

# SC panel proposes ban on AI use to decide verdicts, judge bail risks

Ananthakrishnan G  
New Delhi, June 4

A COMPLETE ban on using artificial intelligence (AI) to decide judicial outcomes; restrictions on AI tools that predict or profile parties and witnesses; and a prohibition on undisclosed or unexplainable AI systems in court processes—these are among the draft regulations proposed by the Supreme Court AI Committee on the use of the technology in courts. The preliminary draft of the 'Regulations for Use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Courts, 2026' published by the top court on Wednesday emphasises that the use of AI in court processes will always "remain strictly subservient to human judgment and judicial authority".

Every AI system, it says, will function solely in an assistive capacity and "shall not supplant or compromise the independent exercise of judicial authority by a duly appointed judicial officer" and "the ultimate authority to determine matters of law, fact and justice shall vest exclusively in the judicial officers of the competent jurisdiction".

The committee—chaired by Supreme Court judge Justice P S Narasimha, and including Justices Sanjeev Sachdeva, Raja Vijayraghavan V, Anoop

## *The use of AI in court will remain strictly subservient to human judgement & judicial authority, says committee*

Chitkara, and Suraj Govindaraj as members—has now sought the views and suggestions of all stakeholders and the general public on the draft recommendations before finalising them. The suggestions have to be submitted by June 20.

As per the draft, AI systems used in court processes "shall be designed, trained and deployed in a manner that promotes fairness and avoids discrimination". "No AI System shall be deployed that perpetuates, amplifies, or introduces bias on the grounds of race, religion, caste, sex, gender, disability, language, economic status, or any other ground prohibited under the Constitution or any law for the time being in force and special care shall be taken to protect the rights and interests of vulnerable groups including women, children, persons with disabilities, marginalised and minority communities, and persons from economically and socially disad-

vantaged backgrounds," it adds.

The systems will be subject to the provisions of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act, 2023.

Permissible uses of AI include for case management, cause list preparation, hearing scheduling, transcription of court proceedings, translation of judgments etc, legal research, administrative functions including case filing assistance, defect scrutiny, record management and judicial resource allocation, conversational AI assistants and guided chatbots to assist litigants and other stakeholders in accessing court services and understanding procedural requirements, accessibility services for persons with disabilities or language barriers and anonymisation of court records.

Among the prohibitions, the draft says that no personal data of any person shall be used to train, test, or refine any AI system without the prior approval of the appropriate authority, or to perform the function of adjudication or sentencing in any matter without mandatory human-in-the-loop. It added that any output of an AI system in relation to adjudicative or sentencing questions shall be treated as advisory only and will be subject to independent judicial evaluation.

The proposal says that "no AI system shall be used for risk scoring for any purpose in court processes, including the assessment of flight risk, prediction of recidivism, evaluation of bail eligibility, or determination of the credibility of parties or witnesses" and that "no undisclosed, opaque, or unexplainable AI system shall be used in any court process that may materially affect the lawful rights or personal liberty of any party".

The apex body, it recommends, would include two SC judges nominated by the CJI, one of whom shall serve as ex-officio chairperson; two high court Chief Justices nominated by the CJI; two high court judges nominated by the CJI; one member from an institution of national importance or any institution of repute, as may be nominated by the CJI; an officer not below the rank of joint secretary to the Government of India in the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology; a finance expert, to be nominated by the CJI; a cybersecurity expert, to be nominated by the CJI; one or more advocates of standing, nominated by the CJI with expertise in technology related laws or data privacy or related fields; and the professor heading the field of AI at the NJAP.

# Army chief: Accelerating absorption of drones, better command systems

**Amrita Nayak Dutta**

*New Delhi, June 4*

UNDERLINING THAT the Indian Army has accelerated the absorption of drones, UAVs, loitering munitions and counter-UAS systems in a structured manner, Army chief General Upendra Dwivedi said Thursday that the larger aim of the Army is not merely to procure drones, but to absorb them into the way the Army trains, operates and fights.

In an interview with *The Indian Express*, General Dwivedi said the procurement and in-



**General Upendra Dwivedi**

duction of drones cover a wide range of capabilities, that the Army is also introducing better command and control arrangements for a drone-dense battle-

field, including a Unified Control Centre at division levels to manage the growing number of UAS and C-UAS systems at the tactical level.

General Dwivedi is set to retire as the Army chief at the end of this month. Much of the Army's accelerated move towards procuring and inducting drones, unmanned aerial systems, loitering munitions and counter-drone capabilities have gathered pace during his tenure in the last two years. Various structures, procedures and command systems needed

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# Energy tie-up tops bilateral agenda as Modi meets Delcy

PM holds discussions with Venezuela's Acting President on also expanding cooperation in critical minerals, technology, agriculture and health; importance of Global South solidarity emphasised

**Kallol Bhattacharjee**  
NEW DELHI

India's partnership with Venezuela is of "immense importance" for the Global South, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday, welcoming Delcy Rodriguez, the Acting President of Venezuela, even as the South American country called "energy security a fundamental pillar of the bilateral relationship".

Venezuela is still dealing with the aftermath of the abduction of President Nicolas Maduro by the U.S. military in January. Officials said Ms. Rodriguez, whose country is dealing with 'political transition' and 'fundamental economic transformation', described India as a "trusted partner". The leader, who arrived here on Wednesday, is on a five-day visit.

"We had extensive discussions on expanding our



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with Venezuelan Acting President Delcy Rodriguez in New Delhi on Thursday. SHIV KUMAR PUSHPAKAR

cooperation in energy, critical minerals, technology, agriculture, health and people-to-people ties. As a valued partner in Latin America, our close cooperation with Venezuela holds immense importance for the Global South. We will continue to work together for the mutual benefit of the people of our nations," said Mr. Modi after the meeting.

A press release from the Venezuelan government said the meeting was aimed at "strengthening the role of both nations in the geopolitical context of the Global South and on boosting mutually beneficial macroeconomic agreements". It described India as "one of the main destinations for the Nation's energy exports, making energy security a funda-

mental pillar of the bilateral relationship".

Ms. Rodriguez, who was accompanied by Ministers of Economy, Foreign Affairs, Science and Technology, and Transport and Communications, conducted a "comprehensive review of the mutual cooperation map", the press note said, adding that the bilateral relation is in an "excellent state".

Officials revealed that Ms. Rodriguez discussed the political situation in Venezuela in a "frank conversation" with Mr. Modi during official-level talks and over the working lunch that followed. "We all know there was a transition in Venezuela, and we are working with a government that is friendly and that wants partnership with India. We want to reciprocate that," said Rudendra Tandon, Secretary (East) of the External Affairs Ministry, while briefing the media.

# India, U.K. launch observatory for critical minerals

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Seeking to expand cooperation and technology-sharing in the realm of critical minerals, India and the United Kingdom on Thursday formally launched the Critical Minerals Global Supply Chain Observatory (GSCO).

The platform – to be jointly operated by India's Technology Innovation in Exploration & Mining Foundation (TEXMiN), Indian Institute of Technology (ISM) Dhanbad and U.K.'s University of Cambridge – will institute a data-driven platform to monitor and analyse global critical mineral supply chains.

In a social media post, Union Minister G. Kishan Reddy wrote, "This is a major step towards strengthening critical mineral supply chains, supporting clean energy transitions, and building resilient global supply chains through the India-U.K. partnership."



Union Minister for Coal Kishan Reddy with U.K. Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper.

India and the U.K. were well-positioned to construct a mutually beneficial partnership on the back of their newly firm-ed-up comprehensive trade deal and the defence industrial road map, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said on Thursday. He made the remarks during a meeting with British Foreign Secretary Yvette Cooper.

Ms. Cooper stated the observatory could also serve "as a foundation for broader cooperation across the critical minerals sector and related strategic industries."

(With PTI inputs)

# Kuki organisation in Manipur opposes SIR of electoral rolls

**The Hindu Bureau**  
GUWAHATI

An apex Kuki organisation has opposed the ongoing Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in conflict-scarred Manipur, alleging that it has excluded thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs) from the community.

The Kuki Inpi Manipur (KIM) said it expected the government to resolve the issue of some 59,000 Kuki-Zo IDPs, and help them return home to participate in the SIR exercise.

“Proceeding with such a critical electoral and administrative exercise without ensuring the participation of a large and vulnerable section of the population undermines the very principles of democratic representation. The exclusion, whether direct or indirect, of these IDPs from the SIR process renders the exer-

cise incomplete and unacceptable in its present form,” the organisation said in a statement on Thursday.

The government and the district authorities should take immediate and concrete steps to establish accessible and inclusive mechanisms to let all affected IDPs be duly enrolled and participate in the revision process, the KIM said.

“Any continuation of the SIR without such provisions would not only be unjust but would also call into question the legitimacy and credibility of the entire exercise,” the organisation said.

The KIM said leaving any displaced person out would raise questions on the fairness and inclusivity of the SIR exercise, which was launched in Manipur, Mizoram and Sikkim a few days ago.

# Rajnath announces revised financial powers for armed forces to boost autonomy

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Thursday revised the financial powers of the defence forces via the framework for the Delegation of Financial Powers for Defence Services, including for medical and works projects. The move aims to enhance operational efficiency, accelerate procurement, and strengthen self-reliance in the defence sector.

According to the Ministry of Defence, financial powers have been enhanced by up to 100% and, in certain cases, more than doubled. The move is expected to empower field commanders with greater decision-making authority, enabling faster conclusion of contracts and timely execution of projects.

The Ministry stated that



Defence Minister Rajnath Singh during a meeting regarding the approval of enhanced financial powers for armed forces. PTI

financial powers related to indigenisation and research and development within the military ecosystem have been doubled to further the government's Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative and reduce dependence on foreign Original Equipment Manufacturers (OEMs). The revised framework is expected to facilitate procurement worth over ₹1.25 lakh crore through the revenue route,

in line with the current year's budgetary allocations.

Special financial powers delegated to Army, Navy, and Air Force commanders have also been significantly enhanced, including a 100% increase in the overall ceiling to meet urgent operational requirements. The revised provisions additionally promote joint procurement by the lead service.

# Nicobar port has no 'strategic goals', govt. body said in 2024

EXCLUSIVE

**Jacob Koshy**  
NEW DELHI

The Public Investment Board (PIB), a Finance Ministry body that appraises large public investments, had in August 2024 termed the proposed International Container Transshipment Port (ICTP) at Galathea Bay in Great Nicobar Island as lacking “strategic objectives”.

At the August meeting, it had advised the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways (MoPSW) to include a strategic case in its proposal. A little over a year later, the same project was formally notified as a “strategic project” by the Ministry of Defence, according to records of a March 2026 meeting viewed by *The Hindu*.

The “strategic” nature of the proposed ₹81,000-crore Great Nicobar Pro-

## The Nicobar question

The “strategic” nature of the project has been the Centre’s excuse for not making public the contents of a report by a High Powered Committee on the environmental impact of the project

The Public Investment Board, a Finance Ministry body, termed the port-component of the Nicobar project as “lacking strategic objectives” in August 2024

A year later, the Ministry of Defence labels it as a “strategic project”



In the last year or so, the ₹81,000-crore project is being cast in a maritime security lens, centred around the threat from China

ject, which consists of the ICTP, a township, an airport, a gas-powered power plant, and a tourism zone, has been the Centre’s excuse, since at least 2022, for not making public the contents of a report by a High Powered Committee (HPC) on the cumulative environmental impact of the project. It has also denied Right To Information requests on environmental clearances for the project on the same grounds.

The PIB’s view surfaces in records of meetings held

on March 17 and 19, 2026, by another Finance Ministry body – the Public-Private Partnership Appraisal Committee (PPPAC) – tasked with vetting project proposals worth ₹500 crore and above involving a partnership with private players. *The Hindu* has viewed the PPPAC meeting records and reached out to the Finance Ministry for comment, but has not received one till press time.

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# Nicobar port's lack of 'strategic goals' flagged

The proposal, sponsored by the MoPSW with the Kamarajar Port Limited (KPL) in Chennai as the implementing agency, sought PPPAC clearance to build the port in two phases and, crucially, approval for ₹12,230 crore as Viability Gap Funding (VGF) to make the commercially marginal project bankable. VGF is a one-time grant given to support infrastructure projects that are economically justified but fall short of commercial (financial) viability.

The PPPAC cleared the proposal “unanimously” though it refused the VGF, recommending instead that the MoPSW use its internal budget for the same. Earlier this week, Congress MP Jairam Ramesh wrote to Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav that “...the narrative on the Great Nicobar Island Project has suddenly shifted... faced with incontrovertible evidence of its hugely adverse ecological impacts, the Union Government is now emphasizing its supposed strategic rationale.” He added that “...the Great Nicobar Island Project as presently conceived is overwhelmingly a commercial enterprise”.

“Until the environment clearance (accorded in November 2022) there was no real reference by the Government of it being a strategic project... and even then it was only the airport (with civilian and military use),” researcher and author Pankaj Sekhsaria, who has extensively documented the environmental threat posed by the project, told *The Hindu*.

The ICTP is a significant component of the much bigger Great Nicobar Island Development Project and is a Ministry of Home Affairs initiative, with the Andaman and Nicobar Islands Integrated Development Corporation Limited (ANIIDCO) as the proponent of the overall project and holder of environmental clearance.

The 2021 documents that conceived the Great Nicobar programme and the January 2023 Expression of Interest for the port described it as a means of capturing transshipment cargo currently routed through Colombo, Singapore, and Port Klang, with the government estimating annual foreign exchange savings of about \$200 million, cumulatively reaching around \$1 billion by 2047.

In the last year or so, the project has volubly been cast in a maritime security lens, centred around the threat from China. The project has hence been cast as a counterweight to Chinese naval expansion in the Indian Ocean. This is an argument given fresh impetus by the U.S.-Iran confrontation over the Strait of Hormuz.

Former Chief of Staff of the Integrated Andaman and Nicobar Command, Rear Admiral Sudhir Pillai, has called infrastructure built there without a maritime doctrine “a platform without a theory”, while former Navy Chief Admiral Arun Prakash has argued that the existing military presence can be reinforced without the ecological damage the project entails.

# Funding India's climate future, a trillion-dollar question

**T**here is one figure that should command the attention of every policymaker, banker, and financial expert in India. India will require ₹162.5 trillion – roughly \$2.5 trillion – by 2030 to meet its Nationally Determined Contributions. Over the longer term, the cost of achieving net-zero emissions by 2070 is estimated at \$10.1 trillion, nearly three times India's current GDP.

This is not a counsel of despair. India has more tools to bridge this gap than it has deployed so far. But doing so requires a clear financing strategy and the institutional resolve to build mechanisms that can mobilise capital at scale.

## The financing gap

Decarbonising just four sectors – steel, cement, power, and road transport, which together account for more than half of India's carbon emissions – will require \$467 billion in additional capital expenditure between 2022 and 2030, roughly \$54 billion annually, or 1.3% of GDP. These are sectors where the private sector will not lead without strong regulatory incentives, because the economics of green steel and green cement simply do not yet work without policy support.

By 2030, developing economies are estimated to need \$5 trillion to \$6 trillion for climate action. The developed world promised \$100 billion annually at Paris – and missed it. The Baku New Collective Quantified Goal (NCQG) commits \$300 billion by 2035 – which India rightly considers insufficient. The Reserve Bank of India (RBI)'s own Report on Currency and Finance estimates that India needs an additional annual investment of at least 2.5% of GDP for green financing until 2030.

The international community will not fill this gap on India's behalf. The honest answer is that India must mobilise most of it from within.

India is not starting from zero. By the end of 2024, India had issued \$55.9 billion in green, social, sustainability, and sustainability-linked debt – a 186% rise since 2021. Green debt leads, making up 83% of the total, with most funds directed to clean energy and transport. Sovereign green bonds worth ₹477 billion have helped set benchmarks and boost investor confidence. This is genuinely impressive.

The instruments exist. The challenge is deploying them at scale. India already has green bonds, sovereign green bonds, sustainability-linked bonds, blended finance structures, transition finance instruments and infrastructure investment trusts. What is missing is the connective tissue: a taxonomy, a guarantee architecture, a liquidity mechanism, and the regulatory incentives that make green finance cheaper than brown finance.

The most significant shift in India's



**Balakrishna Pisupati**

Head of the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) office in India

India's bottleneck is not funding, but the institutional architecture needed to move it where it is needed

climate-finance landscape in 2025 did not occur at a climate conference but in Mint Street. In 2025, the RBI's Climate Finance and Management of Climate Change Risks Directions for Commercial Banks and Small Finance Banks established a comprehensive framework requiring banks to integrate climate risks into their lending and risk-management practices. Importantly, eligible green activities can qualify as priority sector lending (PSL), while investments in sovereign green bonds are also recognised under the framework.

This is a bigger deal than it looks. PSL requirements are one of the most powerful levers that the RBI holds over bank behaviour. Currently, for every ₹10,000 crore in loans, banks must ensure ₹4,000 crore of PSL.

The RBI can and must go further. It has proposed accepting sovereign green bonds as collateral with more flexibility in margin requirements and adjusting reserve requirements to support credit flows to green sectors. The next frontier is differentiated capital requirements based on climate risk – essentially, making brown lending more capital-intensive and green lending less so.

The RBI's Climate Risk Information System on climate-related financial risks for commercial banks, and its inclusion of sustainable finance in its regulatory sandbox, are steps in the right direction.

The next critical step is a comprehensive climate stress-testing framework for Indian banks – one that assesses the flood risk of a loan portfolio in Bihar as rigorously as it evaluates credit risk.

## The taxonomy unlocks everything else

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced in the Union Budget 2024-25 that India would develop a climate-finance taxonomy. This is the foundation of the entire ecosystem. Without a clear legal definition of what counts as "green", green bonds cannot be credibly verified, PSL classifications remain questionable, international investors cannot make compliance claims, and regulators cannot effectively curb greenwashing.

The Ministry of Finance's Climate Finance Taxonomy and the Ministry of Steel's Green Steel Taxonomy will facilitate standardised sustainable investments and boost investor confidence.

The international climate finance system has one instrument that India has chronically underused: blended finance – the strategic use of public or concessional funds to de-risk private investment. Financial instruments such as green bonds, climate funds, and blended finance models are important in mobilising capital for sustainability initiatives, and unlocking

investment at scale will help drive long-term resilience in India's most climate-sensitive sectors.

Here is the arithmetic that makes blended finance so compelling. A first loss guarantee of \$100 million from a public source can unlock \$500 million to \$1 billion in private co-investment in solar, offshore wind, green hydrogen, or climate-resilient agriculture, because it absorbs the risk that private capital finds unacceptable. It needs a capitalisation injection and an expanded mandate to get there.



## Where the finance gap is most acute

One dimension of India's climate finance challenge that receives almost no attention is its federally disaggregated nature. Climate adaptation – the kind of finance that protects coastal villages in Odisha, drought-proofing in Vidarbha, or spring rejuvenation in the Himalayas – is delivered at the State level. But States have neither the borrowing capacity nor the institutional infrastructure to access international climate finance. Tamil Nadu and Kerala have shown that ambitious State-level climate programming is possible. The financing architecture needs to catch up with the ambition.

There are four things that India must do now. First, finalise and enact the Climate Finance Taxonomy without further delay. It is the single most leveraged action available.

Second, the RBI must move from enabling green finance to mandating it – through differentiated capital requirements, mandatory climate stress testing for banks, and expanded PSL targets that include climate adaptation alongside mitigation.

Third, establish a State Climate Finance Facility, capitalised for example, by the Union, National Bank for Agriculture and Rural Development (NABARD), and international sources, to give States and municipalities genuine access to green debt markets.

Fourth, scale sovereign green bond issuances rapidly and embed them in the SLR framework to deepen the domestic market and attract foreign capital.

India's climate-finance challenge is large and urgent, but not insurmountable. The instruments exist, the regulatory framework is taking shape, and capital is available. What is missing is not money, but the institutional capacity to deploy it at scale. Fixing that is the work of the Budget cycles. The country that solves this challenge fastest will shape the future of climate finance in the developing world.

# Pak. accuses India of 'weaponising' water after treaty suspension

**Agence France-Presse**

ISLAMABAD

Pakistan said on Thursday two river projects by India would "weaponise" water and violate a major treaty between the neighbouring nations, threatening a response if they move ahead.

India, which has announced the two initiatives separately this year, insists it is within its rights to press ahead with projects on the waters it controls, even though rivers flowing through both countries would be impacted.

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry spokesperson Tahir Andrabi told presspersons that New Delhi had not consulted Islamabad on

the two Chenab River projects that he said would undermine the Indus Waters Treaty.

"These projects confirm that India seems to weaponise water," he said. "This carries dangerous implications not only for Pakistan's economy but also for regional stability and international peace and security."

India announced last year it was suspending the bilateral Indus Waters Treaty that governs the use of waterways relied on by hundreds of millions, in the lead up to armed conflict between the neighbours. Mr. Andrabi, however, said the treaty still binds both governments.

# As talks stutter, Iran grip on Strait of Hormuz still tight

Recent weeks have seen more non-Iran-linked ships transit with Iranian permission; Lloyd's List data show ships with an 'Iran nexus' accounted for nearly 97% of crossings in mid-March

**Kalyanaraman M.**  
CHENNAI

Even as the U.S.-Iran talks lurch and ships are attacked by both sides, there has been a slight uptick in the regularity of stranded ships leaving the Strait of Hormuz over the past three weeks, as per Lloyd's List data.

Though the U.S. blockade seems to have impacted the transit of ships with direct Iran links, Iran has maintained a tight grip over the strait.

In the recent three weeks, there has been an increase in the number of non-Iran linked ships transiting with the permission of Iran, while ships have slipped across with support from U.S. forces too. Lloyd's List data shows that ships with "Iran nexus" accounted for nearly 97% of crossings in mid-March.

After this peak, this figure has steadily declined to 35% in the week of May 25-31.

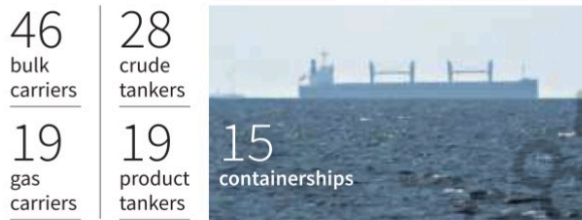
Nearly 40 non-Iranian-linked ships have exited in the past three weeks, bringing the number of "escapees" to 142 since March, says Richard Meade, editor-in-chief of Lloyd's List.

In the past, transits came in sporadic bursts such as when the ceasefire was signed.

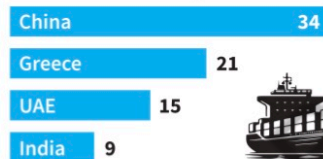
Between April 13 and 19, for example, 23 stranded ships affiliated to 12 coun-

## On the trail

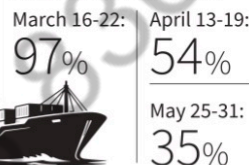
Vessels that exited Persian Gulf since the Iran war began



### Notable vessel allegiances



### Ships with Iran nexus



SOURCE: LLOYD'S LIST INTELLIGENCE

tries transited as owners rushed to move during a brief ceasefire between the U.S. and Iran.

"The past three weeks, however, have brought a more consistent pattern of exits," Mr. Meade told *The Hindu*.

### 'Little business sense'

A source in the shipping industry says ship owners want the vessels to exit the Persian Gulf as being anchored there for more than three months makes little business sense.

This may be leading them to take the Iranian route as the U.S. has said that it will not attack ships with no links to Iran while transiting the Strait of Hormuz, the source said.

Some ships are transiting via the southern route close to the coast of Oman in coordination with-

and under an element of protection of the U.S. military, says Jakob Larsen, chief safety and security officer at Bimco, a global body representing ship owners.

"This is quite risky since it is done with lights and radars turned off, and the Iranians are doing what they can to attack the ships," he adds.

Capt. Ritesh Kumar, who has more than 20 years of seafaring experience, says the Strait of Hormuz is quite wide compared to say Malacca Strait and ships had enough space to not hug either the Oman or the Iran coast and for that reason the Oman coast has been less well-surveyed.

Though the Persian Gulf Strait Authority set up by Iran to control the strait and permit transit along its coast has been sanctioned

by the U.S., more than 300 non-Iranian vessels have applied for transit permits, as per the authority. Lloyd's List analysis estimates that some 28% of the ships above 10,000 dwt that applied were bound for China, 19% for India, 23% for other parts of Asia, 12% for Europe, 10% for Africa and so on.

The PGSA has said it will prioritise permits to ships with affiliations to nations friendly to it and will disallow U.S. and Israel-linked ships.

"As a general observation, the threat level for ships in the Persian Gulf is currently unchanged. However, the situation is volatile, and the threat may increase with short notice," Mr. Larsen told *The Hindu*.

Despite the uptick in exits, overall traffic through the Strait of Hormuz in May fell to its lowest level since the crisis began, likely a result of the U.S. actions against Iran-associated ships.

U.S. Centcom, while refusing to give details to *The Hindu*, however, pointed to media releases that say that it has "disabled" (attacked) six and redirected more than 120 ships involved in Iranian trade since April 13.

On June 2, a missile launched from a U.S. aircraft caused a hole on tanker MT Lexie near Kharg island. This provoked an immediate attack on MSC Sariska by Iran.

ISRAEL CONTINUES TO STRIKE SOUTHERN LEBANON, SAYS IT WON'T WITHDRAW TROOPS

# Hezbollah rejects ceasefire, Israeli strikes undermine Trump efforts

Reuters  
Beirut, June 4

THE PRO-IRAN Hezbollah movement rejected a new ceasefire in Lebanon on Thursday and Israel said it would not withdraw troops from the country, undermining US President Donald Trump's efforts to halt fighting there to force peace with Tehran.

Iran has made a ceasefire in Lebanon a condition for any peace deal with Washington, and has suggested in recent days that it could intervene directly in support of its proxy Hezbollah if Israel keeps up or escalates attacks there.

Lebanese President Joseph Aoun said the ceasefire would come into force within 24 hours of all concerned parties approving it. However, Hezbollah leader Naim Qassem rejected the Washington declaration, insisting "resistance will continue". There was no immediate response from Israel, Lebanon or the US to Qassem's remarks. Hezbollah is not a party to the US-brokered agreement reached between Israel and the Lebanese government on Wednesday,



An Israeli flag hoisted on a destroyed building in southern Lebanon on Thursday. AP

nesday, but would be required to halt attacks.

Israel kept up strikes in southern Lebanon on Thursday and Defence Minister Israel Katz said Israeli forces would not be withdrawing from the area or halting operations in the country, which they invaded in March in par-

allel with the war in Iran.

The commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards Quds Force — which established Hezbollah in 1982 — said "the minimum demand of the resistance" was Israel's withdrawal to positions it held before the war began.

"Our initial condition for ac-

cepting a ceasefire in the regional war was a ceasefire on all fronts, including Lebanon," a separate statement from the Guards said.

✓ Israel must stop its attacks in Lebanon, evacuate the areas it occupies and retreat behind international borders, said the statement, carried by state

media on Thursday.

Hostilities between Hezbollah and Israel reignited on March 2, when the group opened fire in support of Tehran as it came under U.S.-Israeli attack. The war has continued despite several ceasefires declared from Washington since April.

The attempt to reach a ceasefire in Lebanon comes after a flare-up in violence across the region that put Trump's efforts to end the war in new jeopardy. Iranian and US forces traded attacks in the Gulf on Wednesday in one of the most intense bouts of fighting since a separate ceasefire halted large-scale US-Israeli bombing of Iran in early April.

Iranian forces struck Kuwait, damaging its airport and injuring dozens of people, authorities said, while the U.S. military carried out strikes near the Strait of Hormuz. The strait, through which a fifth of the global oil and liquefied natural gas supplies normally flow, remains largely closed more than three months after the U.S. and Israel launched their strikes on Iran.