's strikes 'unacceptable', says 'targeting of civilian infrastructure and innocent civilians' must end; three Indians injured in the attacks; Modi to visit UAE on May 15

Suhasini Haidar

NEW DELHI

In one of his toughest statements amidst the war in West Asia, Prime Minister Narendra Modi "strongly condemned" the drone and missile attacks by Iran on oil installations in Fujairah where three Indians were injured, and affirmed "solidarity" with the UAE.

Mr. Modi's words, issued in a social media post, come days ahead of his visit to Abu Dhabi, where he is expected to strengthen ties with the UAE in talks with President Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

Earlier on Tuesday, the External Affairs Ministry issued a statement calling the attack "unacceptable", and said the "targeting of civilian infrastructure and innocent civilians" must end. Both statements demanded an end to the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, where the U.S. attempted on Monday to forcibly open up shipping channels by sinking a number of Iranian boats, action that is believed to have triggered the Iranian attack.



A screen grab from a video shows smoke billowing from Fujairah oil industry zone following a drone attack on May 4. REUTERS

"[I] strongly condemn the attacks on the UAE that resulted in injuries to three Indian nationals. Targeting civilians and infrastructure is unacceptable," Mr. Modi said in his post. "India stands in firm solidarity with the UAE and reiterates its support for the peaceful resolution of all issues through dialogue and diplomacy."

The Ministry statement called for "free and unimpeded navigation and commerce through the Strait of Hormuz in keeping with international law". "India stands ready to support all efforts for a peaceful resolution of issues," it added.

The attacks by the U.S. and Iran on Monday were the first serious outbreak of violence since the April 8 ceasefire that was agreed to in talks in Pakistan between the two countries. The incidents on Monday led to fears of resumption of the war in West Asia that has already caused widespread losses across the world.

The government's response is believed to be aimed at sending a message of support to the UAE that has borne the brunt of Iran's attacks in an 'asymmetric' response to the strikes initiated by the U.S. and Israel on February 28

this year. Thus far, India has not named either the U.S. and Israel or Iran directly in criticising attacks during the war in West Asia. However, the government has sent envoys to the Gulf, including External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and National Security Adviser Ajit Doval who visited the UAE separately in April, and Prime Minister Modi's visit to Abu Dhabi, expected on May 15 on his way to a four-nation European tour, is expected to reinforce that message.

The Ministry has repeatedly expressed its concerns for Indians, estimated to be 10 million, living in the worst-hit areas of the Gulf region, especially the UAE, where Iranian drones and missiles set fire to oil facilities. The largest number of Indians, about 4.3 million, live and work in the UAE, making them about a third of the total population, as well as the biggest expatriate community. Remittances from the Gulf to India amount to more than \$40 billion a year, with the UAE the top earner, accounting for more than half.

Widening U.S. sanctions on Cuba 'illegal', says China

Reuters

HONG KONG

China urged Washington on Tuesday to immediately end its embargo and sanctions on Cuba, saying the expanded measures were "illegal" and "seriously violated" the norms of international relations.

U.S. President Donald Trump, seeking to put more pressure on Havana after ousting Venezuela's leader Nicolas Maduro, a close ally of Cuba, signed an executive order on Friday broadening U.S. sanctions against the Cuban government, two White House officials said.

Daily life for many Cubans has come to a standstill as a U.S. energy blockade triggers severe power outages and fuel shortages.

Beijing has voiced sup-



Reeling under blockade: A man fill containers with potable water during a blackout in capital Havana. AP

port for the socialist island after tension flared in January between the United States and Cuba after the U.S. captured Mr. Maduro.

"The U.S. has intensified its illegal unilateral sanctions against Cuba," China's Foreign Ministry said, criticising the move as "seriously violating" the basic norms of international relations.

"China ... urges the U.S. to immediately end the embargo and sanctions against Cuba," it added in a statement, saying they violated the Cuban people's right to existence and development. China backs Cuba's efforts to safeguard national sovereignty and resolutely opposes interference in its internal affairs, the Ministry added.