

# Army Chief: Armed forces preparing well for Op Sindoor 2.0 if it takes place

Sushant Kulkarni

Pune, May 30

CHIEF OF Army Staff General Upendra Dwivedi said on Saturday that all three services are preparing well for Operation Sindoor 2.0 if it takes place. He also said that within the next two to three years, the process of theaterisation can be seen happening on ground.

General Dwivedi, who reviewed the Passing Out Parade (POP) of the landmark 150th course of the National Defence Academy (NDA), also said that Operation Sindoor has set a benchmark on how India responds to provocation and urged the passing out NDA cadets to uphold that standard. As the Reviewing Officer of the parade Gen Dwivedi inspected the cadets lined up for their final parade.

He addressed the passing-out cadets and ceremonially



Army Chief General Upendra Dwivedi reviews the parade on Saturday. PAVAN KHENGRE

pinned medals on those who earned medals.

Answering a question about Operation Sindoor during media interaction on the sidelines of the parade, the Army Chief said, "As far as Operation Sindoor is concerned, firstly, it is still continuing. There is tempor-

ary cessation of hostilities. All the three services including the Indian Army are preparing well for Operation Sindoor 2.0 if it takes place. Presently we are looking at enhancing synergy within the three services. We are looking at equipping ourselves for the next warfare. The next warfare will not be limited to land, maritime and air alone. Space, cyber and cognitive will play a very important role."

On the subject of information warfare, General Dwivedi said, "...victory is always in the mind and not on the ground. Therefore, information warfare is only successful only if the whole nation gets together and trusts the people who are giving information. And if that happens and in the nation we trust each other, I can assure you that we will always win the war."

When asked about the process of theaterisation, the Army Chief said it is on the right track.

"As of now all the discussions on theaterisation have gotten over within the Chiefs of Staff committee. The complete report has been submitted to the defence minister. It is undergoing a review from the various stakeholders at this stage. The Chief of Defence Staff and present three chiefs have taken a conscious view that all the major interests of the three services are met with," he said.

"Whenever synergy needs to be brought, there will be some giveaway by all the three services. Service chiefs will be responsible for raise, train and sustain functions and theatre commanders will be responsible for the operation orchestration of the forces. We are hopeful that the next set up, which is coming under the new CDS, will be able to take the journey forward and in the next two to three years we should be able to see it happening on the ground..." he added.

# Our naval might confined Pak to its ports: Rajnath

**Express News Service**  
*Lucknow, May 30*

AT THE inauguration of naval museum 'Nausena Shaurya Vatika' in Lucknow, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh said on Saturday that the facility was a symbol of inspiration that would remind future generations of the true cost of the country's freedom and security.

He added the Indian Navy forced "the entire Pakistan Navy to remain confined to its ports during Operation Sindoor".

The open-air display museum, which was inaugurated by Singh along with Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, showcases the artefacts and weapon systems of INS Gomati, which was decommissioned on May 29, 2022 after 34 years of service. It has been built on 2 acres in Lucknow's Gomti Nagar Extension area at a cost of Rs 19 crore.

Chief of the Naval Staff Admiral Dinesh K Tripathi was also present on the occasion.

The Defence Minister said, "It is not just an architectural design or a product of structural craftsmanship, it rekindles a sense of gratitude we hold for our soldiers. The idea is to awaken the zeal for nation building among our youth."

Singh hailed the Indian Navy

for its "robust presence and operational readiness" at sea, underlining that amid the present geopolitical turmoil, the key to global peace and prosperity lies in securing maritime routes.

Commending the Navy's "exceptional contribution" alongside the Army and the Indian Air Force during Operation Sindoor, he said: "Our Navy's formidable posture in the Arabian Sea instilled a constant sense of fear in the mind of the adversary. As a result, the Pakistan Navy remained confined to its ports."

He added, "India can truly be considered powerful when our defence forces do not have to depend on other nations for their weaponry. Through initiatives such as Make-in-India, Defence Industrial Corridors, Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) and Acing Development of Innovative Technologies with iDEX (ADITI), we are indigenously manufacturing state-of-the-art weapons, and exporting them to friendly nations."

He claimed the domestic defence production in 2014 was Rs 46,000 crore which now increased to over Rs 1.51 lakh crore and aims to soon touch the Rs 1.75 lakh crore figure. Defence exports have reached to about Rs 40,000 crore, he said. Uttar Pradesh Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath was also present.

DEAL WITH INDONESIA IN FINAL STAGES: DEFENCE SECY

# 'India has signed deal with Vietnam for supply of BrahMos'

Amrita Nayak Dutta

New Delhi, May 30

IN THE first official confirmation of India selling the BrahMos missiles to Vietnam, Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh said Saturday that a deal has been signed with the southeast Asian nation for the supply of the missiles, adding that a similar deal with Indonesia is in "final stages".

Singh, who is in Singapore to attend the Shangri-La Dialogue, made the comments in response to a question on potential buyers of the missile system.

"My understanding is that with both Indonesia and with Vietnam, the deal is in the final stages... In fact, for Vietnam, I understand that it has already been signed, probably not publicly announced, but it's already been signed," he said.

Signing a contract worth nearly 375 million dollars, The Philippines had become the first foreign buyer of the BrahMos missile system from India in 2022. In March, Indonesia had also said that it had entered into an agreement with India to procure the BrahMos missile system.

The details of the deals with Indonesia and Vietnam are yet to be made public.

Singh said countries generally sell sophisticated weapon systems and platforms to nations they regard as friendly partners.

"Obviously, you share technology with people you trust," he said.

He said India has a strong commitment to the ASEAN nations, adding: "...we treat all of you as 'friendly foreign coun-



In March, Indonesia said it had entered into an agreement with India to procure BrahMos. The details of the deals with Indonesia and Vietnam are yet to be made public, said the Defence Secretary

tries' with whom we can share advanced defence technologies".

He told delegates that India was ready to work with partners across the region and beyond to build resilient supply chains and trusted defence partnerships besides securing maritime commons.

"Today, resilience has become one of the defining strategic requirements of our time," he said, adding that geopolitical uncertainty, conflicts in Europe and West Asia, disruptions in maritime trade routes, supply chain vulnerabilities, technological disruptions and growing strategic competition were among factors reshaping the global security landscape.

"The lessons from recent years are clear. Defence preparedness cannot depend upon fragile or overly concentrated supply chains. Nations today require resilient, trusted, diversified, and technologically adaptive defence industrial ecosystems," he said.

He said India had undertaken major reforms in defence

production, innovation and exports over the past decade, adding that the sector had been opened to greater private-sector participation.

He said India was not only modernising its armed forces but also emerging as a dependable defence manufacturing and maintenance hub. He said government-owned companies accounted for nearly 72% of India's defence production while the private sector contributed the rest, adding that three Indian government-owned defence firms were among the world's top 100 arms-producing companies.

He said the Indian defence industry had built capabilities in areas such as missile systems, fighter aircraft and main battle tanks, and efforts are on to bridge gaps in propulsion technologies across land, air and sea domains.

"Our objective is not to create exclusive blocs, but inclusive and reliable partnerships that strengthen collective security and reduce strategic vulnerabilities," he said.

# Air pollution cut India's solar power output by 9.6% in 2023: study

**Vasudevan Mukunth**

Aerosols in the air reduced the amount of solar power generated in India by 9.6% in 2023, equivalent to around 15 terawatt-hours (TWh), according to a new analysis published in *Nature Sustainability*. The same study reported that the global average loss due to the same cause in 2023 was 5.8%.

Between 2017 and 2023, pollution-related electricity generation losses from

existing installations averaged 74 TWh a year – roughly one third of the electricity generated every year by new solar capacity.

According to the study, India's loss is one of the world's highest, with the most electricity generation potential lost in the country's heavily polluted north.

The researchers assembled what they called the first global facility-level database of solar photovoltaic generation and losses,

totalling 1.4 lakh facilities worldwide. They analysed the numbers together with satellite data, atmospheric data, and machine-learning.

Aerosols are fine particles of sulphates and carbon, among other constituents, and they directly reduce the amount of sunlight reaching solar panels, thus undermining an important source of power meant to replace coal in India.

India's neighbour with

an even bigger appetite for power, China, lost the most power generation potential in 2023, 61.3 TWh, but which was lower than India's as a fraction of the total generation (7.7%). In fact, China both illustrates the scale of the problem and a way through it.

China generated 793.5 TWh of solar electricity in 2023 and accounted for 54.9% of aerosol-related losses worldwide. Many of the country's solar farms lie within 30 km of coal

power plants, increasing the former's exposure to pollution that blocks sunlight.

However, China reduced pollution-related loss of solar power by around 1.4% a year from 2013 to 2023 and at the same time it expanded coal power. It reduced the losses by retrofitting coal plants with high-efficiency filters that curtailed sulphur dioxide and particulate emissions.

A key technology in re-

ducing these emissions is flue-gas desulphurisation (FGD), which removes sulphur dioxide from flue gas vented into the air.

India's aerosol-induced losses in solar power production did not decline from 2013 to 2023, staying flat. In 2025, the Indian government also significantly weakened a target to install FGD units by limiting them to coal plants near major cities and, on a case by case basis, plants in critically polluted areas.

13 countries  
join military  
exercise in  
Meghalaya

**Press Trust of India**  
UMROI

Armies of 13 countries came together in Meghalaya's Umroi for the maiden multilateral military exercise 'Pragati 2026', which concluded on Saturday with a focus on countering insurgency and building mutual trust among the nations in the Indian Ocean region, officials said.

Over 400 soldiers, including around 20 women, from Bhutan, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, the Philippines, the Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Vietnam and India slithered down from helicopters, detected IEDs along routes and climbed down rocky walls during the two-week exercise, they said.

#### **Tactics and procedures**

Discussions on how to incorporate niche technologies and the effect of these on the tactics, techniques and procedures (TTPs) were held during the two-week programme.

"Pragati was a mega exercise in the serene environment of Umroi in Meghalaya. We conducted various specialised drills and procedures, including rock craft, special heli-borne operations, tactical situations," said Brigadier Mayur Shekhatkar, the chief coordinator for the programme.

# Myanmar's President arrives in India; border security, trade on agenda

Hlaing will hold discussions with Modi on June 1 on boosting civilisational ties; he will focus on connectivity and defence sectors too, and later visit Mumbai for business-industry interactions

**Press Trust of India**  
GAYAJI

**M**yanmar President U Min Aung Hlaing on Saturday offered prayers at the Mahabodhi Temple, a Buddhist pilgrimage place and a UNESCO World Heritage site, in Bihar's Gayaji district.

Mr. Hlaing, accompanied by a high-level delegation, including several Cabinet Ministers and business leaders, arrived here in the morning as part of his five-day visit to India.

The President was welcomed by Bihar Governor Syed Ata Hasnain and State Minister Vijay Kumar Sinha and accorded a ceremonial Guard of Honour upon his arrival at the airport here.

#### **'New heights'**

Mr. Sinha said the visit of Aung Hlaing to the sacred land of Bodhi Gaya, the place of enlightenment of Lord Buddha, is an important step towards strengthening the historic, cultural, and spiritual ties between India and Myanmar.

"Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi ji, the coopera-



**Ceremonial welcome:** Myanmar's President U Min Aung Hlaing is accorded a Guard of Honour upon his arrival at the airport in Bodhi Gaya. ANI

tion, cultural exchanges, Buddhist heritage, and mutual development ties between India and Myanmar are continuously reaching new heights," Mr. Sinha, the State Agriculture Minister, wrote in his X post.

#### **Bilateral cooperation**

Mr. Hlaing's five-day visit will be focused on boosting bilateral cooperation in

trade, connectivity, border security and defence. The tour comes less than two months after he became the President following Myanmar's parliamentary elections.

Mr. Hlaing was earlier scheduled to visit New Delhi to participate in the International Big Cat Alliance Summit on June 1, which has been deferred.

"President U Min Aung

Hlaing will hold discussions with Prime Minister Narendra Modi on June 1 on further strengthening the historical and civilisational ties between the two countries. He will also participate in a business forum," the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said.

Mr. Hlaing will also travel to Mumbai on June 2 for business and industry interactions and site visits.

# Tech glitch delays CUET-UG; NTA to hold retest for 3,765

**The Hindu Bureau**

NEW DELHI

The first shift of the Common University Entrance Test 2026 for undergraduate admissions (CUET-UG) was delayed at some centres on Saturday owing to a technical glitch, causing stress to thousands of students and their parents. Over 3,700 candidates, who had completed biometric registration, left without taking the test across multiple centres.

“Earlier today, some centres faced a technical glitch that delayed the start of Shift 1. We know this was stressful, and we are sorry for the anxiety it caused. The technical service provider, TCS iON [a unit of Tata Consultancy Services], has been asked to conduct a root-cause analysis and submit its report immediately,” said the National Testing Agency (NTA). Allegations that the shift was delayed three to four hours surfaced on the social media on Saturday and videos of students protesting against the organisers were circulated.

**The NTA said it would**



**Testing times:** Students arrive at an examination centre at Sarita Vihar in New Delhi to appear for CUET-UG 2026 on Saturday. ANI

reschedule the examination as a one-time measure for the 3,765 candidates who chose to leave before the exam could restart, adding that new date and details will be announced separately.

TCS said the issue that caused the delay was promptly resolved and the exam resumed “without any impact on its sanctity”.

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## Modi destroying India's education system: Rahul

NEW DELHI

Following reports of delays by the National Testing Agency in holding the CUET-UG at some centres due to technical glitches on Saturday, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, accused Prime Minister Narendra Modi of “destroying” India's education system. » **PAGE 9**

# Shivakumar will take oath as Karnataka CM on June 3

Governor invites current deputy Chief Minister to take oath after he was unanimously elected leader of the CLP; speculation remains over Cabinet and whether there will be new deputy CMs

**Sharath S. Srivatsa**  
BENGALURU

**K**arnataka Pradesh Congress Committee president D.K. Shivakumar will take oath as the Chief Minister at the Lok Bhavan on Wednesday after being unanimously elected the leader of the Congress Legislature Party (CLP) on Saturday.

Governor Thaaawarchand Gehlot, in a communique to Mr. Shivakumar, has invited him to take the oath at 4.05 p.m. on Wednesday. It is expected to be a simple event at the Glass House on the Governor's residential premises. The event is expected to be attended by the central leadership of the party.

The invitation came after a delegation of Congress leaders, including Mr. Shivakumar and caretaker Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, met the Governor to hand over the CLP resolution on the election



**New role:** Karnataka CM-designate D.K. Shivakumar with supporters after the CLP meeting in Bengaluru on Saturday. K. MURALI KUMAR

of a new leader. The letter said 135 Congress legislators, two associate members, and one Raitha Sangha member had unanimously elected Mr. Shivakumar as the CLP leader. Earlier in the day, Mr. Shivakumar had met the Governor informally to check his availability for the dates chosen for swearing in. With Cabinet forma-

tion still under discussion, speculation continues over whether a full Cabinet will be sworn in and whether there will be deputy Chief Ministers.

“The Congress high command proposed the name of Mr. Shivakumar for the post of CLP, and he was unanimously elected. The power transition took place under the guidance

of Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, and leader Sonia Gandhi,” Congress general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal told presspersons. “With the support of Mr. Siddaramaiah and under the leadership of Mr. Shivakumar, the Congress will return to power in 2028,” he said.

Addressing speculations surrounding the power transition, Mr. Venugopal said, “Several people had predicted that the Congress would be in trouble during the power transition. Everyone speculated about the move of Mr. Siddaramaiah. However, by his decision, he has shown that he only has the Congress party in his heart. It proves that Congress is one family.”

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**‘ROCK’ OF CONGRESS**

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# Transporters suspend operations in Manipur over killing of truck driver

**The Hindu Bureau**

GUWAHATI

Transporters suspended their operations in Manipur on Saturday to protest the killing of a trucker from West Bengal's Hooghly in an ambush by Kuki militants in Manipur's Ukhrul district on Friday. The militants had attacked a convoy of food trucks, and LPG and oil tankers on a stretch of National Highway no. 202, the police said.

The suspension of operations threatens to disrupt the supply of essentials to Imphal, the State's capital, and beyond, from southern Assam's Barak Valley via National Highway no. 37, one of Manipur's two lifelines. National Highway no. 2, which enters Manipur via Nagaland, has been blocked since May 13,



Vehicles wait on National Highway no. 37 as drivers stage a protest in Imphal on Saturday after suspending transport of goods. PTI

when the killing of three church leaders led to a hostage crisis involving the Kuki and Naga communities.

On Saturday, the operators of some 400 trucks and oil tankers, stranded in the Keithelmanbi area of Imphal Valley, protested against the killing of Sushil Kumar, 57, the driver who had been transporting

Food Corporation of India rice on National Highway no.202. This highway connects Imphal and Ukhrul, the headquarters of the Naga-majority Ukhrul district. The place where the convoy was ambushed is dominated by the Kuki community, and on Saturday, the police confirmed that the attackers were Ku-

ki militants.

A joint team of Border Security Force, Central Reserve Police Force, Manipur police, and Rapid Action Force had been escorting the trucks when the attackers rained bullets on them from "tactical positions along the route". A Manipur police constable was injured in the attack.

The drivers said it was too risky to operate on these highways unless the government gave a fool-proof guarantee regarding their security. They demanded action against Kumar's killers and the reopening of NH-2, which is a shorter and better-maintained route than NH-37.

Chief Minister Yumnam Khemchand Singh met the representatives of the All Manipur Road Transport Drivers and members of the slain driver's family.

# Inside Ebola epicentre, the virus rages with little to stop it

Declan Walsh

Mongbwalu, May 30

IN THE cramped, dilapidated Ebola ward, a 5-year-old boy languished on a bare mattress, a tissue stuffed into his nose to stanch the incessant bleeding. His father stood over him, eyes clouded with worry.

A few beds away lay the body of Christiane Bahati, 21, who had died seven hours earlier but had not yet been taken away. Her shoes were still tucked under the bed, her wailing relatives gathered outside the ward doors.

The body, covered by a thin sheet, was highly contagious. Yet hardly anyone in the ward was protected. Relatives came and went, carrying food and

water to ailing patients because the hospital had none to give them. A few wore rubber gloves or pulled a scarf across their mouths. Most had nothing at all.

In the next ward lay the hospital's laboratory technician, also sick. Seven other hospital workers had already died from suspected Ebola.

Few of the staff members had ever been trained to fight the disease, and the most rudimentary equipment was in dangerously short supply: tests, protective suits, goggles, masks, even drinking water.

Outside, the sound of hammering broke the hushed silence. Aid workers from Doctors Without Borders were racing to erect isolation tents and disinfection stations.



Dr Alex Bogole, a Congolese doctor in the hospital's intensive care ward, was furious.

The virus had been spread-

ing for months, virtually unimpeded, "and this is the best we can do?" he said, the frustration pouring through his protective

gear. This is the epicenter of the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo, and the front line is completely overwhelmed.

The Congolese Health Ministry declared the outbreak on May 15, and it has already ballooned into the third largest on record. Two weeks later, the international response is being outpaced by the virus, and there is almost nothing to slow it down. Aid groups warn that without urgent intervention, this could be the world's deadliest Ebola outbreak ever.

Dr Bogole was never trained for this and was angry at everyone — at the Congolese government for failing to detect the outbreak until perhaps six weeks after it began, and at the

world, which has barely mobilized help here in Mongbwalu, a remote gold mining town of about 150,000 where the outbreak is believed to have started.

"They hold meetings and meetings," he said, struggling to contain his disdain. "What is the purpose of these meetings? People are dying, people are getting infected, people are in danger. It's very slow."

Giant trucks, curling through lush hills, leave blinding clouds of dust. Edgy-looking Congolese soldiers guard checkpoints that are often little more than string.

Gold miners and people fleeing rebel conflict stream in and out of Mongbwalu, providing an excellent vector for the spread of the virus. **NYT**

# Hegseth backs Trump's India-Pak. ceasefire claim at Shangri-La meet

India has consistently disputed third-party mediation, saying the understanding was reached directly between two nations; Pentagon chief warns of 'rightful alarm' over China's historic military build-up but says U.S. seeks 'stable equilibrium' in Asia

**Press Trust of India**  
SINGAPORE

**U**.S. Secretary of War Pete Hegseth on Saturday credited President Donald Trump with helping broker peace between India and Pakistan, while describing New Delhi as a key partner in Washington's Indo-Pacific strategy.

Speaking at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, Mr. Hegseth referred to the understanding reached between India and Pakistan after their military confrontation last year and praised Mr. Trump's role in easing tensions.

**"You saw that in the**



Delegates view U.S. Secretary of War Pete Hegseth's speech on a screen at Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore on Saturday. REUTERS

**ability of the President to come together on brokering a peace between India and Pakistan, two nuclear capable countries," Mr. Hegseth said.**

**Mr. Trump has repeatedly claimed that he helped secure peace between India and Pakistan following a four-day military conflict last year trig-**

**gered by the terror attack in Jammu and Kashmir's Pahalgam that killed 26 people. India, however, has consistently maintained that the understanding was reached directly between the two countries and has rejected claims of third-party mediation.**

The Pentagon chief said both India and Pakistan would continue to view each other through the prism of security concerns.

**Mr. Hegseth also struck a measured tone towards China, noting "rightful alarm" over Beijing's military build-up but saying Washington sought a "stable equilibrium" in Asia.**

**"When we look across the region today, there is rightful alarm regarding China's historic military build-up and the expansion of its military activities in the region and beyond," Mr. Hegseth said.**

**Washington does not seek "needless confrontation" but rather "a genuinely stable equilibrium [in Asia] that works for Americans as well as our allies", he said.**

Mr. Hegseth's remarks came as he outlined Washington's broader Indo-Pacific strategy, which he said was aimed at preserving regional stability while ensuring that no single power could dominate the region.

## PETE HEGSETH IN SINGAPORE

# 'No China hegemony, India critical anchor, helps maintain balance of power'



US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth at Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, Saturday. AP

## Flags Javelin co-production with India, urges Asian allies to up defence spend

**Amrita Nayak Dutta**  
New Delhi, May 30

IN AN expansive articulation of American strategic intent in the Indo-Pacific, US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth Saturday described India as a "critical anchor" to "hold the line" in South Asia and that a "powerful" India, acting in its own self-interest, "advances our shared goal of maintaining a balance of power across the region."

Speaking at the Shangri La Dialogue in Singapore Saturday, he framed the balance of power in Asia as one "in which no state, including China, can impose its hegemony and hold the security or prosperity of our nation and our allies in question."

At the same time, though, he struck a softer note on Beijing saying Washington was not seeking confrontation despite concerns over China's military build-up. And that under US President Donald Trump, US-China relations were "better than they've been in years."

Hegseth noted India's  
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### POLITICS

## INDIA SIGNS DEAL WITH VIETNAM FOR BRAHMOS MISSILES

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### E. EXPLAINED

## The balancing act

Hegseth framing of India as an Indian Ocean anchor and defence co-production partner may be a bid to reassure Delhi that its engagement with Beijing does not come at India's expense. At the same time, he flagged a Pacific dominated by any hegemon (read China) would "undermine the equilibrium we all seek to preserve."

# Hegseth

modernisation of its military to bear its share of the security burden, particularly in the Indian Ocean, and praised its efforts to build “heavy industrial and logistics capacity to sustain high-end military operations, including the ability to repair and maintain shared platforms and support US Navy vessels operating forward in the theatre.”

The Defence Secretary announced that the US had committed to pursuing “co-production” of Javelin anti-tank guided munitions with India — “real, tangible steps to improve the collective readiness of our forces.” Defence co-production of this kind, with a sophisticated frontline weapon system, is framed as deepening the bilateral defence relationship.

“This kind of industrial muscle isn’t just a long-term

goal; it’s an immediate operational imperative, and the United States Department of War is leading the way,” he said.

Highlighting that Washington’s broader Indo-Pacific strategy was aimed at preserving regional stability while ensuring that no single power could dominate the region, he said: “What we seek ... is a genuinely stable equilibrium that works for Americans as well as for our allies.”

He added that the Indo-Pacific remained central to US security and prosperity, underlining that Washington remained committed to the region despite security challenges elsewhere, including in West Asia.

He further said that the era of the United States subsidising the defence of wealthy nations is over. “We need partners, not protectorates. We seek alliances built on shared responsibility, not dependency,” he said.

The US would continue to strengthen military capabilities and cooperation with allies to preserve regional stability, he said, adding that defence commitments have been undertaken by several Indo-Pacific partners, including India, Japan, South Korea, Australia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and the Philippines.

In an echo of what Washington has been saying to European allies, Hegseth urged the Asian ones to increase their military spending to counter China’s power and dominance in the region, adding that a stronger, more self-reliant network of allies is essential to prevent aggression while preserving the balance of power.

“There is rightful alarm regarding China’s historic military buildup and the expansion of its military activities in the region and beyond,” he said, adding: “A Pacific dominated by any hegemon would unravel the re-

gional balance of power.”

“No state, including China, can impose its hegemony and hold the security or prosperity of our nation and our allies in question.”

“Less Shangri-La, more ships, more subs,” Hegseth said, underlining that the region needs to invest in defence capability more than conferences.

Responding to a question on India’s recent test of an advanced version of the Agni missile,

Hegseth said “both sides there are going to see understandable threats coming from the other...but we are not pointing a finger, at least from our view right now, at either country.”

He repeated President Donald Trump’s claims regarding the India-Pakistan ceasefire last year giving him credit for “brokering a peace between India and Pakistan, two nuclear-capable countries.”

# Ukrainian drones strike oil depot, port in south Russia

**Reuters**

MOSCOW

Ukrainian drones struck a tanker at Russia's port of Taganrog overnight and hit an oil depot in the city of Armavir, authorities in the southern regions of Rostov and Krasnodar said on Saturday.

Rostov region Governor Yury Slyusar said on Telegram that fires on the tanker and in the port of Taganrog – a city of about 2.4 lakh – had been extinguished, with no oil spill reported. Two persons were injured, he said.

The city's mayor, Svetlana Kambulova, said a local state of emergency, introduced on May 27, had been extended. Russia's Defence Ministry said that its forces had downed 127 drones overnight.

In the neighbouring Krasnodar region, authori-



Smoke rising from oil infrastructure in the southern Krasnodar region of Russia following a Ukrainian drone strike in April. AP

ties in Armavir, which has a population of 1.85 lakh, said a fire at an oil depot in the city's industrial zone had been brought under control and that there were no injuries.

Rostov governor Slyusar said that almost 50 drones had been downed in the region, with attacks reported across the province, which borders Ukraine's

Donbas, the focus of fighting between Russia and Ukraine. Outside Taganrog, he said, only minor damage was reported.

The commander of Ukraine's drone forces said they had struck Taganrog, as well as an oil depot in Feodosiya in Russian-controlled Crimea. He made no mention of a strike on Armavir.

# The strait where America stalled

## Hormuz

The waterway connecting the Persian Gulf to the Arabian Sea has emerged as the most consequential battleground of the U.S.-Israeli war on Iran, with Tehran effectively taking control of the route and rattling energy markets and the global economy

### Stanly Johny

**T**ehran's Milad Tower, the tallest structure in Iran, stands as a symbol of the revolutionary state's engineering ambitions. Rising 435 metres, including its 120-metre antenna, the tower's octagonal concrete shaft joins a pod with 12 floors housing observation decks, a cafe and a museum. Above it, the antenna pierces Tehran's smoggy skyline. From the deck of the 12th floor, the highest point accessible to visitors, one can take in the vast sprawl of the city, made the capital of the Persian Empire in the late 18th century by Agha Muhammad Khan, founder of the Qajar dynasty. To the north rise the Alborz mountains, the natural barrier separating the Iranian plateau from the Caspian Sea.

Inside the museum, a large 18th-century map of the Gulf drawn by a French cartographer is on display. "You may have heard some countries call the Persian Gulf the Arabian Gulf today," a local travel assistant told this writer during a visit in February 2022. "Look at this map and teach your own conclusions." A young woman, who described herself as "a huge fan" of Amitabh Bachchan and Aishwarya Rai, the assistant pointed to the mouth of the Persian Gulf on the map. "This is the Strait of Hormuz," she said. "This is the gate of the Persian Gulf. And the Iranians hold its key." It is this geographical key that Iran used to effectively shut the

strait after coming under attack by the U.S. and Israel on February 28. The strait is a narrow corridor, 50 km wide at its entrance and exit, connecting the Persian Gulf waters to the Gulf of Oman, which joins the Arabian Sea. At its narrowest point, between Iran in the north and Oman's Musandam Peninsula in the south – an exclave separated from mainland Oman by UAE territory – the waterway is just 33 km wide, which means it falls within the overlapping territorial waters of Iran and Oman.

As the only gateway to the high seas from the Persian Gulf, the Hormuz Strait has remained one of the world's

most important waterways for centuries. In modern times, separate shipping lanes, as wide as 2 nautical miles, have been marked for inbound and outbound vessels. There is a buffer zone of around 2 nautical miles between the shipping lanes. So the tankers carrying fuel and gas typically navigated highly constrained waters even before the war.

In the 1980s, during the eight-year Iran-Iraq war, both sides targeted fuel tankers in the Persian Gulf, effectively weaponising the waters. In recent years, Iran had repeatedly warned that it would close the waterway if it came under attack. There are eight major islands in the strait, seven of which are controlled by Iran. Islands such as Qeshm, Hormuz, Larak, and Abu Musa sit closer to the shipping lanes, giving Iran a commanding physical advantage over the route. The ownership of Abu Musa, Greater Tunb and Lesser Tunb islands is contested between Iran and the UAE, but they are de facto controlled and administered by Tehran.

### Strategic significance

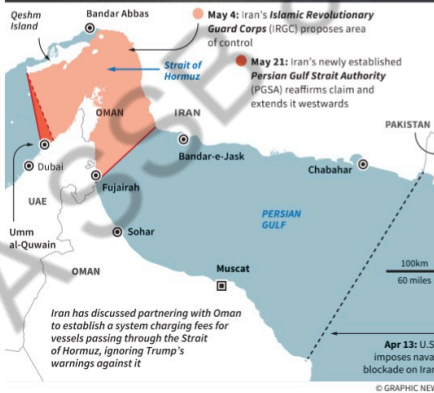
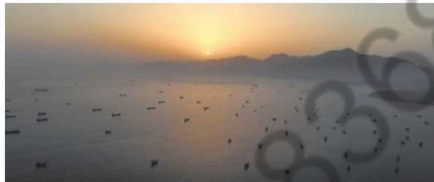
The strait's strategic significance grew after the oil discoveries in the Persian Gulf region in the early 20th century. The post-War oil boom transformed the entire region. All Gulf countries – Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, the UAE, Bahrain and Kuwait – have been more or less dependent on the strait to get access to the Arabian Sea.

During 2023-25, 20% of the world's liquefied natural gas (LNG) and 25% of seaborne oil passed through the strait. In 2025 alone, 20 million barrels of oil and oil products passed through this route every day, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration. About 3,000 ships sailed through the strait each month before the war. Hormuz is also a key route for exports of fertilizer from the region, and Gulf countries import food, medicines and tech products through this route.

In June 2025, when Israel bombed Iran, Tehran's response was largely limited to striking back at Israel. After the U.S. joined the war and attacked Iran's nuclear facilities, Tehran carried

## Iran expands claim

Tehran took control of the strait after the U.S. and Israel launched the war



out a token attack on the American base in Qatar and agreed to a ceasefire. The 12-Day War, as it's known, did not pose any direct threat to traffic through the Strait of Hormuz. But in early 2026, when the U.S. was mobilising forces in the region amid threats of another war, Iran had warned that it would retaliate by striking American bases and shutting down the Strait. The U.S. and Israel started the war on February 28 by

assassinating Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and Iran responded by doing what it had vowed to do. It retaliated by attacking Israel and Arab countries in the Gulf. And it took control of the strait. The number of ships passing through the strait daily, which was more than 100 before the war, fell by over 90%.

During the 40 days of bombing, the U.S. and Israel caused immense material damage to Iran. Its aerial and

naval infrastructure has been repeatedly hit. But such attacks weren't enough to force Iran, which used asymmetric warfare to weaponise the waters, to reopen the strait. Iran used cheap, disruptive weapons to impose disproportionate costs on the vessels that ignored its restrictions. Several ships that sought to pass the strait without the IRGC's permission came under attack. Fuel prices started rising, insurance and shipping costs soared. Energy-import-dependent economies, particularly India, were hit hard.

### Contested terms

When U.S. President Donald Trump announced a ceasefire with Iran on April 8, he said Iran would reopen the Strait of Hormuz. The truce came into effect, but both sides differed on its terms. Iran demanded a ceasefire in Lebanon as well, but Israel actually stepped up bombing of Lebanon. Mr. Trump later announced a ceasefire in Lebanon and "prevented" Israel from bombing the country – but the bombing campaign continued. When Iran refused to reopen the strait, Mr. Trump, on April 12, announced a blockade of Iranian ports. In response, Iran cancelled direct negotiations with the U.S., and pushed the nuclear file down its priority list.

Mr. Trump has repeatedly said he was close to reaching a deal with Iran. He wants Iran to reopen the strait in return for the lifting of the U.S. blockade. And Iran should abandon its nuclear programme. Iran, on its side, has established a new body, the Persian Gulf Strait Authority, to manage traffic through and maintain the Hormuz Strait, defying Mr. Trump's demands. The PGSA has introduced a new email-based permit system for vessels and says all ships passing through the strait should coordinate with the agency. Result: a diplomatic logjam.

One of Mr. Trump's key demands for a deal today is that Iran should reopen the Strait of Hormuz, which was fully open before Mr. Trump and his ally Benjamin Netanyahu launched this war on February 28.

### THE GIST

▼ The strait is a narrow corridor, 50 km wide at its entrance and exit, connecting the Persian Gulf waters to the Gulf of Oman, which joins the Arabian Sea

▼ At its narrowest point, between Iran in the north and Oman's Musandam Peninsula in the south, the waterway is just 33 km wide

▼ As the only gateway to the high seas from the Persian Gulf, the Hormuz Strait has remained one of the world's most important waterways for centuries