

UNION MINISTERS, CMs OF NDA-RULED STATES AT BRIGADE PARADE GROUND EVENT

Suvendu takes charge of Bengal: 'I am everyone's Chief Minister'

Five others sworn in as ministers; TMC wishes them success; PM bows to people of Bengal

Atri Mitra & Ravik Bhattacharya
Kolkata, May 9

FIVE DAYS after the BJP scripted history with a landslide victory in the West Bengal Assembly elections, Suvendu Adhikari, who led the party's ground offensive that ended 15 years of TMC rule, was sworn in Saturday as the state's first BJP Chief Minister.

The oath-taking ceremony, the first by a Chief Minister at Kolkata's iconic Brigade Parade Ground, was attended among others by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Ministers Rajnath Singh, Amit Shah, Nitin Gadhkari, Shivraj Singh Chouhan, and all NDA and BJP CMs including N Chandrababu Naidu, Yogi Adityanath, Himanta Biswa Sarma and Devendra Fadnis.

Apart from Adhikari, five ministers — Dilip Ghosh, Agnimitra Paul, Nisith Pramanik,

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PM Narendra Modi on the dais as West Bengal Governor R N Ravi administers the oath of office to CM Suvendu Adhikari in Kolkata. PARTHA PAUL

Team Suvendu: Mix of old and new faces; balancing of regions, groups

Ravik Bhattacharya & Atri Mitra
Kolkata, May 9

WEST BENGAL Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari's newly formed Cabinet reflected a mix of old and new faces, with representation for women as well as the Rajbanshi, Matua and tribal communities.

Apart from Adhikari, five ministers took oath of office in Kolkata's Brigade Parade Ground on Saturday, including Dilip Ghosh, Agnimitra Paul, Nitish Pramanik, Khudiram Tudu and Ashok Kirtaniya. Sources said Ghosh and Paul are likely to be named as Deputy Chief Ministers.

E.

Dilip Ghosh: BJP veteran Dilip Ghosh, MLA from Kharagpur Sadar, began his political journey as an RSS pracharak and later served as Bengal BJP president twice. He won the Medinipur Lok Sabha seat in 2019 and also served as the party's national

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PM SEEKS BLESSINGS OF MOOKERJEE'S AIDE

KNIVES OUT IN TMC AFTER POLL DEBACLE

Vijay to take reins today; T.N. set for coalition govt.

Governor appoints TVK chief, who secured support of 120 MLAs-elect, as CM-designate, directs him to seek vote of confidence in House by May 13; nine Ministers to take oath with Vijay today

B. Kolappan
K. Muralitharan
N. Sai Charan
CHENNAI

Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) president C. Joseph Vijay will be sworn in as the Chief Minister of a coalition government in Tamil Nadu on Sunday, putting an end to almost six decades of alternating rule by the State's two dominant Dravidian parties – Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK).

Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar on Saturday appointed Mr. Vijay Chief Minister-designate after he secured the support of 120 MLAs-elect in the 234-member House.

Mr. Vijay will take the



Stage set: Governor Arlekar hands over the letter of appointment as Tamil Nadu CM-designate to TVK chief Vijay on Saturday. PTI

oath at Nehru Stadium in Chennai at 10 a.m. on Sunday. Nine other Ministers, including some senior TVK leaders, will also be sworn in. Mr. Vijay will head the government with the Congress as a partner.

The Governor has also directed Mr. Vijay to seek a vote of confidence in the Assembly on or before May

13. The political uncertainty that prevailed over the last few days ended on Saturday evening, when the Viduthalai Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK) and the Indian Union Muslim League (IUML) extended their support to the TVK, taking the strength of its backers to 120. Later, Mr. Vijay called on the Governor at Lok

Bhavan in Chennai, and handed over letters of support from the Congress, Communist Party of India (CPI), Communist Party of India (Marxist) [CPI (M)], VCK, and IUML.

Though the Congress snapped ties with the DMK to forge a post-poll alliance with the TVK, the other parties said that while they were extending support to the TVK for government formation, they would continue to remain part of the DMK-led alliance.

TVK cadre celebrated the development by distributing sweets and bursting crackers at several places.

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PLEAS AGAINST GOVERNOR

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STORMING INTO POLITICS

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Elections in India must be held through ballot paper: Akhilesh

BJP is 'stealing' votes, alleges the SP chief, adding 'we must fight against a multi-layered 'election mafia'; questions law and order situation and rising cases of crimes against women in the State

Press Trust of India

LUCKNOW

Samajwadi Party (SP) chief Akhilesh Yadav on Saturday once again advocated for the use of ballot paper for voting, citing recent election in the United Kingdom as an example, and demanded that elections in India be conducted through ballot paper.

'Are we ahead of U.K.?'

Speaking to reporters at the party office in Lucknow on Saturday, Mr. Yadav said, "An election was held in a very developed country, the U.K., and the voting took place by secret ballot. The entire country voted using ballots. Are we ahead of England? This demand is not new; it has always been a call from the socialists. Like in America [U.S.], Japan, Germany, and England, we believe it is essential for us to cast votes by ballot."



SP chief Akhilesh Yadav on the occasion of Maharana Pratap Jayanti in Lucknow on Saturday. ANI

He added, "You [referring to the Bharatiya Janata Party] have defeated us using electronic voting machines (EVMs). We will defeat you again using EVMs and then remove you from power."

Mr. Yadav alleged that during the 2022 Uttar Pradesh Assembly election, the BJP "conspired" to delete voters' names. Many people arrived at polling booths only to find their names missing or reassigned to different booths,

leading to manipulated votes, he claimed.

"The SP submitted the deleted voters' names along with affidavits to the Election Commission (EC), but no action was taken against any of the guilty officials. Further, the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls was conducted. The voter list released after the SIR also contained a large number of double and triple votes," he said.

He also alleged that the EC is not providing techni-

cal information and training to parties. "The EC does not disclose the type of software it uses. The BJP is stealing votes and rights," he said.

Commenting on the upcoming 2027 U.P. Assembly election, he said, "We must fight against a multi-layered election mafia. All those committed to saving democracy, the Constitution, and the credibility of Constitutional bodies must collaborate."

Promises galore

The SP president also made a string of promises: free education for girls, free treatment for the poor patients, including cancer treatment.

He also expressed concern about the law and order situation in the State.

"Crimes against women and daughters are the highest in U.P. Where has the BJP government's promise of zero tolerance gone?" he said.

Lt. Gen. N.S. Subramani named next CDS; Vice-Admiral Krishna Swaminathan to be Navy chief

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Union government on Saturday announced two major appointments, naming Lieutenant-General N.S. Raja Subramani (retd) as the next Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and Vice-Admiral Krishna Swaminathan as the next Chief of the Naval Staff.

According to the Ministry of Defence, Lt.-Gen. Subramani will succeed General Anil Chauhan, whose tenure as the CDS ends on May 30. Along with the role of the CDS, he will also serve as Secretary, Department of Military Affairs.

Currently serving as Military Adviser in the National Security Council Secretariat since September 2025, the senior officer has earlier held key positions, including Vice Chief of Army Staff and General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of Central Command.

Commissioned into the 8 Garhwal Rifles in December 1985, Lt.-Gen. Subramani is a graduate of the National Defence Academy and the Indian Military Academy. He has also attended the Joint Services Command Staff College in



Lieutenant-General N.S. Raja Subramani (retd) and, right, Vice-Admiral Krishna Swaminathan.

the U.K. and the National Defence College in New Delhi.

During a distinguished career spanning over four decades, he commanded formations in Assam, Jammu and Kashmir, the Central Sector and along the Western Front, including the prestigious 2 Corps. He has also served in several important operational, instructional and strategic staff appointments. For his distinguished service, he has been awarded the Param Vishisht Seva Medal, Ati Vishisht Seva Medal, Sena Medal, and Vishisht Seva Medal.

Vice-Admiral Krishna Swaminathan, who has been appointed as the next Chief of Naval Staff, will succeed Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi, who re-

tires on May 31.

He currently serves as the Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Western Naval Command. Commissioned into the Indian Navy in 1987, he is a specialist in Communication and Electronic Warfare. Over the course of his Naval career, he commanded several frontline warships, including *INS Mysore* and aircraft carrier *INS Vikramaditya*, and held key appointments in operations, personnel and training.

A recipient of the Param Vishisht Seva Medal, Ati Vishisht Seva Medal, and Vishisht Seva Medal, the Vice-Admiral has also served as Vice Chief of the Naval Staff and holds multiple postgraduate degrees, including a Ph.D. in International Studies.

Misri's proposed Kathmandu visit deferred for now; India invites Nepal for big cat summit

Divya A & Yubaraj Ghimire
New Delhi, Kathmandu,
May 9

THE PROPOSED visit of Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri to Kathmandu next week has been deferred for now. However, India has extended an invite to the Nepalese leadership to visit New Delhi next month for the International Big Cat Alliance (IBCA) summit.

New Delhi is hosting the IBCA summit on June 1, and leaders of all member states, including Nepal, have been invited. It is likely that Nepalese Foreign Minister Shishir Khanal would make a visit to India although there has been no confirmation yet. The IBCA was launched on April 9, 2023, by Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the commemoration of 50 years of Project Tiger to create an international platform for the conservation of seven big cats — tiger, lion, leopard, cheetah, snow leopard, puma and jaguar.

Misri's proposed two-day visit, at the invitation of his Nepal counterpart Amrit Bahadur Rai, was meant to understand the priorities of the new Balen Shah government. It was also a follow-up of the meeting between External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar and Khanal in April, on the sidelines of the 9th Indian Ocean Conference in Mauritius. During their meeting, Jaishankar and Khanal had discussed ongoing projects and



Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri's visit to Kathmandu was scheduled for next week

programmes, and explored high-level diplomatic visits in the near future. During his proposed visit to the neighbouring country, Misri was likely to call on Nepal PM Shah and hand over an invitation to him to visit India. As per sources, Shah has conveyed to his inner circle that he will not undertake any foreign visits in the near future.

Shah has been reluctant to meet visiting foreign officials or leaders below the rank of foreign minister, as per reports. Last week, as United special envoy for South and Central Asia Sergio Gor visited Nepal, he met with Khanal and Finance Minister Swarnim Wagle. Earlier, Shah is said to have refused to meet US Assistant Secretary of State S Paul Kapur.

It was expected that Shah would have maintained the same policy during Misri's visit. Traditionally, visiting Indian officials have called upon successive Nepal prime ministers.

Earlier, the Foreign Secretary had met with then-Prime Minister KP Sharma Oli in August 2025 to discuss bilateral ties.

The recent statement by the Shah government on Lipulekh, objecting to India and China planning to conduct the Kailash Mansarovar Yatra through the pass, has also cast a shadow. India had said that such claims are "neither justified nor based on historical facts and evidence", adding it remains open to "constructive interaction with Nepal".

Meanwhile, the two sides continue to engage on a range of other issues, including water resources, power transmission and developmental projects. Three bilateral meetings have been held between the two sides in the last two weeks. These include the Kosi and Gandak projects Joint committee, the committee on water resources, flood forecasting, and that on power transmission.

New Delhi is looking to recalibrate its ties with the Himalayan neighbour, with the stable and full-majority government coming in, in the wake of strain with the previous Oli-led government in the preceding years. Soon after Shah's swearing in on March 27, PM Modi had congratulated him through a post on X, expressing his desire to work closely with Shah to strengthen India-Nepal friendship and deepen cooperation for mutual benefit.

Energy security a key priority, UAE stopover added to PM's itinerary

Modi leaves on May 15 for tour of 4 Europe nations

Shubhajit Roy

New Delhi, May 9

AT A time when India is navigating security and economic challenges amidst the instability in West Asia, Prime Minister Narendra Modi is expected to visit the UAE on May 15.

Sources said Saturday that the UAE, which has a comprehensive strategic partnership with India and is home to a large

Indian diaspora, has been included in the Prime Minister's itinerary at the last minute.

The UAE has been one of the main targets of Iranian missile attacks ever since the start of the West Asia war on February 28. Tehran accuses the emirates of providing safe space to American military bases, facilities and personnel.

And amid the crisis in the Strait of Hormuz, which has impacted energy supplies to much of the world, including India, the UAE announced it was exiting the OPEC, the bloc of oil-producing exporters headed by Saudi Arabia, and

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UAE visit

the OPEC Plus.

India has walked the diplomatic tightrope between the UAE and Iran, but has repeatedly condemned the attacks on the UAE.

From the UAE, Modi will leave for Europe. He is scheduled to visit the Netherlands (May 15-17), Sweden (May 17), Norway (May 17-19) and Italy (May 19-20).

Sources said the situation in West Asia is one of the reasons why the Prime Minister has decided to meet UAE President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

On May 5, a day after three Indian nationals in the UAE were injured in a blaze following

an Iranian drone strike in the eastern emirate of Fujairah, Modi “strongly condemned the attacks”, and said the targeting of civilians and infrastructure was “unacceptable”.

The Ministry of External Affairs, in a separate statement, called for the “immediate cessation of these hostilities and the targeting of civilian infrastructure and innocent civilians”.

Earlier, in the last week of April, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval travelled to the UAE and met the UAE President in Abu Dhabi. This was a week after he visited Saudi Arabia.

Doval’s visit was an important outreach given that he has been coordinating with the Emirati establishment on security and strategic issues, especially on counter-terrorism cooperation. It also laid the

groundwork for Modi’s visit.

Trade with the energy-rich UAE has been disrupted due to the Iranian closure of the Strait of Hormuz in the last two months — only 11 Indian ships have been able to transit the strait.

Modi has spoken to leaders of the UAE, Saudi Arabia and other Gulf monarchies in the last two months, and External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has also been in touch with his counterparts in these countries.

In April, Jaishankar also met the UAE President. Underlining the robustness of the India-UAE strategic partnership, he said the ongoing dialogue between the two nations remained strong and transparent despite the complex regional environment.

The UAE is home to about 4.7 million Indians, and annual

remittances by the large Indian community in the UAE is one of the highest in the world. The Indian expatriate community is the largest ethnic community in the UAE, constituting about 35 per cent of the country’s population.

The India-UAE trade, valued at USD 180 million per annum in the 1970s, reached USD 84 billion in 2023-24 – the UAE became India’s third largest trading partner after China and the US.

For the period April 2000-September 2024, FDI inflows from the UAE accounted for nearly USD 22 billion (3.1% of the total inward FDI inflows), making it the seventh largest source of investments. The UAE has committed to invest USD 75 billion in India’s infrastructure sector over a period of time.

Centre operationalises Labour Codes, publishes Rules; trade unions protest

The Codes will replace 29 labour laws that governed provisions, including wages, social security, working hours, retirement benefits, and trade union rights; officials maintain the Rules have been published with 'minor amendments' to the draft rules pre-published in December 2025

A. M. Jigeeesh
NEW DELHI

In over 30 gazette notifications issued on Friday and Saturday, the Union government fully operationalised the four Labour Codes.

Officials maintained that the rules had been published with "minor amendments" to the draft rules pre-published in December 2025.

The government had announced the implementation of the four Labour Codes from November 21, 2025. With the notification of the Rules, the Codes will replace 29 labour laws that governed provisions, including wages, social security, working hours, retirement benefits, and trade union rights.

Soon after the publication of Rules, members of 10 central trade unions held protests across the country, burning copies of it. The Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh said it was studying the Rules and would soon come up with a comment on them.



Protesters called for the withdrawal of Labour Codes at a recent rally in Delhi. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

The Opposition parties alleged that the publication was a direct attack on the rights of workers.

All stakeholders had been given one month's time to submit responses on the draft Rules, a senior government functionary said.

"We have gone through all the responses and considered some of the suggestions, and amended the Rules accordingly," the offi-

cial said, adding that the amendments were minor.

Minimum wages

On the controversial subject of minimum wages, the Rules of the Code on Wages said the criteria shall be separately specified by the Union government by a special or general order, and the rate of wages for a day is fixed, and "such amount shall be divided by eight for fixing

the rate of wages for an hour and multiplied by twenty six for fixing the rate of wages for a month..."

For fixing the floor wage, the Union government, according to the Rules, may consult a Central Advisory Board, taking into account the minimum living standard, including food, clothing, housing, and any other factors considered appropriate by the

Union government from time to time. The number of hours of work for a normal working day "for an employee whose wage period is on a daily basis" shall be eight hours. For other employees, the total number of weekly working hours shall not exceed 48 hours. The Rules mandate that every employer shall issue wage slips, electronically or in physical form to the employees.

The Rules for Code on Social Security changes 12 rules, including the Employees' State Insurance (Central) Rules, 1950 and the Employees' Provident Funds Appellate Tribunal (Conditions of Service) Rules, 1997.

The Code on Industrial Relations says where there is only one registered trade union operating in an industrial establishment having its membership not less than 30% of the total workers employed in the industrial establishment, the employer of such industrial establishment shall recognise such trade union as the sole negotiating un-

ion of the workers. Commenting on the Rule, senior leader of Centre of Indian Trade Unions R. Karumalaiyan said the Union government had ignored the amendments moved by the CTUs.

"We had submitted amendments seeking clarity on working hours, trade union rights, minimum wages, floor wages, and protection of social security. This government has ignored all our suggestions, forcing us to go on protests," Mr. Karumalaiyan said.

The Communist Party of India (Marxist) said in a statement that the Union government "deceptively waited" till the Assembly election in four States and a Union Territory were over before notifying the Rules. "Within just four days after the announcement of results, they have now operationalised the Labour Codes. This exposes the deceptive modus operandi of the BJP-led Union government," the CPI(M) said, urging States to reject the Rules.

India test-fires Agni missile that can deploy multiple warheads

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI

India has successfully test-fired an advanced Agni missile with the strategic ability to deploy multiple payloads to separate targets simultaneously – a milestone that places the country among a select league of global powers.

The testing of the missile with Multiple Independently Targeted Re-Entry Vehicle (MIRV) system was carried out from Odisha's A.P.J. Abdul Kalam Island on Friday, according to the Defence Ministry.

The MIRV feature ensures that a single missile can deploy multiple warheads at different locations simultaneously.

The missile was flight-tested with multiple payloads, targeted to different targets spatially distributed over a large geographical area in the Indian Ocean Region, the Ministry added.

Incredible capability

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh has complimented the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), Indian Army, and the industry partners concerned on the successful flight-test of the missile.



An image from the flight trial of an advanced Agni missile on Friday. DEFENCE MINISTRY

This will add an incredible capability to the country's defence preparedness against the growing threat perceptions, he said.

The Ministry said the telemetry and tracking was carried out by multiple ground and ship-based stations. "These systems tracked the entire missile trajectory from lift-off till the impact of all payloads. Flight data confirmed that all mission objectives were met during the trial," it said.

"With this successful trial, India once again demonstrated the capability to target multiple strategic targets using a single missile system," the Ministry said in a statement.

Europe wants a strong NATO, shares US goal of ending Iran war, says Merz

Reuters
Stockholm, May 9

GERMAN CHANCELLOR Friedrich Merz said on Saturday Europe wanted to work to keep the NATO alliance functioning, despite differences with the United States that the Iran war has exposed.

Already high after U.S. criticism of Europe over defence spending and issues like immigration policy, the tensions have increased after Germany and other European countries refused to support the U.S. and Israeli war against Iran that began at the end of February.

"We are really willing to keep this alliance alive for the future," Merz said at a press conference with Swedish Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson. He also said Sweden and Finland had strengthened the European pillar of the alliance.

"We know that there are some differences. We know that we are seeing challenges, all of us, but our final goal is to bring this conflict to an end and to guarantee that Iran is not able to produce nuclear weapons," Merz said.

STRAIT OF HORMUZ CALM AFTER DAYS OF SPORADIC ATTACKS

Iran no closer to ending war as US waits for a response from Tehran

Idrees Ali, Erin Banco & Hatem Maher
Washington, Cairo, May 9

A STATE of relative calm prevailed around the Strait of Hormuz on Saturday, after days of sporadic flare-ups, as the US waited for Iran's response to its latest proposals to end more than two months of fighting and begin peace talks.

US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said on Friday that Washington expected a response within hours. But a day later, there was no sign of movement from Tehran on the proposal, which would formally end the war before talks on more contentious issues, including Iran's nuclear program.

With US President Donald Trump due to begin a long-awaited visit to China next week, there has been mounting pressure to draw a line under the conflict, which has thrown energy markets into turmoil and posed a growing threat to the world economy. Recent days have seen the biggest flare-ups in fighting in and around the Strait of Hormuz since a ceasefire began a month ago, and the United Arab Emirates came under renewed

EXPANDED AREA IRAN CLAIMS TO CONTROL



SOURCE: INTERNATIONAL MARITIME ORGANIZATION, MARINE REGIONS, GLOBAL ENERGY MONITOR

attack on Friday.

On Friday, there were sporadic clashes between Iranian forces and US vessels in the strait, Iran's semi-official Fars news agency reported. The Tas-

nim news agency later cited an Iranian military source saying the situation had calmed but warning more clashes were possible. The US military said it struck two Iran-linked vessels

Israeli strikes kill 4 in Beirut, at least 13 in southern Lebanon

Beirut: Three Israeli drone strikes on vehicles just south of Beirut on Saturday killed four people while a series of airstrikes on southern Lebanon killed at least 13, including a man and his 12-year-old daughter, state media and the Health Ministry said.

The three drone strikes south of Beirut marked another escalation since a ceasefire between Israel and Hezbollah went into effect on April 17. Both Israel and Hezbollah have continued their daily attacks despite the truce. On Wednesday night, Israel's air force carried out an airstrike on

a southern suburb in which Israel said it killed a senior Hezbollah military official. It was the first strike near the capital since the ceasefire was reached.

Two of the strikes on Saturday took place on the highway linking Beirut with the southern port city of Sidon in which several people were wounded, while the third happened on a road leading to Lebanon's Chouf region killing three, the state-run National News Agency said.

An Associated Press journalist at the scene saw a dead body on the highway in the town of Saadiyat. AP

attempting to enter an Iranian port, with a U.S. fighter jet hitting their smokestacks and forcing them to turn back.

Tehran has largely blocked non-Iranian shipping through the strait since the war began with US-Israeli airstrikes across Iran on February 28.

The US imposed a blockade on Iranian vessels last month.

But a CIA assessment indicated Iran would not suffer severe economic pressure from a US blockade of Iranian ports for about another four months, according to a U.S. official familiar with the matter, raising questions over Trump's leverage over Tehran in a conflict that has been unpopular with voters and US allies. REUTERS

Deal hangs in balance amid renewed clashes in the Gulf

A U.S. fighter jet fired on and disabled two Iranian-flagged tankers that Washington accused of challenging its naval blockade; Trump says he is expecting Tehran's response to the U.S. proposal

Agence France-Presse
TEHRAN

Iran questioned the seriousness of American diplomacy on Saturday in the wake of renewed naval clashes in the Gulf, while keeping Washington waiting for a response to its latest negotiating position.

U.S. President Donald Trump had said on Friday that he was expecting Iran's response to Washington's latest proposal on a deal to extend a fragile truce and launch peace talks – “supposedly tonight”.

But, if Iran did send the talks' Pakistani mediators a response, there was no public sign of this, and Tehran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi called into question the reliability of the U.S. leadership, in a call with his Turkish counterpart.

“The recent escalation of tensions by American forces in the Persian Gulf



A banner depicting the U.S. President which reads, 'There is no need for a video, I will do what ever you say' in Tehran on Saturday. AFP

and their numerous actions in violating the ceasefire have added to suspicions about the motivation and seriousness of the American side in the path of diplomacy,” he said, according to an Iranian account of the call published by the ISNA news agency.

In an incident on Friday, a U.S. fighter jet fired on and disabled two Iranian-flagged tankers that Washington accused of challenging its naval blockade of

Iran's ports. The U.S. action prompted Iranian retaliatory attacks.

An Iranian military official told local media the country's navy had “responded to the violation of the ceasefire and to American terrorism with strikes” and “the clashes have now ceased”.

✓ The latest incident came after a previous flare-up overnight on Thursday to Friday in the Strait of Hormuz, a vital international

sea lane that Iran is seeking to control to extract tolls from foreign vessels and to wield economic leverage over the U.S. and its allies.

U.S. Secretary of State Marco Rubio reiterated on Friday that it was “unacceptable” for Tehran to control the key oil route.

Washington has sent Iran, via Pakistani mediators, a proposal to extend the truce in the Gulf to allow for talks on a final settlement of the conflict launched 10 weeks ago with U.S.-Israeli strikes on Iran.

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Esmaeil Baqaei said on Friday that the proposal was still “under review”.

Qatar's Prime Minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, met with U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance in Washington on Friday and discussed the Pakistani-led efforts to broker a permanent peace.

US proposes to hike minimum wages for hiring H1B workers

Press Trust of India
Washington, May 9

THE US has proposed to increase the minimum wages paid to hire an employee under the H1B visa program by 30 per cent over the previously fixed limits, a move the administration claims will help prevent foreigners from undercutting wages of US nationals.

The new rule, proposed by the US Department of Labour on March 27, seeks to increase the minimum wages for four categories from the entry-level to the most-experienced, contending that the existing wage levels were fixed 20 years ago and fail to adequately protect US workers.

According to the proposed rule 'Improving Wage Protections for the Temporary and Permanent Employment of Certain Foreign Nationals in the United States', the prevailing wage for entry-level foreign workers was USD 73,279 per annum, USD 98,987 (Level II), USD 121,979 (Level III) and USD 144,202 (Level IV).

The new rule, which is now open to public comments till May 26, seeks to increase the prevailing wages for entry-level workers to USD 97,746, a hike of 33.39 per cent over the old rates, USD 123,212 (Level II, 24.47 per cent), USD 147,333 (Level III, 20.79 per cent), and USD 175,464 (Level IV, 21.68%). The prevailing wages differ from city to city.

Countries prepare to evacuate hantavirus-hit ship passengers

Madrid: Countries prepared to evacuate their citizens from the luxury cruise ship hit by a deadly strain of hantavirus that is due to anchor near Tenerife early on Sunday, as health authorities said the risk of the virus spreading was low.

The WHO briefed member states with nationals on board on Saturday on how to manage the process, advising active monitoring of passengers for a 42-day period from the last point of exposure. "I need you to hear me clearly: this is not another COVID. The current public health risk from hantavirus remains low," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus wrote on X earlier on Saturday. **REUTERS**

AHEAD OF TRUMP'S VISIT

China Apr exports rebound, trade surplus widens

Reuters

London, Beijing, May 9

CHINA'S EXPORT growth gathered pace in April as factories raced to meet a wave of orders from AI-related industries and other buyers seeking to stockpile components amid fears the Iran war could push global input costs even higher.

That export strength, which has seen China's trade surplus with the US widen to \$87.7 billion so far this year, will be in focus next week as President Donald Trump travels to Beijing for a leaders' summit expected to extend last year's trade truce.

While Chinese exporters have so far weathered the fallout from the West Asia conflict economists warn that the longer the war drags on and energy prices rise, the greater the risk that external demand fades away — leaving sluggish domestic consumption unable to plug the gap.

For now economists are watching the pace of the AI manufacturing boom and

whether shipments of related equipment can keep the Chinese export engine purring.

“The conflict in the Middle East pushed up demand for global manufacturing inventory replenishment, and under the upward cycle of semiconductors, imports and exports maintained a boom,” according to Xing Zhaopeng, senior China strategist at ANZ.

“There is still room for expansion in this round of manufacturing cycle driven by AI, and it is expected that the annual export growth rate will be about 10%.”

Exports expanded 14.1% from a year earlier in U.S. dollar value terms, customs data showed on Saturday, outpacing the 2.5% gain in March and a 7.9% rise tipped by economists.

New export orders rose to their highest level in two years, separate factory activity data for April showed last month.

Imports notched another strong month, climbing 25.3% versus 27.8% in March.

How China's leader lost faith in his top military generals

Chris Buckley
May 9

THE PURGE China's leader, Xi Jinping, has inflicted on the military elite was plain to see at a recent legislative meeting. A year earlier, state television footage showed around 40 generals in the room. This time, there were only a handful.

Yet Xi indicated that an upheaval that rivaled those of the Mao Zedong era was not over.

"The military," he said, "must never have anyone who harbours a divided heart towards the party."

It was a rare public reference by Xi to one of the worst political crises of his 13 years in power: He had lost faith in the military leadership that he had spent a decade remolding.

"When Xi uses the words 'divided heart,' they are heavy with meaning," said Chien-wen Kou, a professor at National Chengchi University in Taiwan. The phrase is found in ancient Chinese treatises that counsel rulers against treacherous generals, including a volume Xi has kept on his bookshelf.

"Even his most trusted and important confidants have fallen," Kou said. "Who else can gain his trust?"

The crisis threatens one of Xi's great feats: the transformation of the Chinese military into a formidable force with new aircraft carriers, hypersonic missiles and an expanding nuclear arsenal. And it comes as China's rivalry with the US has intensified, and as the Trump administration has put American firepower, and its limits, on vivid display in Venezuela and Iran.

China's war readiness may be disrupted for years by the very cleanup that Xi has said is necessary to purify and strengthen the ranks. What once looked like a limited



“The military must never have anyone who harbours a divided heart towards the party”

XI JINPING
CHINA'S LEADER

crackdown on corruption became a sweeping dismissal of dozens of top officers, and culminated in the downfall early this year of Zhang Youxia, China's top uniformed commander, who had appeared to be a confidant of Xi's.

"This is Xi Jinping's military," said Daniel Mattingly, an associate professor at Yale University who studies China's politics and military. "Why does he break the thing that he built?"

The corruption Xi has been hunting is real. But earlier internal speeches by Xi, not previously reported in detail, reveal another factor: a leader who saw in any sign of disobedience the seed of a political threat to his rule. He became convinced, analysts say, that the commanders he had chosen to modernize the military could no longer be trusted, their loyalty and effectiveness eroded by graft and cronyism.

Analysts say the upheaval has also exposed the tensions between Xi's two imperatives — preparing for combat and enforcing loyalty.

Early on, Xi appeared determined to avoid the fate of his predecessor, Hu Jintao, who was widely seen to have failed to establish his authority over China's military commanders.

Hu's directives to army commanders were "more like suggestions they would consider," said John Culver, a former CIA analyst now at the Brookings Institution. "Basically you had a system that was no longer responsive to the party."

After coming to power in 2012, Xi launched investigations against commanders who had grown wealthy, and overweening, under Hu, including some previously deemed untouchable because of their status.

From his first years in power, Xi also began entrenching a "chairman responsibility system," an overhaul that tightened his control over the military by giving him intelligence and control deep into its ranks. He declared his confidence in his own ability to spot the right commanders for promotion.

By late 2025, the purges were reshaping not just the ranks but the balance of power among remaining commanders.

Analysts suggested that as the investigations deepened, there was growing turbulence inside the military elite, including between commanders focused on warfighting goals and officers tasked with enforcing political loyalty.

The final straw came when Xi moved to promote Gen Zhang Shengmin to vice chair of the Central Military Commission, said Christopher K Johnson, a former US government intelligence officer who is now president of China Strategies Group, a consultancy firm.

NYT

Why is hantavirus drawing global attention?

What is hantavirus? What happened on the expedition cruise ship MV Hondius early this month? How does hantavirus spread? Why are health agencies monitoring recent cases? What are the symptoms and treatment options? How concerned should the public be?

Atira Elssa Johnson

The story so far:

Following a hantavirus outbreak on the MV *Hondius* expedition cruise ship in early May, in which three deaths were reported and at least five others were infected, global attention has once again turned to the group of viruses. Hantavirus had made headlines last year following the passing of Betsy Hackman, wife of renowned American actor Gene Hackman.

What happened on the ship?

The Dutch expedition cruise ship was travelling from Ushuaia in Argentina across parts of the South Atlantic towards Cape Verde and the Canary Islands when cases were identified among both the passengers and the crew.

The World Health Organization (WHO) said 147 passengers and crew were onboard, and 34 passengers and crew had previously disembarked. It said that as of May 8, there were eight cases (six confirmed and two probable cases) reported. Three of them died (two confirmed and one probable) after contracting the Andes strain of hantavirus. Several others were hospitalised with symptoms including fever and breathing difficulties.



MV *Hondius* docks off Cape Verde's Praia port on May 4, as health authorities investigate suspected hantavirus cases. REUTERS

WHO has stated that hantavirus does not spread easily between humans like airborne viruses such as influenza or SARS-CoV-2

After confirmed and suspected cases had been identified among passengers after they left the ship and travelled to different countries, health authorities in Singapore, Switzerland, South Africa, Spain, and the U.S. began tracking and monitoring passengers.

What is hantavirus?

Hantaviruses are a group of viruses mainly carried by rodents such as rats and mice. Human beings can get infected after coming into contact with infected rodent urine, saliva, or droppings, especially while cleaning or disturbing contaminated areas, which can release virus particles into the air.

Hantavirus infections can affect either the lungs or the kidneys. Some strains can cause hantavirus pulmonary syndrome, a severe respiratory illness, while others can lead to haemorrhagic fever with renal syndrome, affecting the kidneys and blood vessels. WHO states that even though most hantaviruses do not spread from one human to another, the Andes virus strain found in parts of South America has shown some human-to-human transmission, usually among close contacts.

Why are health agencies concerned now?

The outbreak linked to the MV *Hondius* cruise ship drew attention because passengers travelled across several countries before the infection was identified. WHO reported that cases were characterised by fever, gastrointestinal symptoms, pneumonia, respiratory distress, and shock. Reacting to fears of another pandemic, officials from WHO and the Disease Control and Prevention have stressed that hantavirus spreads very differently from viruses such as COVID-19 and is far less transmissible.

What are the symptoms?

WHO states that symptoms usually appear between one and eight weeks after exposure. Early symptoms are often flu-like and can include fever, muscle aches, fatigue, headache, chills, nausea, vomiting, abdominal pain, and dizziness.

In severe cases, the infection can affect the

lungs, causing coughing, chest tightness, breathing difficulty, and fluid build-up in the lungs. Some forms of the disease can also affect the kidneys and blood vessels, leading to kidney complications or bleeding problems. Since the symptoms can resemble illnesses such as influenza, COVID-19, dengue, or pneumonia, diagnosis may sometimes be delayed. Even though infections remain rare overall, severe respiratory forms of hantavirus infection can be dangerous, particularly without early medical care.

Who is at risk?

People living or working in rodent-prone environments face the highest risk. Farmers, forestry workers, campers, construction workers, and people cleaning poorly ventilated or abandoned buildings are vulnerable. Health agencies also advise caution while handling pet rodents or entering rodent-infested spaces.

Is there a treatment or cure?

WHO notes that early diagnosis and timely medical attention can significantly improve outcomes. Prevention is important, particularly through rodent control, proper sanitation, and safe cleaning practices in potentially contaminated environments.

Currently, there is no specific antiviral cure or approved vaccine for hantavirus infection. Treatment mainly focuses on supportive medical care, including oxygen therapy, fluid management, and intensive care support during severe illness. Some patients may require mechanical ventilation.

Could this become another pandemic?

Public health agencies say current evidence does not suggest a COVID-19-like global pandemic scenario. WHO has repeatedly stated that the overall risk to the wider public remains low and that hantavirus does not spread easily between humans like airborne viruses such as influenza or SARS-CoV-2.

The outbreak has also drawn attention to zoonotic diseases – infections that spread from animals to humans – and highlighted the importance of staying prepared as global travel and human-animal interactions increase. At the same time, WHO and other health agencies have stressed that stronger surveillance, quicker reporting, testing systems, and coordination between countries are helping health authorities respond effectively.