

Vulnerabilities in marking platform 'contained': CBSE

Board says it is 'closely monitoring the vulnerabilities' in its On-Screen Marking system; 'other exploitable weaknesses are being ruled out'; it thanks people for pointing out issues in its IT infra

Maitri Porecha
NEW DELHI

After public posts by ethical hackers exposed vulnerabilities in the On-Screen Marking platform OnMark for Class 12 answer sheets, the Central Board of Secondary Education (CBSE) on Sunday said the identified vulnerabilities "have been contained and other exploitable weaknesses are being ruled out".

The CBSE said it was "grateful" to alert citizens for pointing out "such weaknesses".

"We have been closely monitoring the vulnerabilities in the OnMark portal of our service provider that are being flagged in the public domain. An expert team of cybersecurity professionals has been de-



Students' cause: NSUI president Vinod Jakhar during a protest at the CBSE headquarters in New Delhi. ANI

ployed over the last few days from across various arms of the government as well as the IITs [Indian Institutes of Technology] to fortify these systems, including taking them over to a more secure set-up," the CBSE said in an official statement on X. "The identified vulnerabilities have

been contained, and other exploitable weaknesses are being ruled out."

The Board's statement comes after 19-year-old ethical hacker Nisarga Adhikary said he had hacked its digital evaluation ecosystem. Parents and students had raised concern regarding the evaluation

Rahul slams govt., CBSE over OSM controversy

NEW DELHI

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Sunday sharpened his attack on the Centre and the CBSE over the OSM issue, describing it as a 'fraud' and alleging that changes in tender conditions had enabled irregularities in the scanning of answer sheets. » PAGE 11

process and glitches in its portal.

Speaking with *The Hindu*, Mr. Adhikary said he felt "happy and satisfied" that the CBSE had finally acknowledged the vulnerabilities in its ecosystem.

CONTINUED ON

» PAGE 10

'Vulnerabilities in CBSE platform contained'

"I sent my first report to the CBSE on February 25, and within three to four days, they took the portal down," he said. "Six or seven vulnerabilities were still active and exploitable later but the CBSE did not respond to my e-mails. This was pretty frustrating. I noticed that the CBSE had poorly managed infrastructure and the passwords used were easy to guess," Mr. Adhikary said.

Earlier, the Board had rejected claims that its evaluation platform had been compromised. Mr. Adhikary had countered this claim.

On May 30, Mr. Adhikary managed to hack into the CBSE's Principals dashboard in the On-Screen Marking platform. "The dashboard and the portal had had 9.3 million columns and rows of sensitive student data, including images of answer sheets of students which lay unprotected and could be easily tampered with," he said.

He has alleged that there are data sovereignty issues with how COEMPT Eduteck [the CBSE's technology vendor] handled sensitive student exam data. He has alleged that an Amazon Web Services (AWS) bucket containing 2026 answer sheets and question papers could be accessed without authentication.

"COEMPT should have ideally stored the data on their own servers, but they took the 'cheap easy route' of storing answer sheets in Amazon Web Services public buckets without security checks," Mr. Adhikary said. Sensitive data, including personal information of students, was processed by Google's Gemini in automation scripts prepared by quality assurance engineers of COEMPT, he added. Mr. Adhikary called this "scary" and "sad", where a third party sends such data to the U.S. for processing. "Data Privacy Laws are not respected and they [the company] should get sued for doing this without student consent," he said.

Enumeration for Phase 3 of SIR begins in Odisha, Mizoram, Sikkim, Manipur

Sreeparna Chakrabarty

NEW DELHI

The enumeration phase of the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls has started in Odisha, Mizoram, Sikkim, and Manipur as announced by the Election Commission (EC).

All eligible electors whose enumeration forms are received by the Electoral Registration Officer on or before June 28 will be included on the draft electoral rolls.

The EC, which has completed the SIR in 10 States and three Union Territories in two phases and a special revision in Assam, announced the third round of the SIR on May 14. The third phase of the exercise will be carried out in a staggered manner in 16 States



Former Odisha CM and Biju Janata Dal chief Naveen Patnaik signs the enumeration form for the SIR in Bhubaneswar. PTI

and three Union Territories – Delhi, Odisha, Mizoram, Sikkim, Manipur, Uttarakhand, Andhra Pradesh, Arunachal Pradesh, Haryana, Chandigarh, Telangana, Punjab, Karnataka, Meghalaya, Maharashtra, Jharkhand, Nagaland, Tripura, Dadra

and Nagar Haveli and Daman and Diu – which have a combined voter base of 36.73 crore.

The EC had said the enumeration phase would start in Odisha, Mizoram, Sikkim, and Manipur on May 30 and continue till June 28. Voters who are un-

able to submit their enumeration forms by that date may apply through Form 6 – meant for the inclusion of new voters – along with the prescribed declaration form, during the claims and objections period.

The poll body said on Sunday that the main objective of the SIR was to ensure that “no eligible citizen is left out while no ineligible person is included on the electoral roll”.

“Every person who is a citizen of India and who is not less than eighteen years of age on the qualifying date and is not otherwise disqualified under any law shall be entitled to be registered on the electoral roll,” it said in a statement.

CONTINUED ON

» PAGE 10

Admiral Swaminathan takes charge as 27th chief of Navy

Saurabh Trivedi

NEW DELHI

Admiral Krishna Swaminathan on Sunday assumed charge as the 27th Chief of the Naval Staff (CNS) of the Indian Navy, succeeding Admiral Dinesh Kumar Tripathi, who retired after over 41 years of service.

Soon after taking over the command of the maritime force, Admiral Swaminathan reaffirmed the Navy's commitment to protecting national and economic interests amid an increasingly complex regional security environment. Speaking to reporters on the occasion, the new Navy chief said he was honoured to lead the force at a time when maritime security challenges continue to evolve.

"I'm extremely grateful to have this opportunity to serve the Indian Navy and the nation in this capacity. The Indian Navy stands vi-



Adm. Krishna Swaminathan with outgoing Navy chief Adm. Dinesh Kumar Tripathi in New Delhi. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

giant to protect national interests and is actively deployed in a regional security environment that remains challenging, complex, unpredictable and uncertain," he said.

Highlighting his priorities as the Chief of the Naval Staff, Admiral Swaminathan stressed the importance of maintaining the highest standards of operational readiness and combat effectiveness. He said the Navy would conti-

nue its ongoing modernisation drive while accelerating the induction of niche and emerging technologies to strengthen its operational capabilities. "The Indian Navy is well set on a course of capability enhancement and modernisation. It shall be my endeavour to sustain the growth momentum, consolidate ongoing programmes and sharpen our operational capabilities," he added.

Commissioned into the Indian Navy on July 1, 1987, Admiral Swaminathan is a Communication and Electronic Warfare specialist with nearly four decades of distinguished service.

During his career, he has held several key operational and staff appointments, including Commander of Western Fleet, Vice Chief of Naval Staff and Flag Officer Commanding-in-Chief of Western Naval Command, a position he held prior to becoming the Navy chief.

General Subramani takes charge as CDS; lays emphasis on 'JAI'

Saurabh Trivedi

NEW DELHI

General N.S. Raja Subramani on Sunday assumed charge as India's third Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) and Secretary, Department of Military Affairs.

Soon after assuming office, General Subramani paid tribute to fallen soldiers by laying a wreath at the National War Memorial in New Delhi. He was later accorded a ceremonial Tri-Services Guard of Honour at South Block.

Addressing reporters, the new CDS expressed gratitude for the trust reposed in the armed forces and reaffirmed his commitment to strengthening national security through greater integration among the services. "The Indian Army, Navy, Air Force, Ministry of Defence, strategic institutions and all stakeholders stand united as part of the Whole of Nation approach to strengthen India's security," he said.

He said the armed forces would work towards implementing Prime Minister Narendra Modi's vision of "JAI" – Jointness, Atma Nirbharta (self-sufficiency), and Innovation. He



Gen. N.S. Raja Subramani

said organisational reforms aimed at enhancing synergy, integration, and operational effectiveness among the three services would remain a key focus area. "Atma Nirbharta is a central pillar of our national security. We will accelerate the development, induction, and integration of indigenous weapons in our armed forces," he said, while stressing the need for innovation in thought and action.

A highly decorated officer with more than four decades of service, General Subramani was commissioned into the Garhwal Rifles in December 1985. He has held several key command and staff appointments, including General Officer Commanding 2 Corps, GOC-in-C Central Command, and Vice Chief of the Army Staff.

Govt seeks to bring back delimitation Bill, push joint polls by 2029

Liz Mathew
& Arun Janardhanan

New Delhi, Chennai, May 31

IN THE wake of its defeat in Parliament over its attempt to push the delimitation Bill, moves are on within the Government to revive the legislation and also bring in the One Nation One Election Bill — both before the 2029 Lok Sabha elections, *The Indian Express* has learnt.

To this effect, emboldened by its victory in West Bengal, sources said, the BJP is reaching out to regional parties

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Delimitation Bill

eyeing a political realignment in Parliament. This, even as the main Opposition Congress has categorically said that the Government should follow due process and consult all parties before taking any step.

Sources said the Union Home Ministry is preparing a fresh delimitation Bill after its attempt to pass the Constitution (One Hundred and Thirty First Amendment) Bill, 2026 fell short of the required two-thirds majority in Lok Sabha in April.

The renewed push follows the April-May Assembly elections, which dealt a severe blow to the TMC and DMK in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu, disrupting Opposition dynamics.

Sources said that within the DMK, following its shock defeat and the Congress's move to join the TVK government, there are voices open to negotiating "on specific issues" with the BJP. At the same time, the BJP is closely watching the deepening divisions within the TMC and growing anger against its leadership in West Bengal. How and when

these play out in Parliament is also a factor in the BJP strategy going forward.

In parallel, work is on to formalise the One Nation One Election Bill that seeks to synchronise Lok Sabha and Assembly polls. Currently, it is being reviewed by a 39-member Joint Parliamentary Committee (JPC). Asked about the proposed legislation, JPC chairman P P Chaudhary told *The Indian Express*: "The law will be amended soon. We are making good progress as far as the report is concerned, and we will submit the report in time." The JPC's tenure has been extended until the first day of the last week of the Monsoon session.

Another BJP leader said this law's rollout could be phased, given the varying terms of state assemblies. "For example, five states had elections just now. Seven states (UP, Uttarakhand, Punjab, Goa, Manipur, Himachal Pradesh and Gujarat) have Assembly elections due in 2027. So there is a possibility of One Nation One Election being im-

plemented in phases," he said.

The BJP is learnt to have reached out to the DMK on this. "The BJP has already approached the DMK, proposing changes to the present form of the (One Nation One Election) Bill to address the party's concerns. The draft Bill will be shared with DMK leaders to seek their support," sources said.

"Since the BJP and the DMK have been on opposite sides on a number of issues, coming together will be a gradual process. It will be issue-based at first," said a BJP leader familiar with the latest political developments in Tamil Nadu.

A senior DMK leader said: "On issues such as delimitation and One Nation One Election, the party's position has always been guided by Tamil Nadu's interests rather than ideology alone. If the Centre provides a credible assurance that states, which successfully implemented population control measures, will not be penalised in parliamentary representation, and if the existing representation ratio is protected through a mutually acceptable formula, there is no reason to re-

ject a proposal... Our concern is safeguarding Tamil Nadu's safe voice in Parliament."

DMK leaders, however, described suggestions of a political arrangement with the BJP as "premature", citing ideological and political differences. "We are nowhere near discussing alliances. The DMK's differences with the BJP are well known. But politics is not conducted in absolutes. Indian parliamentary history has seen parties extend support on specific issues or provide stability under extraordinary circumstances, as happened during the Vajpayee years. Any future decision would depend entirely on the political context and whether Tamil Nadu's interests and federal rights are protected," a former DMK minister said.

When the delimitation Bill was taken up, the Opposition INDIA bloc voted as a united front with 230 MPs, including those from the Congress, DMK (22) and TMC (28). The bloc had objected to the Bill linking the contentious expansion of the Lok Sabha and the rollout of the women's reservation Act, and had raised fears about the marginalisation of southern states'

representation.

During the debate, Union Home Minister Amit Shah had said the Government was willing to bring an amendment to ensure a uniform 50% increase in Lok Sabha seats across states if the Opposition agreed to support the Bill. He said that by this formula, the southern states would not lose out.

Asked whether the Congress would support a fresh delimitation Bill if its concerns were addressed, party leader Jairam Ramesh told *The Indian Express*: "First there should be an all-party meeting; give the proposals in writing — our last experience showed that there is a world of difference from what was promised and what came in the Bill. There should be discussions, and parties should get time to finalise their stances... because it's a Constitution amendment... You cannot bring in amendments during the debate."

Pointing out that the Treasury benches had held discussions with regional parties while keeping the Congress and key Opposition parties out, Ramesh said: "Even what was conveyed to them orally was not

there in the draft Bill. It showed their intentions were not clear."

While the BJP leadership is in contact with DMK leaders, including former chief minister M K Stalin, the party appears to have a different plan in West Bengal. "The internal fissures in the TMC and the intensifying anger against the party's leaders have made it vulnerable. Politics in Bengal has changed. The section that is deeply disappointed with the current TMC leadership is growing stronger by the day. TMC is not like the Congress; it is a regional party, and there could be a development, including a split, that the BJP could use to its advantage in Parliament," said a senior BJP leader.

Days after her party lost power in West Bengal, TMC chairperson Mamata Banerjee had launched a scathing attack on the new BJP government, accusing it of using political pressure and intimidation against opponents. "The more the BJP tortures TMC in Bengal, the more problems it will face in New Delhi... Our party workers and elected representatives are being tortured and intimidated, but we are holding on," she said.

BRENDAN LYNCH LEADS 4-MEMBER TEAM

US team in Delhi today, urgency to finalise deal

Trade talks come as new tariffs set to replace reciprocal tariffs in July

Ravi Dutta Mishra
New Delhi, May 31

A TEAM of United States Trade Representative (USTR) officials, led by chief negotiator Brendan Lynch, is set to commence negotiations with India over four days starting Monday to finalise an interim agreement.

Government sources said there is a sense of urgency now because a new US tariffs architecture is likely to replace the reciprocal tariffs announced by US President Donald Trump, and deemed illegal by the Supreme Court in February. The new rates under Section 301

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

E. EXPLAINED

Key to investments

For India, finalisation of an interim trade deal is seen as important in restoring confidence among investors. Also, there is a sense of urgency since a new US tariffs architecture is likely to replace reciprocal tariffs before July-end.

THE IDEAS PAGE P 11

**INDIA-OMAN PACT
HOLDS PROMISES FOR
FARMS, FACTORIES &
SMALL BUSINESSES**

US team in Delhi today, urgency to finalise deal

will come into effect on July 24.

Months of tension between New Delhi and Washington had resulted in steep 50% tariffs initially on India and an outflow of investments. The depreciation in the domestic currency that began due to steep tariffs last year has intensified in the backdrop of the energy shock following the war in the Gulf. New Delhi is also keen certainty on the US trade deal will restore confidence among investors.

While trade tensions have somewhat eased between the two countries, with the US reducing the reciprocal tariffs from 50% imposed in August last year to 18% in February this year, the negotiations for a deal remain challenging for India due to what officials describe as “unconventional US demands”.

A senior government official told The Indian Express that the current 10% across the board tariff without a deal is a preferable scenario for India than signing a deal because of US demands that interfere with sovereign decisions on the purchase of oil and sensitive agricultural items.

The US had in April launched two Section 301 probes on India in relation to “structural excess capacity” and “forced labour”. While talks have been ongoing, officials in Delhi responded to these changes, stating that surpluses

are a natural consequence of global trade and a byproduct of generalised economic conditions. Further, they said India has ratified the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 and the Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957, which require the prohibition of forced labour in all forms.

Near the finish line

The trade deal talks starting here could finally put an end to months of uncertainty, as USTR Jamieson Greer said last week that he expects to meet Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal “soon” to finalise the India-US framework deal. “On New Delhi, we have had many meaningful discussions. We have a framework agreement with the Indians. I have a team going there next week. I expect to meet my counterpart soon as well. I’d really like to be in a position to finalise our agreement based on the joint framework agreement we agreed to,” Greer said at a Council of Foreign Relations conference.

Sergio Gor, US Ambassador to India, last week said Washington expects that a bilateral trade deal with India will be signed in the “next few weeks and months”. He indicated that only “1 per cent” of the deal was left to be concluded, and negotiators were working on it. Describing US Secretary of

State Marco Rubio’s four-day visit to India which ended May 26 as “substantive”, Gor, addressing the US-India TRUST Initiative event at IIT Delhi, said, “Just last week, India had sent a team to Washington DC to finalise the last 1 per cent of that trade deal. Next week we will welcome a US delegation here to continue those talks.”

Ahead of the key talks, New Delhi is signalling greater openness in trade diplomacy. Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal last week led a delegation with 100 industry leaders to Canada, aiming to sign an agreement by the end of the year. This comes amid testy trade ties between Canada and the US during the ongoing United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement negotiations. India is also set to operationalise its trade agreement with Oman on Monday.

Uncomfortable US demands

While a government official earlier this month said India will continue purchasing Russian crude oil regardless of whether the US extends sanctions waivers, the US had imposed additional 25% tariffs on India for the purchase of Russian oil under the deal. Trade data showed that India’s purchase of Russian oil began declining before recovering from March in the backdrop of the

Demands relating to agricultural products have also been one of the biggest pressure points. The India-US joint statement said India will eliminate or reduce tariffs on all US industrial goods and a wide range of US food and agricultural products, including dried distillers’ grains (DDGs), red sorghum for animal feed, tree nuts, fresh and processed fruit, soybean oil, wine and spirits, and additional products.

Indicating signs of disagreement, the US later revised a factsheet softening its claims about the gains it had secured from New Delhi and entirely dropping a section on digital services taxes. The earlier version of the factsheet said India had “committed to” buying more American products and purchasing “over \$500 billion of U.S. energy, information and communication technology, coal, and other products”. The updated factsheet, as well as the joint statement, tempered the wording from “committed” to “intends”.

FDI & currency pressure

A slowdown in investments has resulted in a rapidly weakening currency. India saw gross Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) inflows rise to a new record high of \$94.53 billion in 2025-26, up 17% from the previous year, although the net figure was a mere \$7.65 billion, data released last week by RBI showed. The domestic currency has breached the Rs 95 per dollar level, becoming one of the worst currencies among its Asian peers.

India, Oman FTA to come into effect today

Mukesh Jagota

New Delhi, May 31

THE INDIA-OMAN Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) will take effect on Monday, extending zero-duty access on 98% of tariff lines, which cover 99.4% of India's exports to Oman. In return, India will open up 77% of its tariff lines for Oman, covering 94% of its total exports to India. This is In-

dia's 15th bilateral trade agreement. For India, the most visible gains lie in merchandise exports. Oman's gains are concentrated in energy and industrial inputs, said Ajay Srivastava, founder of GTRI. With over 6,000 India-Oman joint ventures and Indian investments exceeding \$7.5 billion — mainly in the Sohar and Salalah free zones — the CEPA is as much a strategic pact as a trade deal, he added. FE

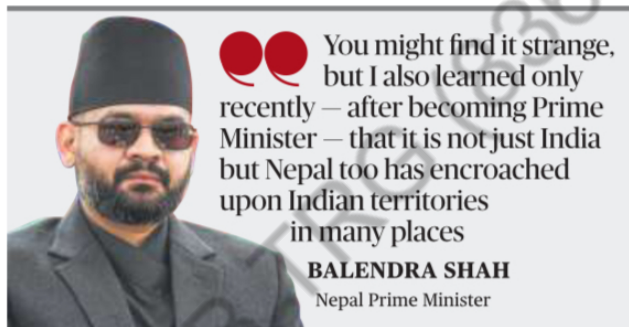
Nepal PM sparks row, says his country has encroached upon Indian territory

Sanjeev Satgainya

KATHMANDU

Nepal Prime Minister Balendra Shah said on Sunday that his country too had encroached upon Indian territory, in what is considered to be the first such public statement by a head of government of the neighbouring country.

Mr. Shah was responding to a question by a lawmaker in Parliament regarding the Kalapani region, which remains disputed between Nepal and India. “You might find it strange, but I also learned only recently – after becoming Prime Minister – that it is not just India but Nepal too has encroached



upon Indian territories in many places. Mr. Shah said, prompting an uproar in Parliament as the Opposition objected to the statement.

Nepal and India have a long-pending boundary dispute over Lipulekh, Limpiyadhura, and Kalapani and the dispute resur-

facied recently when India announced the revival of the Kailash Manasarovar Yatra pilgrimage via the Lipulekh route. Nepal then sent diplomatic notes to both India and China. India maintains that the territories are part of Uttarakhhand.

Lawmakers from the

Nepali Congress and the Nepali Communist Party demanded that the Prime Minister clarify where exactly Nepal has encroached upon Indian territory and sought the removal of his remarks from the record. “The Prime Minister said Nepal has encroached upon Indian territory,” Nepali Congress Chief Whip Basana Thapa said. “Where exactly has this happened? The Prime Minister must make the House aware of this. This is a serious and objectionable statement.”

CONTINUED ON

» PAGE 10

RSP DELEGATION VISIT

» PAGE 12

'Nepal has encroached upon Indian territory'

After Mr. Shah's remarks created a furore, the Nepal Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued a statement clarifying that the issue raised by the Prime Minister was "primarily related to encroachment in the Dasgaja area (no-man's land)" and "cross-border occupation" – that is, the use or possession of land across the border. "...situations have arisen where citizens of one country cultivate land or reside on land that falls within the territory of the other country," the Ministry said.

"Studies conducted by the technical committee have shown that, in some places, land currently being used and occupied by Nepal may actually fall on the Indian side of the border...", the Ministry added. "The Prime Minister's statement in Parliament that 'in some places, Indian land may be on Nepal's side' was made in reference to this technical reality and the issue of cross-border occupation."

From bad to worse

Trump cannot achieve with diplomacy what he failed to get through war

When Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu launched the war on Iran on February 28, their objectives were sweeping: regime change in Tehran, the dismantling of Iran's missile and nuclear programmes, and the curbing of its support for regional non-state allies. In the early days of the conflict, Mr. Trump ruled out any agreement with Iran and demanded its "unconditional surrender". The war went so badly for Washington that, three months later, Mr. Trump is negotiating a temporary ceasefire extension and the reopening of the Strait of Hormuz in exchange for economic concessions to Tehran. According to a draft MoU reported by U.S. media, Iran would restore maritime traffic through the Strait of Hormuz to pre-war levels, while the U.S. would gradually lift its blockade of Iranian ports. Tehran would also get access to its frozen funds, while the ceasefire would be extended on all fronts, including Lebanon. Yet, even if approved by both sides, the agreement is only a preliminary one. Mr. Trump no longer speaks of Iran's missile programme or its support for its regional allies. His focus has narrowed to the nuclear issue, essentially the line Barack Obama adopted in 2013, culminating in the 2015 nuclear agreement with Iran, which Mr. Trump sabotaged in 2018. Once the MoU is reached, Iran and the U.S. would start serious direct negotiations on the nuclear issue.

Mr. Trump's military campaign has failed to achieve any of its declared objectives. By striking U.S. bases across the Persian Gulf and taking control of the Strait of Hormuz, Iran widened the conflict regionally and economically. Mr. Trump announced the ceasefire on April 8, likely realising that air strikes would achieve little, and has tried to extract concessions from Iran through economic and military pressure. But Iran responded in kind. After Mr. Trump announced a blockade on Iranian ports, Tehran cancelled negotiations and pushed the nuclear file down its list of priorities. That Washington is now negotiating, through Pakistan, an MoU to extend the ceasefire and then take up the nuclear file suggests that Tehran's hardline tactics are yielding results. Tehran had previously engaged constructively with the U.S. When Mr. Trump unilaterally withdrew the U.S. from the 2015 nuclear deal, Iran was compliant with its obligations, and in early 2025 and February 2026, it was engaged in talks. So, if the U.S. seeks a deal, it must address the trust deficit and proceed on the basis of mutual concessions. If Mr. Trump is serious about a negotiated settlement, a deal is within reach. But if he seeks to achieve through diplomacy what he failed to secure through war, he risks entangling the U.S. in yet another forever war.

Iran says it doesn't trust U.S. as Trump toughens terms

Agence France-Presse

TEHRAN

Iran's chief negotiator warned the United States is not to be trusted on Sunday, saying Tehran would not agree to any deal with Washington unless it fully secures Iranian rights.

Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf's remarks came as reports emerged that U.S. President Donald Trump had sent a tougher peace proposal back to Iran, and underlined the rift that the parties still need to close.

Any further tweaks to the draft could further delay an agreement to formally end the West Asia war and reopen the Strait of Hormuz after weeks of fraught negotiations marked by sharp rhetoric and occasional flare-ups of



Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf

violence. Iran was already in negotiations with the United States about the fate of its nuclear programme in February, when the U.S. and Israel launched air and missile strikes that wiped out much of the Islamic republic's senior leadership.

And, while Tehran has long insisted that its nuclear programme is for purely civilian ends, the United States and its West-

ern allies have long suspected it aims to develop a weapon.

The *New York Times* and *Axios* reported on Saturday that Mr. Trump had sent back a "tougher" new framework to be considered by Iran, though details remain unclear.

Top priorities

Mr. Trump has said his priorities include stopping Iran from any nuclear weapon development and reopening the Hormuz shipping lane, over which Iran has sought to impose control since the war began.

According to the *Tasnim* news agency, "exchanges between Iran and the U.S. regarding the text of a possible memorandum of understanding are ongoing, with both parties regularly proposing amendments.

Israel captures Beaufort castle in Lebanon in its deepest incursion

Defence Minister Katz says Israel will hold the site while targeting 'thousands more homes' and Hezbollah infrastructure in southern Lebanon; the 12th century Crusader-built castle overlooks Litani river and has long-standing strategic importance

Associated Press

BEIRUT

Israeli troops have captured a strategic mountain topped with a Crusader-built castle in southern Lebanon in the deepest incursion into the country in more than a quarter-century, the military said on Sunday.

The capture of Beaufort castle, near the city of Nabatiyeh, came after days of air strikes and intense fighting in nearby villages where Israeli troops fought Hezbollah members in the rugged area.

Its capture marks a major development in the latest Israel-Hezbollah war,



Holding down the fort: Israeli soldiers operate at Beaufort Ridge in southern Lebanon on Sunday. REUTERS

which began on March 2 when Hezbollah fired rockets into northern Israel two days after the U.S. and Israel attacked its main backer, Iran.

"The occupation of Beaufort is a dramatic stage and a dramatic shift in the policies we are leading," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said.

Defence Minister Israel Katz wrote on X that they raised an Israeli flag over the castle. Israeli troops previously captured the castle in 1982 and held it until they withdrew from Lebanon in 2000.

"Twenty six years after the withdrawal from the security zone in Lebanon, the Israeli flag has returned to fly on the peaks that overlook the Galilee towns," Mr. Katz said at a memorial ceremony for Israeli soldiers killed in its previous occupation of southern Lebanon.

Mr. Katz said Israel intends to hold the castle as its troops work to destroy thousands more homes

that he says were used by Hezbollah and other military infrastructure in southern Lebanon.

The Beaufort fortress, perched high atop Lebanon's rolling green hills and overlooking the Litani River, has been a strategic military asset for centuries.

Built as a Crusader castle around the 12th century on top of previous fortifications, it has also been used by Saladin's Jerusalem army, Mamluks, Ottomans, the French mandate, the Palestine Liberation Organisation and the Israeli military until 2000, when it was partially restored and opened to visitors.

U.S. to send only used subs to Australia in revised defence deal

Agence France-Presse

SINGAPORE

Australia will only receive used nuclear-powered submarines from the United States as part of an agreement to “streamline” the AUKUS deal, with the move branded on Sunday as a “cost-effective” measure by Defence Minister Richard Marles.

The two nations – together with the third partner in their security pact, Britain – met at Singapore’s Shangri-La Dialogue, which brings together top defence officials and experts from about 45 countries.

Under the 2021 AUKUS deal, Australia is expected

to receive at least three so-called “Virginia-class” nuclear-powered submarines from the United States within 15 years.

Australia had been expecting to receive two used submarines and one new one, but the countries announced on Saturday that all three will now be in-service vessels from the U.S. Navy stock.

When asked why Canberra was now receiving only used equipment, Mr. Marles, who is also Deputy Prime Minister, told presspersons on Sunday it would be more cost-effective. In a joint statement, the U.S. and the U.K. confirmed the revision to the submarine agreement.

Japan's Defence Minister takes veiled swipe at China at Shangri-La summit

Agence France-Presse

SINGAPORE

Japan's Defence Minister took a veiled swipe at China on Sunday, pledging to keep strengthening the military despite Beijing's criticism of Tokyo's increasingly muscular security stance.

Under Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, Japan has quickened its pivot towards a more proactive defence policy, further shaking off – with U.S. encouragement – a pacifist outlook in place since the end of the Second World War. The change has drawn frequent rebukes from Beijing, which has accused Tokyo of following a reckless policy of “new



Shinjiro Koizumi, Japan's Defence Minister, speaks at the Shangri-La Dialogue security summit in Singapore on Sunday. REUTERS

militarism” that could destabilise the region.

Japanese Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi hit back on Sunday, saying “nothing could be further from the truth”.

“Think about it. There is a country that has a huge

arsenal of nuclear weapons and strategic bombers,” Mr. Koizumi said at the annual IISS Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore.

“Japan has neither of such weapons. And yet, Japan is labelled [as] ‘new militarism’. Isn't it

strange?” he said, without mentioning China by name.

China is thought to possess hundreds of nuclear warheads and has been rapidly developing its military in recent years.

A diplomatic spat between the Asian rivals has been rumbling since Ms. Takaichi suggested in November that Japan might intervene militarily if China were to attempt to seize Taiwan, the self-ruled island that Beijing claims is part of its territory.

Mr. Koizumi said that China was expanding its military capabilities “without sufficient transparency” and that its military activities were “a matter of serious concern for Japan”.

U.S. to send only used subs to Australia in revised defence deal

Agence France-Presse

SINGAPORE

Australia will only receive used nuclear-powered submarines from the United States as part of an agreement to “streamline” the AUKUS deal, with the move branded on Sunday as a “cost-effective” measure by Defence Minister Richard Marles.

The two nations – together with the third partner in their security pact, Britain – met at Singapore’s Shangri-La Dialogue, which brings together top defence officials and experts from about 45 countries.

Under the 2021 AUKUS deal, Australia is expected

to receive at least three so-called “Virginia-class” nuclear-powered submarines from the United States within 15 years.

Australia had been expecting to receive two used submarines and one new one, but the countries announced on Saturday that all three will now be in-service vessels from the U.S. Navy stock.

When asked why Canberra was now receiving only used equipment, Mr. Marles, who is also Deputy Prime Minister, told presspersons on Sunday it would be more cost-effective. In a joint statement, the U.S. and the U.K. confirmed the revision to the submarine agreement.

REPEAT

REPEAT

Doval holds talks with Myanmar President

Press Trust of India

NEW DELHI

National Security Adviser Ajit Doval on Sunday met Myanmar's President U Min Aung Hlaing and discussed key issues relating to bilateral ties.

Mr. Hlaing, who is on a five-day trip to India, is scheduled to hold wide-ranging talks with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Monday, focusing on ramping up ties in trade, connectivity, border security and defence.

Mr. Hlaing's visit to India comes less than two months after he became the President following Myanmar's parliamentary elections. The elections were held in December and January, after years of protests against the ruling military-junta that seized power in a coup on February 1, 2021, overthrowing the democratically elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi.

Myanmar is one of India's strategic neighbours and shares a 1,640-kilometre-long border with a number of northeastern States, including militancy-hit Nagaland and Manipur.

Mr. Hlaing will also travel to Mumbai on June 2 for business interactions.

Prisons in India continue to be overcrowded by undertrials

More than half of the States/UTs had an occupancy rate of over 100% in 2024 despite a modest increase in capacity

DATA POINT

Sambavi Parthasarathy

While the latest Prison Statistics report released by the National Crime Records Bureau show that the occupancy rate in Indian jails fell to a decade-low of 112.7% in 2024, data shows that overcrowding remains a persisting problem in Indian prisons driven largely by a high share of undertrials. The report also highlighted other concerns such as insufficient capacity expansion and high levels of staff vacancies.

In more than half of the States/ Union Territories (UTs) in India, prisons continue to operate beyond their sanctioned capacity. At the end of 2024, the country had about 1,333 jails with a capacity of 4.53 lakh inmates. However, with an inmate population of over 5.11 lakh, prisons continued to be overcrowded.

A Parliamentary Committee report, titled 'Prison- Conditions, Infrastructure and Reforms', noted that overcrowding strains resources, compromises living standards, increases tensions among inmates and limits their access to health-care and rehabilitation facilities. It also recommended various measures such as the constructions of new buildings, barracks and prisons, transfers to other jails and free legal aid.

While the total number of jails remained lower than the pre-pandemic period, prison capacity has increased by 24% between 2015 and 2024 largely due to renovations and expansions which were carried out across 2,268 prisons in this period (Chart 1). Over 120 prisons were newly constructed in these years.

Though overall capacity has improved modestly, several States are yet to catch up. A Statewise analysis shows that more than half of the States had an occupancy rate of over 100% in 2024. Delhi re-

corded the highest occupancy rate in the country at 194% in 2024, much like the previous year when its occupancy rate stood at 200% (Chart 2). Other major States/UTs which saw high occupancy rates include Jammu and Kashmir, where occupancy rates increased from a mere 78% in 2015 to over 148% in 2023 and 2024.

However, the levels have relatively reduced in States such as Uttar Pradesh and Chhattisgarh which had previously registered higher occupancy rates. For instance, Chhattisgarh registered an occupancy rate of 234% in 2015. As per the latest report, this figure has decreased to 127.6%.

This problem of overcrowded prisons can be attributed to the disproportionately higher share of undertrials – who accounted for about 73% of the total inmate population in 2024 (Chart 3). While this is much lower than in 2021, when the undertrial population in prison peaked at about 77%, this is still higher than pre-COVID periods. On the other hand, the share of convicts in prisons reduced from about 32% in 2016 to 26.6% in 2024.

A Statewise analysis shows that in about 14 States/UTs, the share of undertrials is higher than the all India average (Chart 4). With over 87% of its inmates being undertrials, Delhi and Bihar were the two major States/UTs to have the highest share of undertrial population in its prisons.

Further, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Home Affairs also expressed concern that the high levels of staff vacancies has become the most neglected part of prison administration. States/UTs such as Delhi and Jammu which registered higher occupancy rates and a higher share of undertrials also had a higher share of staff vacancies. Almost half of the sanctioned posts remained vacant in about 8 States/UTs. At least 60% of its sanctioned prison staff remained vacant in Delhi and Jammu and Kashmir.

Arrested development

The data for the charts were sourced from the Prison Statistics India report, published by the National Crime Records Bureau

Chart 1: The total number of jails (left axis) and available capacity (right axis) at the end of each year

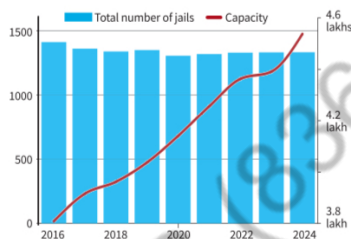


Chart 3: Types of prison inmates in jails between 2016 and 2024. Undertrials disproportionately form a higher share of inmates

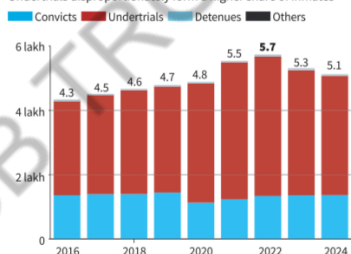


Chart 4: Undertrials as a share of the total population of inmates in 2024. The chart shows only select States in which the share of undertrials exceed the national average

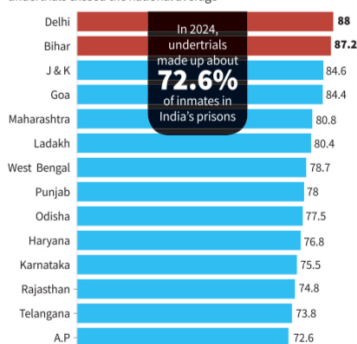


Chart 2: Prison occupancy rates in select States/UTs in the 2015-2024 period. The darker the blue, the higher the occupancy rate

