

Uncertainty continues in T.N. over govt. formation

Left backs TVK, but VCK holds back decision by a day; Vijay meets Governor again and stakes claim showing support of 116 MLAs, two short of majority; AMMK leader alleges horse-trading bid

The Hindu Bureau

CHENNAI

Uncertainty prevailed over government formation in Tamil Nadu on Friday night as the Viduthala Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) remained undecided on backing actor C. Joseph Vijay's Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK), though the Communist Party of India and the CPI(Marxist) offered "unconditional support" to the party. Indian Union Muslim League leader Khader Moideen said his party has not given any letter of support to the TVK.

Late evening, Mr. Vijay called on Tamil Nadu Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar for the third time, staking claim to form the government, after receiving the support of the Left parties. His post-poll front's tally stood at 116,



Numbers game: TVK chief Vijay meets Tamil Nadu Governor Rajendra Arlekar at the Lok Bhavan in Chennai on Friday to stake claim to form government. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

still short of the halfway mark in the 234-member House. Till the filing of this report well past midnight, the Lok Bhavan did not issue any communication on the Governor's decision.

In a development past midnight, Amma Makkal

Munnetra Kazhagam's T.T.V. Dhinakaran accused the TVK of submitting to the Governor the photocopy of a "forged letter" claiming it has the support of his party's lone MLA-elect S. Kamaraj. "The TVK, which claims to be a

'pure force' has indulged in forgery in the hope that later they could indulge in horse-trading and buy our lone MLA, as it would not attract anti-defection law.

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Amit Shah felicitates West Bengal CM-designate Suwendu Adhikari after the BJP legislature party meeting in Kolkata on Friday. PTI

Suwendu Adhikari to take oath as Bengal Chief Minister today

Shiv Sahay Singh

KOLKATA

The MLAs-elect of the BJP in West Bengal unanimously elected Suwendu Adhikari as leader of their Legislature Party on Friday. Union Home Minister Amit Shah, who presided over the meeting, said all proposals were received in favour of Mr. Adhikari.

Accompanied by several

leaders of the BJP's State unit, including Dilip Ghosh, Locket Chatterjee, and Tapas Roy, the Chief Minister-designate reached Lok Bhavan and met Governor R.N. Ravi to stake claim to form the government. The BJP had won 207 seats while the TMC was reduced to 80 seats.

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Calcutta HC rejects Centre's objections to pleas against Great Nicobar project

Abhinay Lakshman

NEW DELHI

The Calcutta High Court has overruled the Union government's preliminary objections to a batch of petitions alleging that it violated the Forest Rights Act while obtaining consent for its ₹92,000-crore Great Nicobar Island project.

In an order made public on Friday, a Bench of Chief Justice Sujoy Paul and Justice Partha Sarathi Sen dismissed the Centre's argument that Meena Gupta, the petitioner in the case, did not have the *locus standi* to approach the court in this matter. It directed the case to be listed for final hearing on June 23.

Ms. Gupta is a retired IAS officer who has served as Secretary to both the Tribal Affairs and Environment Ministries.

Over the last two years, she has filed a series of petitions challenging the Gram Sabha resolutions



The Centre plans to build a transshipment port, an airport, and a township on the Great Nicobar island. GETTY IMAGES

consenting to the diversion of forest land for the mega-infrastructure project under the 2006 Forest Rights Act (FRA); the constitution of a sub-divisional level committee under the same law; and the notifications reducing the buffer zones for both the Campbell Bay and Galathea Bay National Parks. The petitions also question the validity of a certificate issued by the Andaman and Nicobar Islands administration

claiming that all rights under the FRA have been identified and settled.

On Wednesday, Additional Solicitor General of India Ashok Kumar Chakraborty argued that Ms. Gupta did not have authorisation from the tribal population of Great Nicobar Island to file the petition, adding that the petition was not maintainable because her place of residence was in Hyderabad. The court ruled that in this case, it was "clear that the petitioner has sufficient interest in the matter", and that "she is espousing the cause of the vulnerable tribal community".

'National importance'

The Centre argued that the project was of "great national importance" and that "such project of national importance cannot be called in question in a [public interest litigation] PIL petition". The Bench responded by saying, "So

far, argument regarding the cost and importance of project is concerned, at this stage we are not inclined to enter into the merits of the case. A project involving huge expenditure must proceed in accordance with governing laws holding the field and it is not beyond the scope of judicial review on permissible parameters."

The ASG further argued that the petitions should not be maintainable because multiple petitions were filed for prayers that could have been made in the same petition, further positing that the National Green Tribunal had already heard and ruled on this issue, and hence the principle of *res judicata* would apply. The court dismissed both arguments, ruling that the petitions and issues before the High Court were distinct not only from each other but also from the issue decided by the NGT earlier this year.

Judge who quit SIR tribunal cleared more voters than EC added to rolls

Mismatch: Justice Sivagnanam, one of 19 tribunals, cleared 1,717 appeals; EC added only 1,607 names to rolls

Damini Nath

New Delhi, May 8

A DAY before polling ended in West Bengal, data from the office of the Chief Electoral Officer showed that as many as 1,607 appeals by people whose names were deleted from the voter list, as part of the controversial SIR exercise, had been approved by the Appellate Tribunals and added back to the electoral roll. *The Indian Express* has, however, learnt that just one of the 19 tribunals headed by Justice (Retd) T S Sivagnanam had cleared as many as 1,717 appeals between April 5 and April 27. Since there are 18 more tribunals, there are now questions about the number of appeals cleared by them, and how many more persons could have been added to the electoral rolls in time to cast their votes.

The Indian Express reported Friday that Justice Sivagnanam resigned from the tribunal on Thursday. When contacted by *The Indian Express*, he said he had done so due to personal reasons.



Justice T S Sivagnanam quit the tribunal Thursday

The Election Commission did not respond to a request for comment. West Bengal CEO Manoj Agarwal could not be reached for comment.

It is learnt that Justice Sivagnanam, who had originally been assigned some constituencies of North 24 Parganas and Kolkata as per the EC's March 20 notification, disposed of 1,777 appeals in total. Of these, it is learnt he approved all 1,717 appeals filed by citizens against deletion. He rejected 60 appeals filed by the EC against inclusions in Birbhum district, the jurisdiction of which had been given to him when the Supreme Court asked him to give

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OMCs losing ₹30,000 crore a month on petrol, diesel, LPG

Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary, Union Petroleum Ministry, added that Oil Marketing Companies were making these losses despite the government reducing the export duty on petrol and diesel

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

India's oil-marketing companies (OMCs) are losing about ₹30,000 crore a month on the sale of petrol, diesel and LPG as they hold steady retail fuel prices amid rising prices of crude oil, said Sujata Sharma, Joint-Secretary at the Union Petroleum Ministry.

Ms. Sharma told reporters the OMCs were incurring the losses despite the government having reduced excise duties on petrol and diesel earlier.

"Our OMCs are buying crude oil at higher rates but are not selling at corresponding rates to protect our consumers, this impacts their finances," she stated, "To alleviate this pressure [on OMCs], the government reduced the excise duties on retail fuel and forewent revenue of



Sujata Sharma

₹14,000 crore in a month. Notwithstanding the same, OMCs are incurring under-recoveries on petrol, diesel and LPG."

West Asia tensions

Escalating tensions in West Asia, which have now extended for more than 60 days, have marred shipping across the Strait of Hormuz, which accounts for a fifth of the global

energy trade. This has resulted in prices of crude oil prices spiralling upwards.

At the time of writing, benchmark Brent Crude futures (for July 2026) were trading 0.7% higher over their previous close at \$100.75 for every barrel.

As per provisional data from the Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC), consumption of petrol rose about 6.36% in April year-on-year whilst that of diesel rose 0.25%.

Since the onset of the tensions, LPG use slid 15.7% in March from February and 7% in April.

This was due to the government seeking to regulate allocation of commercial LPG to commercial establishments.

On March 27, the government increased the allocation of the bottled LPG to commercial and industrial establishment to up to

70% of pre-crisis levels.

Indicative of rising price pressures, the price of commercial LPG cylinder was hiked by ₹993 per cylinder and that of 5-kg free trade LPG by ₹261 per cylinder on May 2, the latter being imperative for migrant populations in urban and semi-urban areas. This was the second such hike. The first of these hikes was effected on April 1.

13 vessels in Hormuz

Speaking to reporters at the same briefing, Opesh Kumar Sharma, Director at the Ministry of Ports, Shipping & Waterways, informed there were 13 India-flagged vessels in the Strait of Hormuz.

This included one LPG tanker, five crude oil tankers, one chemical products tanker, three container ships, two bulk carriers and one dredger.

Armed Forces set new goals for 2047, draw insights from Sindoor, conflicts

Amrita Nayak Dutta
New Delhi, May 8

DRAWING INSIGHTS from Operation Sindoor and the recent global conflicts, the Indian Armed Forces have set strategic goals and priorities that they aim to reach by 2047, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

These goals include achieving an edge in combat readiness and scaling capability development and strengthening military diplomacy, among others.

These goals are beyond the various measures being undertaken by the Indian military over the last year, including a large-scale construction of underground infrastructure, boosting air defence, prioritising procurement of modern weapons and technology through the emergency route.

According to officials privy to the matter, the goals call for the formulation of a National Military Strategy, modernising and procuring the latest technologies and platforms, including autonomous, while bolstering the development of indigenous technologies under the Atmanirbharta initiative.

As part of the vision, the military is looking to strengthen deterrence through the procurement of intelligent platforms, combat assets, and force multipliers, create robust border infra-



India aims to strengthen jointness among the Army, Navy and Air Force by the centennial of Independence

OPERATION
sindoor
A YEAR LATER

structure as well as coastal surveillance, and design national strategies for possible threats.

There will likely be an emphasis on air domain awareness in maritime zones, while also expanding Underwater Domain Awareness (UDA).

Additionally, there will be an overall enhancement of space-based Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities, along with the development of robust cyber defence networks, among the strategic priorities of the forces.

Officials told *The Indian Express* that there will be increased focus on executing operations across domains for greater integration among the forces and building flexible structures for warfighting.

While the military is close to establishing unified theatre commands from the three services, the long-term goals also include integrating networks and communication, setting up a joint logistics and inventory management system and an operations coordination centre.

According to officials, other long-term goals are to create surge capacities to meet the demands arising from prolonged high-intensity operations, develop indigenous systems and platforms in alignment with

specific needs.

There are also long-term goals to establish a Defence Geospatial Agency, a Drone Force and a force for cognitive warfare, aside from a full-fledged Space Command, and Cyber Command.

Expansion of various missile defence and air defence systems for protection against multi-domain threats as part of mission Sudarshan Chakra are also part of the plans, the officials said.

Strengthening military cooperation with other countries through joint training and exercises, while also modernising the training curriculum for Indian military personnel are some of the other long-term strategic priorities of the Indian defence forces.

TWO MEETINGS IN LAST 3 MONTHS

Ex-Army generals, retired diplomats break India-Pak ice

**Meetings in Qatar, another Asian
capital amid growing consensus
on the need for a back-channel**

Shubhajt Roy
New Delhi, May 8

A YEAR after Operation Sindoor, while there has been no official contact with Pakistan, former Army generals and retired diplomats from both India and Pakistan have met at least twice in the last three months, including once in Qatar and another Asian capital, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

While these are not formal “back-channels of communication,” this is the first such engagement since Operation Sindoor amid a growing consensus in official circles in favour of opening such a track with Islamabad and Rawalpindi.

It’s learnt that the need for this has been “escalated” to National Security Advisor Ajit Do-

NATION

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CHINA ADMITS IT SUPPORTED PAK IN CONFLICT WITH INDIA LAST YEAR

val’s office and the National Security Council Secretariat has been made aware of the “willingness” from Pakistan as well.

A political call is yet to be taken in favour of a back-channel but one of the key reasons behind this rethink has been the imperative to “manage” escalation in case of another attack.

Sources said, as of now, there is an absence of established crisis-management mechanisms between the two

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India-Pak

countries. After the Pahalgam terror attack and during Op Sindoor, the only channel of communication in operation was the hotline at the level of each country's Director General of Military Operations (DGMO.) Today, the DGMOs speak once a week, usually on Tuesdays.

Sources said Delhi's thinking is that any back-channel communication doesn't contradict its stated position that "terror and talks can't go together." This is also being seen as a crisis management mechanism led by the civilian government on the Indian side and with counterparts — who could be the military — on the other side.

In theory, Op Sindoor is at a "pause" but Delhi's redlines are still around the "new normal" where any future terror attack will be seen as "an act of war" and military operations can resume. This necessitates a "civilian-level and political-guided mechanism," which can be enabled by the military leaders, sources said.

The other factor is Pakistan's increasing leverage as a diplomatic player in the current

US-Israel-Iran standoff and its Army chief Field Marshal Asim Munir's consolidation of power.

"Right now, Pakistan has an active role in the Iran talks with US Vice President and President Trump's interlocutors travelling there. Trump has given his whole-hearted support to Pakistan's leadership including Munir. In this context, if there's another attack inspired or abetted from across the border, it will be a challenge for New Delhi to navigate the global discourse to put pressure on Islamabad," said a source.

"So we need to have our own points of engagement."

There's an acknowledgment in South Block that India may have won the war last May but Pakistan made significant gains in the battle of perception, not least because of the manner in which it had wormed its way into Trump's inner circle.

That's why a back-channel is vital, said the source. "Trump is here for three years, we are both nuclear powers, any communication between Delhi and Islamabad also helps us firewall ourselves against any direct Trump intervention in the eventuality of any bilateral flashpoint."

China confirms on-site support to Pakistan during Op Sindoor: Reports

K J M Varma

Beijing, May 8

CHINA, FOR the first time, has confirmed that it provided on-site technical support to Pakistan during the four-day conflict with India last year, official media reports here said.

China's state broadcaster CCTV on Thursday aired an interview with Zhang Heng, an engineer from the Aviation Industry Corporation of China's (AVIC) Chengdu Aircraft Design and Research Institute, a key developer of China's advanced fighter aircraft and unmanned aerial vehicle design. Zhang had provided technical support to Pakistan during the four-day conflict last May, Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported, quoting CCTV. Pakistan's air force operates a fleet of Chinese-made J-10CE jets, produced by an AVIC subsidiary.

"At the support base, we frequently heard the roar of fighter jets taking off and the constant wail of air-raid sirens. By late morning, in May, the temperature was already approaching 50 degrees Celsius. It was a real ordeal for us, both mentally and physically," Zhang said.

What drove his team was the "desire to do an even better job with on site support" and to ensure their equipment could "truly perform at its full combat potential", Zhang told CCTV.

"That wasn't just a recognition of the J10CE; it was also a testament to the deep bond we formed through working side by side, day in and day out," he said.

Chinese foreign ministry and military officials have either par-

ried or played down allegations of China's support for Pakistan during the conflict.

There was no official reaction to India's Deputy Chief of Army Staff Lt General Rahul R Singh's assertion that Beijing provided active military support to Pakistan during Operation Sindoor, using the conflict as a "live lab".

In an address at a seminar organised by industry chamber FICCI in July last year, Lt Gen Singh suggested that China used its satellites to monitor Indian military deployment as the Pakistani military was getting live inputs on it during the DGMO (Director General of Military Operations)-level phone talks.

He likened China's strategy during Operation Sindoor to its ancient military strategy of "36 stratagems" and killing the adversary with a "borrowed knife" to buttress the point that Beijing extended all possible support to Pakistan to cause pain to India.

Chinese officials and social media played up Pakistan's claims of shooting down Indian fighter planes to showcase Chinese tech superiority, even though there was no evidence to support Islamabad's assertion.

But they remained silent about Pakistan suffering heavy collateral damage, including several terrorist headquarters, key air bases and failure of Chinese radars, which enabled India's air superiority.

Latest media reports here said China plans to sell its stealth bomber J-35 to Pakistan. The disclosures by the Chinese officials about China's assistance to Pakistan are seen as a new "sales pitch", observers said. — PTI

Bangladesh failed to give 'actionable response': India

In diplomatic note, New Delhi says it sent over 1,000 messages to Dhaka on repatriation of illegal immigrants since 2020, but the neighbouring country has not extended necessary cooperation

Kalol Bhattacharjee

NEW DELHI

India has sent over a 1,000 diplomatic notes (notes verbale) and 456 "consolidated reminders" to Dhaka since September 2020 regarding the repatriation of suspected illegal Bangladeshi immigrants but has not received "an actionable response", a diplomatic document has stated.

The numbers were mentioned in the note verbale that the External Affairs Ministry sent to Dhaka on April 30, hours after the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh summoned the Indian envoy to protest against remarks made by Assam's then Chief Minister Himanta Biswa Sarma. Mr. Sarma had claimed in a media interview that under his government, Indian border guards were "pushing in" suspected Bangladeshi individuals through unguarded parts of the land border.



BSF personnel patrol along the fence on the India-Bangladesh border in Golakganj in Assam. FILE PHOTO

"It is of note that over 1,137 Notes Verbale seeking nationality verification and 456 consolidated reminders have been sent in this period," the Ministry said in the diplomatic note of April 30, which *The Hindu* has reviewed.

2,862 cases

"A majority of these communications have not received an actionable response," it said, adding that "Since September 2020

Bangladesh has not extended the necessary cooperation to India for nationality verification of over 2,862 cases of illegal Bangladeshis in India..."

It said "all measures undertaken by the Government of India for the repatriation of illegal Bangladeshi nationals are in adherence to Indian laws and procedures, in tandem with established bilateral arrangements".

The Indian allegation of

illegal Bangladeshi immigration was spotlighted on Thursday when Randhir Jaiswal, the spokesperson of the External Affairs Ministry, referred to the matter as the "core issue" in bilateral ties.

"These comments must be seen in the context of the core issue of repatriation of illegal Bangladeshis from India. This requires cooperation from Bangladesh. Over 2,862 cases of nationality verification are pending with Bangladesh, some for over five years," Mr. Jaiswal said during a weekly press briefing.

He was responding to remarks by Bangladesh Foreign Minister Khalilur Rahman and Home Minister Salahuddin Ahmed who had said that Dhaka would take "adequate measures" if attempts at "push in" from the Indian side were to take place, especially against the backdrop of the victory of the BJP in the elections in West Bengal and Assam.

Strait of Hormuz: why U.S. Project Freedom couldn't secure free navigation

M. Kalyanaraman

CHENNAI

The U.S. announced Project Freedom on May 4 to end the Iranian blockade of the Strait of Hormuz. It was suspended the next day even as merchant ships and U.S. Navy craft came under attack.

Though U.S. President Donald Trump cited progress in talks with Iran as the reason for calling off the initiative, Iran showed it could escalate the situation if the U.S. persisted in its attempt to deny Iran stake in the Strait of Hormuz and establish dominance in the Persian Gulf.

This was a far cry from 40 years ago when the U.S. was able to intervene in the Tanker Wars and ensure a relatively smoother flow of ships in the region.

Listing a range of advanced systems, including underwater drones and warships, the U.S. said multiple advanced military capabilities were being 'harnessed' in Project Freedom to reopen safe navigation via the strait.

As the initiative got underway, the U.S. claimed two U.S.-flagged merchant ships crossed the strait freely, apparently not via the routes Iran indicated, as a demonstration meant to encourage confidence.

Iran had earlier indicated only the area close to its coast was free of mines and marked a danger zone running almost the entire breadth of the strait towards Oman.

Temporarily suspended

In a day, however, Mr. Trump declared Project Freedom was temporarily suspended. There were in-



Some experts say drones have changed the equation as they could damage ships.

dications shipowners were not convinced to make the transit. The same day the project was announced, Hapag-Lloyd, one of the biggest container shipping firms in the world, said its risk assessment was unchanged and the strait was closed for transits until further notice.

Industry cautious

The industry sought more details since the U.S. indicated it was not going to escort ships individually, unlike 40 years ago when it largely succeeded in beating back Iranian initiatives to take control of the strait. Operation Earnest Will involved minesweepers, patrol boats and U.S. warships escorting merchant ship convoys with anti-missile batteries to counter Iranian attacks.

At the time, Iran had recently acquired Silkworm missiles that could be mounted on trucks and fired from land at merchant ships. It also had speedboats with machine guns and mines. Iran sought to attack Kuwaiti and Saudi ships as the two countries were supporting Iraq, its adversary.

During Operation Earnest Will, the U.S. Navy es-

corted almost 130 fleets consisting of more than 250 ships in a 14-month period ending in September 1988. Though the Tanker Wars drove up insurance costs and reduced traffic, transits continued amid a few attacks and the strait remained open.

After the U.S. launched a major operation against Iran's Naval capabilities, Iran backed off and the Tanker Wars ceased.

Now, however, some experts say drones have changed the equation. A few low-cost weapons could inflict visible damage on merchant ships and even one hit from a swarm of drones could have a disproportionate impact, including on insurance costs that influence global ship movements.

'Ahead of the game'

"The U.S. is ahead of the game as far as countering Iranian surprises is concerned, especially if it is able to deploy capabilities continuously," said Commodore (ret'd.) R. Seshadri Vasan, a defence expert.

But that commitment was not visible to the shipping industry since key operational details were missing. Meanwhile, at least two merchant ships, including a UAE tanker, were attacked and damaged. Two U.S. Navy destroyers were hit too, in a sign of Iranian firepower. "While a few ships made it out safely while Project Freedom was in place, it was clear transits without coordination with Iran entailed significant risk," said Jakob Larsen, chief safety and security officer, Bimco, a global industry body representing shipowners.

U.S., Iran trade fire, threatening truce; UAE reports 'attacks'



USS Rafael Peralta enforcing a maritime blockade against the Iran-flagged crude oil tanker vessel Stream. AFP

Agence France-Presse

WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump said the ceasefire with Iran was still in place despite an Iranian attack on three American destroyers in the Strait of Hormuz that fanned fears on Friday that the truce was faltering.

The U.S. military said it carried out strikes on Iranian military targets in response, although Tehran charged that it was Washington that had initiated the exchange of fire.

The latest violence threatens to unravel a fragile truce in effect since April 8 that brought an end to weeks of U.S.-Israeli attacks on the Islamic republic, which has retaliated with strikes across the West Asia and by blocking the strait, a vital route for oil and gas shipments.

The United Arab Emirates said that its air defences were “engaging missile and drone attacks originating from Iran”.

Asked in Washington on Thursday if the Iran cease-

fire was still on, Mr. Trump said: “Yeah, it is. They trifled with us today. We blew them away. They trifled. I call that a trifle.”

'Eliminated threats'

U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) said in a post on X that Iranian forces launched “multiple missiles, drones and small boats” at the three U.S. warships, but none were hit, and that it “eliminated inbound threats and targeted Iranian military facilities responsible”.

“CENTCOM does not seek escalation but remains positioned and ready to protect American forces,” it said.

For its part, Iran’s central military command accused the United States of violating the ceasefire by attacking an oil tanker and another ship, saying Tehran’s forces “immediately and in retaliation attacked American military vessels”.

Mr. Trump this week fuelled hopes of a deal, saying an agreement could be near.

Spain readies for evacuations as Hantavirus-hit ship nears coast

Associated Press

Madrid, May 8

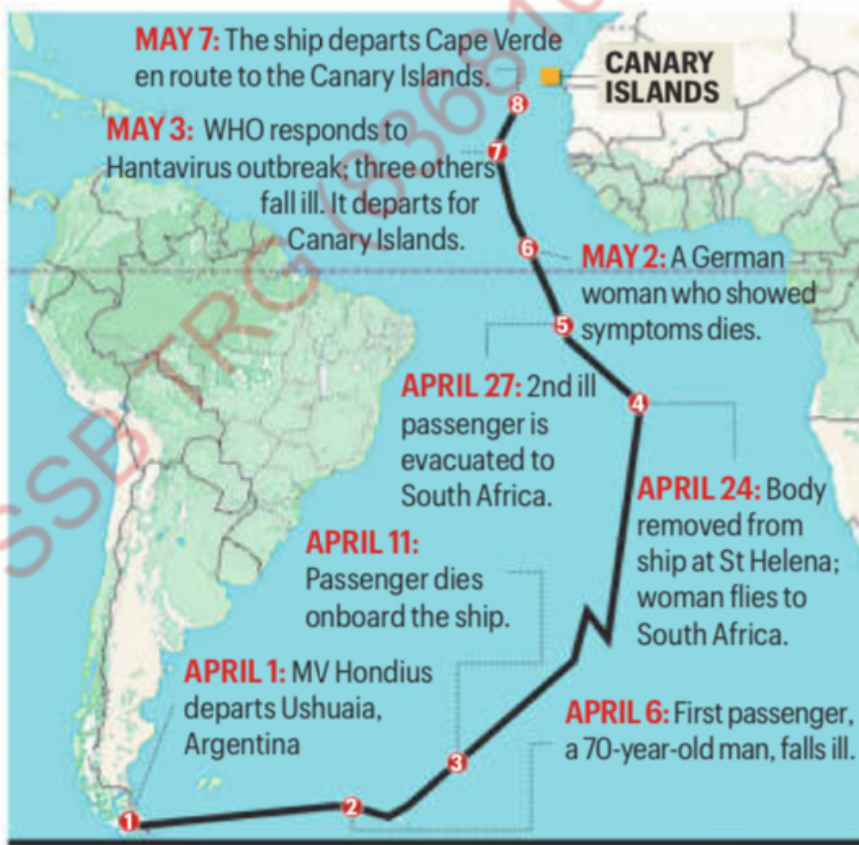
SPANISH AUTHORITIES on Friday were preparing to receive more than 140 passengers and crew members on board a hantavirus-stricken cruise ship headed for the Canary Islands, where health officials have said they will perform evacuations.

The vessel is expected to arrive Sunday at the Spanish island of Tenerife, off the coast of West Africa, and passengers will be taken to a "completely isolated, cordoned-off area," said the head of Spain's emergency services, Virginia Barcones.

While three people have died since the outbreak, and five passengers who left the ship are known to be infected with hantavirus, cruise operator Oceanwide Expeditions said Thursday there were no people with symptoms of a possible infection on board the Dutch-flagged ship, the *MV Hondius*.

On Friday, the WHO said a

•MV Hondius Route



flight attendant on a plane briefly boarded by an infected cruise passenger tested negative.

Her possible infection had raised concerns about the virus's potential transmissibility.

2 Indian crew members aboard ship at centre of hantavirus outbreak; both asymptomatic

Express News Service
New Delhi, May 8

At least two Indians are crew members on-board the MV Hondius cruise ship, which is at the centre of the current hantavirus outbreak. “Both individuals are presently asymptomatic and are under observation in accordance with established international health protocols,” said sources from the Union health ministry.

In case they do develop symptoms, they will have to remain in isolation longer, the



The cruise ship is anchored in Cape Verde. AP

sources added.

Keeping in mind the situation, a high-level meeting was

conducted on Friday with officials from Integrated Disease Surveillance Programme and the National Focal Point for International Health Regulations — the body that communicates with the World Health Organisation (WHO) in situations of public health emergency – in attendance. The officials assessed the situation and reviewed preparedness measures. Sources said that the health ministry is closely monitoring the situation on-board the cruise ship.

According to the information available from the WHO,

shared by health ministry officials in the meeting, there are eight probable cases of the infection on the vessel. Of these, five have been confirmed with laboratory tests. Three deaths have been reported so far. The WHO was notified about the incident in the first week of this month.

A health ministry official said that as per the WHO, the virus involved is the Andes strain, which is known to have limited capability of human-to-human transmission and generally requires close and prolonged contact for spread.