

DMK lays down conditions to support delimitation Bill

These conditions come amid renewed efforts from the Centre to reach out to the Opposition to secure numbers for the Bill; however, a top DMK leader says govt. has not approached them yet

Sandeep Phukan

Sobhana K. Nair

NEW DELHI

As the Narendra Modi government explores the possibility of bringing in a constitutional amendment Bill to carry out a fresh delimitation exercise, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) may consider extending support if the Centre revises the legislation that reached the Lok Sabha in April with three essential changes.

There is a freeze on Lok Sabha seats based on the 1971 Census and this freeze ends after the latest Census, which is expected to be completed in 2027. The DMK wants the constitutional freeze to remain for another 25 years, while amending the Constitution to introduce a 50% blanket

Terms for support

The DMK will support the NDA government's delimitation Bill only if the following conditions are met, according to sources

1. A freeze on the 1971 Census as the basis for delimitation for another 25 years

2. A blanket 50% increase in Lok Sabha seats for all States, as verbally promised by Home Minister Amit Shah when the legislative package to bring about delimitation was introduced in Parliament in April



3. A Schedule of the number of seats that each State will have in the legislative package

increase in the Lok Sabha seats for all States, which was verbally promised by Home Minister Amit Shah when the legislative package aimed at bringing about delimitation was tabled in Parliament in April.

Additionally, the party wants a Schedule of the number of seats that each State will have in the legis-

lative package, as per sources in the DMK. A top DMK leader said the government has not yet approached them on the issue either "formally or informally". The party maintains that it will take a final call only after the form and substance of the Bills are known.

These conditions come

amid renewed efforts from the Centre to reach out to the Opposition, with Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijju speaking to Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi again on Thursday.

"I had a productive conversation with Rahul Gandhi. I have made a request on a few specific issues and also discussed other matters. We expect continuous communication with the Congress and other Opposition parties," he said.

He had met Mr. Gandhi on Wednesday too, during which the Congress leaders are said to have reiterated their opposition to any constitutional amendment to carry out delimitation.

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DMK lays down terms to back delimitation Bill

Though the government doesn't have the two-thirds majority yet to push through a constitutional amendment, the political situation has changed since April 17, when the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill was defeated on the floor of the House. The numerical strength of the INDIA bloc has since vastly changed.

In the present 540-member Lok Sabha, the two-thirds majority mark is 360, and if 22 Lok Sabha members of the DMK vote for the Bill, the government's strength would go up to 346. While the government would still be short of 14 MPs, the threshold changes if there are abstentions during the proceedings. If the government brings the Bill to the Rajya Sabha, it will find it easier to reach the two-thirds majority mark. In the Rajya Sabha, if all 244 members are present for voting, the government will need 164 votes. The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) currently has 158 MPs.

Home Minister Amit Shah had earlier said that once it is assured of the numbers, the government would once again bring the constitutional amendment Bill to increase the strength of the Lok Sabha to 850 seats in order to implement the 33% reservation for women after fresh delimitation.

Since April, the government has secured the support of 20 rebel Trinamool Congress MPs, who are now part of the Nationalist Citizens Party of India (NCPI), and six Shiv Sena MPs who had switched sides from the Uddhav Thackeray faction to the Eknath Shinde-led faction.

J&K police register FIR over PDP protests to mark 7th anniversary of Article 370 dilution

The Hindu Bureau
SRINAGAR

The J&K police on Thursday lodged an FIR against leaders and workers of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) after the party took out multiple street protests in Srinagar to mark the seventh anniversary of the dilution of Article 370, which had granted special status to the erstwhile State. The PDP termed the FIR “a blatant misuse of power and authority”.

A senior PDP leader said on condition of anonymity that the name of former Chief Minister and party chief Mehbooba Mufti has been mentioned in the FIR for taking out rallies on August 4 and 5 “without prior police permission”.

The name of Ms. Mufti's daughter, Iltija, also figures in the FIR. Ms. Iltija was stopped by the police after leading a protest at Lal Chowk late in the evening on August 4. She has been



PDP leader Iltija Mufti, who has been named in the FIR, taking out a protest march with party workers in Srinagar on Wednesday. PTI

charged under Sections 132 (assaults on a public servant), 121 (voluntarily causing hurt to deter public servant from doing their duty) and 191(2) (political rallies and mob violence) of the Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita.

According to the FIR, workers of the party, led by Ms. Mufti and Ms. Iltija, started moving towards the main road. “Police personnel requested them not to assemble on the main road as such a gathering

could disrupt the smooth movement of traffic. The request was not well received by the PDP workers. Instead, they turned aggressive and attacked the police party,” it stated.

The FIR added that the PDP workers used criminal force against the police team, “obstructed them in the discharge of their official duties, and also resorted to pushing and manhandling”. “As a result, several police officers sus-

tained injuries,” it stated.

Ms. Iltija said the FIR was “an attempt to intimidate the PDP to normalise abrogation of Article 370 like the National Conference”. “No rioting broke out at the site... A police officer, Neha Jain, dragged me and manhandled me in spite of being a woman herself,” she alleged.

‘Police question Iltija’

Meanwhile, a PDP spokesperson alleged that the police reached Ms. Mufti's residence in Srinagar's Khimber and were questioning Ms. Iltija, “who is currently undergoing medical treatment following the injuries she sustained”.

“Questioning an injured person while she is under treatment raises serious concerns and is deeply insensitive. Authorities must respect her medical condition and ensure that due process is followed with dignity and humanity,” the party spokesperson said.

SC to consider Cong. MP's petition alleging 'targeted' deletions of voters in U.P.

Barabanki MP alleges 'misuse of Form 7 during SIR to facilitate bulk, fraudulent deletion bids against eligible electors, particularly of minority and marginalised groups'; 'BLOs received pre-filled Form 7'

Krishnadas Rajagopal
NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has agreed to consider a plea by Congress MP Tanuj Punia highlighting "widespread misuse and fraud" in connection with Form 7 during the claims and objections phase of the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in Uttar Pradesh.

Form 7 is a statutory mechanism under the Registration of Electors Rules of 1960 intended to enable limited and bona fide objections to the inclusion of names in the electoral roll or deletion on narrowly defined grounds such as death or permanent shifting of residence.

Appearing before a Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant on August 5, senior advocates Salman Khurshid and advocate Shariq Ahmed, representing Mr. Punia, said there was documented evidence to show that the Form 7 process was utilised to "facilitate bulk, fraudulent



People searching for their names in the draft voter list after SIR in U.P. The EC exercise in the State ended in April. FILE PHOTO

and targeted deletion attempts against eligible electors, particularly of those belonging to minority and marginalised sections of society". The MP has arraigned the Election Commission of India and the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) of Uttar Pradesh as respondents.

The Uttar Pradesh SIR process ended in April with the final voter list showing a reported 84 lakh increase in the electorate to 13.39 crore. Mr. Khurshid and Mr. Ahmed pointed out that the issue raised in Mr. Punia's application needed to be taken up without any further delay as the process for

State Assembly election may commence as early as December 2026 or early January next year. The court has tentatively scheduled it to come up towards the end of August.

This application itself has been lying pending for nearly five months in the apex court, since February 2026, until it was taken up on August 5 for hearing.

Mr. Punia's application said there were credible reports indicating that "numerous" Form 7 applications were generated and submitted with incomplete or false particulars of the objector, invalid identifying details, forged signatures,

and, in several instances, in the names of persons who had subsequently denied filing any such objections.

It also referred to instances of Booth Level Officers having received pre-filled Form 7 applications seeking deletion of multiple electors, including electors who had already been verified during the SIR process.

'Serious apprehensions'

The Barabanki MP said these instances had raised "serious apprehensions regarding the integrity of the objection mechanism". The application referred specifically to one instance in which a person named 'Yogendar' filed objections under Form 7 against 32 electors within the same Assembly constituency in Hata, Kushinagar district.

Mr. Punia has sought initiation of penal action under Section 31 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, and other applicable provisions, against persons found to have made false declarations or filed fraudulent objections.

FCRA Bill is 'religion-neutral', Shah assures Christian bodies

Bill likely to be taken up for discussion in Parliament on August 12; Home Minister tells Christian delegations that the govt. has 'no intention to harass the Christian community'; forum requests Bill be referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

Amid concerns raised by Christian bodies over the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026 (FCRA), Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday met two delegations, including one representing all Christian denominations and communities, and assured them that the proposed legislation was "religion-neutral".

A member of the delegation said Mr. Shah asserted that the "government has no intention to harass the Christian community, or any faith (or) community for that matter".

The other delegation included Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma, who said that Mr. Shah had conveyed that the Bill was likely to be taken up for discussion in Parliament on August 12, a day before the Monsoon Session ends. "We were given an assurance that the provisions of the Bill will not be applied retrospectively," he said.

Reverend Asir Ebenezer



Mizoram Chief Minister Lalduhoma with Union Home Minister Amit Shah in New Delhi, in this file photo: ANI

er, general secretary of National Council of Churches in India, who met Mr. Shah, said the 48-member delegation of the Joint Action Forum on Minorities included representatives from all the three Christian traditions – Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox.

"We had written to the Prime Minister to register our concerns against the FCRA Bill. The Home Minister gave us time and listened to us patiently for an hour. He said it is not against the Christian faith but against anyone who violates the law. We re-

quested him that a comprehensive review of the Act that was introduced in 2010 is required," Mr. Ebenezer told *The Hindu*.

Main concern

One of the key provisions in the FCRA Bill, 2026, is the appointment of a "designated authority" to take over, manage, or dispose of assets created from foreign funds when an NGO's FCRA registration is suspended, cancelled, or not renewed. This authority will have the powers of a civil court and can order the transfer or sale of assets

owned by NGOs to either the government or any other body. The Bill was initially listed for passage in the ongoing Monsoon Session of the Parliament but did not figure in this week's list of business.

Mr. Ebenezer said that the "deemed cessation" of assets in case the FCRA registration is not renewed or cancelled by the government in absence of a formal order was also flagged at the meeting.

"The Minister asked us for a list of cases where registrations of NGOs had been cancelled without any notice. We also sought clarity on the powers of the vesting authority to dispose the assets without a judicial oversight. How can a government authority just take over my property?" he asked.

The meeting is among a series of interactions that the Home Minister has held with the Christian community to assuage concerns over the Bill.

On July 10, Mr. Shah assured the Catholic Bishops Conference of India, the apex body of the Catholic church in India, that the

Bill was not against the Christian NGOs, which receive a little under 15% of the total foreign donations.

DMK MP P. Wilson, chairman of the Joint Forum, who led the delegation, said, "We clearly spelt out the illegalities in the Bill. Even if a registration is going to be cancelled, there was no necessity to take over the properties of these organisations... it was also explained to the Home Minister that these bodies have employed expert hands for running these organisations, institutions, hospitals, and by taking over it will clearly destroy them, including the hospitals..."

The delegation submitted a representation requesting the withdrawal of the Bill in its present form. It requested that the Bill be referred to a Joint Parliamentary Committee for comprehensive stakeholder consultation.

Government sources ruled out further changes to the Bill adding that the specifics on taking over assets by designated authority will be clarified when the Rules are notified.

Gen Z's grievances must be addressed: RSS chief

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit
MUMBAI

Gen Z's grievances are genuine and need to be addressed, Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh chief Mohan Bhagwat said on Monday. Speaking days after the massive youth protest at Jantar Mantar, the RSS chief said that protest is a way of dialogue in a democracy, and that it should be used to evolve a consensus.

He was participating in an interview at an event organised by India's International Movement to Unite Nations, a youth-run non-profit, at the Nita Mukesh Ambani Cultural Centre.

Disagreeing with the tag of "anti-nationals" slapped on the young protesters by some people, Mr. Bhagwat said that Gen Z was in fact much more honest than his generation.



Mohan Bhagwat

"They are not anti-national. They are our own next generation. They have to be addressed with that relation. There has to be love," he said.

The event's organisers said that the questions Mr. Bhagwat was asked – on topics ranging from LGBTIQ rights, women's empowerment, social media use, and educational reforms, to India's relations with Pakistan and China, reservation poli-

cies, climate change, and unemployment – were collected from members of Gen Z and Gen Alpha. The interview was moderated by IIMUN's Rishabh Shah, who was cheered by the crowd when he asked questions about youth being labelled as anti-national, empowerment of women within the RSS, and the Sangh's stance on same sex marriages.

On same sex couples

Mr. Bhagwat called for a law to allow same sex companions to stay together, though not in the form of a marriage. "LGBTQIs are a part of our community. But in our community, marriage is not a convenience created for two persons to stay together. It is an institution. Family is the unit of society where the next generation is trained by their relations," he said.

After Jantar Mantar, CJP eyes national footprint

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit
MUMBAI

Less than two weeks after ending its successful agitation at Jantar Mantar, the Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) is ready to move to the next level. The group announced a nationwide membership drive, a public dialogue initiative, and an expansion plan, apart from naming its first national working committee. The announcements were made on Thursday, at the end of a two-day core committee meeting at Chhatrapati Sambhajnagar in Maharashtra.

Announcing the launch of its "Kya Bolti Public" initiative (which translates to 'What do you say, public?'), the CJP said it was keen to listen to the voices of ordinary people from different parts of the country. It also plans to launch a



Abhijeet Dipke

crowd-funding initiative to support its expansion. It will continue to focus on education reforms, but will also highlight electoral and judicial reforms and seek to enforce institutional and media accountability.

Founder and national convener Abhijeet Dipke said that the group would go to the grassroots level and build a culture among the people of seeking accountability from political systems. "We want to

change the political discourse. Youth issues will have to be taken up, whoever fights the elections. We will not support or oppose a political party," he said.

He took a swipe at RSS chief Mohan Bhagwat over the timing of his interaction with members of Gen Z, arguing that it was the Jantar Mantar protest that had forced the RSS to stop dismissing the concerns of the youth. The CJP's first national working committee puts young millennials and older members of Gen Z at the helm of the organisation, with the leadership ranging in age from 25 years to 35 years. A zonal architecture is being put in place to create organisational structures across the country. The CJP's organisational structure is to be divided into five zones across the country.

Stop the scam

The digital arrest scam persists from overseas actors

The Supreme Court of India's order of August 4 on the "digital arrest" menace is notable for not being lured into complacency. After all, the Indian Cybercrime Coordination Centre's status report showed that complaints on the National Cyber Crime Reporting Portal fell from 1,23,672 in 2024 to 58,249 in 2025, and stood at 16,377 in the first six months of 2026. The Court called the figures "certainly encouraging" and directed the Reserve Bank of India to circulate a standard operating procedure for temporary debit holds on mule accounts, States to notify cybercrime coordination centres and operationalise e-Zero FIRs, and an inter-departmental committee to examine a victim compensation framework. Thanks to advisories from banks, telecom operators and the police, fewer senior citizens and others are getting victimised by these scams, which have succeeded due to older victims' deference to authority and fear of legal trouble. Yet, scammers find it easy to target youth and professionals, and senior citizens the advisories have not reached. And there have been very few convictions despite scrutiny and investigation, which suggests that law enforcement must move faster in tackling these scams.

The digital scammers have proved nimble in their *modus operandi*. They route calls through SIM boxes to mask their origin, making them appear as Indian numbers, and use multiple mule accounts across many States to move funds swiftly. They are now known to deploy deepfakes on video calls to dupe victims and remain untraceable by investigators. In effect, the fraudsters always seem to be a step ahead of those pursuing them. The Court's insistence on restoring money – completed in 36,290 cases involving ₹18.05 crore – and on the swift disposing of account-freeze cases, alongside detection systems such as MuleHunter.AI, used in over 20 banks, will help limit the damage even when perpetrators are not caught or convicted. But convictions are rare as many of these fraud and extortion schemes are run from overseas "scam compounds" in Myanmar, the wider Golden Triangle, and Cambodia. In Myanmar, scam centres proliferated through direct and indirect official patronage, even as recent scrutiny produced raids that were largely for show with these centres shifting to new areas in the conflict-ridden country. After Beijing's crack-down, in 2023, on scam centres targeting Chinese victims, scammers shifted focus to other countries, with Indians also being trafficked and tortured to commit digital crimes against fellow citizens. New Delhi must use diplomatic pressure in coordination with China, the U.S. and ASEAN to compel Naypyidaw and Phnom Penh to act against the networks that host these compounds.

HC convicts Tarun Tejpal in 2013 sexual assault case

Chinmay Gaikwad
Yohan Varghese

MUMBAI

The Bombay High Court on Thursday convicted Tarun Tejpal, former editor of *Te-helka* magazine, in a 2013 sexual assault case and sentenced him to 10 years of rigorous imprisonment.

The Goa Division Bench of Justice Neela Gokhale and Justice Amit Jamsandekar set aside a trial court's 2021 judgment that had acquitted Tejpal.

Terming the ruling “perverse”, the Bench said the trial court fell for the notion that a sexual assault complainant must be a “perfect victim” and conduct herself in a certain way to appear credible.

The court ordered Tejpal to surrender within two weeks but extended it to four weeks on a request.

HC convicts Tejpal in 2013 sexual assault case

According to the prosecution, Tejpal sexually assaulted a junior colleague inside a hotel elevator in 2013 during an event organised by the magazine in Goa. In its 81-page judgment, the court expressed disapproval about the way the defence highlighted the complainant's personal life, and noted that it found it surprising that the trial court "remained silent and allowed the defence to harass and humiliate her during the cross examination".

The court said that the prosecution had established its case "beyond every reasonable doubt" and the victim too had stood firm in her testimony. The trial court had proceeded with the notion that a sexual assault complainant must behave in a stereotypical manner, the court said.

"The 'perfect victim' concept, more formally known as an 'ideal victim', described an unspoken cultural archetype where a person is fully believed, sympathised with and granted legitimacy only if they exhibit absolute vulnerability, complete innocence and total passivity," the court said. When a victim does not fit the description, the trauma is devalued, it added.

While Solicitor-General Tushar Mehta requested the court to award the maximum sentence, senior advocate Abad Ponda, representing Tejpal, appealed for leniency, stating that this was Tejpal's first offence and he was 62 years old.

"Let me be given an opportunity to approach the Supreme Court," Mr. Ponda said on behalf of Tejpal. He assured the court that Tejpal was not going to flee from the law. Tejpal, with permission from the court, addressed the Bench. "For the last 13 years, we have been working to bring facts and truth to light. Obviously, that holds no significance today. I am a father to two daughters, and I have a family. All I want to say is that we now have the option to appeal in a higher court," he said.

The court convicted Tejpal under Sections 376(2)(f), 376(2)(k), 354A, and 354B of the Indian Penal Code and also imposed a fine of ₹5 lakh under Section 376(2)(f).

(With inputs from PTI)

Govt deep-tech fund: Rs 2,192 cr cleared, 62% goes to firms linked to panel that chose them

15 of 22 firms chosen have links to seven members in selection panel; members say they disclosed their interests, recused; it's public money, need guardrails, says MP who flagged issue

**Amitabh Sinha
& Sandeep Singh**
New Delhi, August 6

A NEW public fund to boost India's deep-tech ambitions in the private sector has approved, in its first round, Rs 2,192 crore in soft loans to 22 private companies at the cutting edge of space science, energy tech and pharma, among others. These companies were chosen from 124 applicants by a 12-member panel, including 11 established names in private equity and technology, and a non-voting government representative. The credentials of each company are well-established.

There's one question mark, though.

An investigation by *The Indian Express* has found that of the 22 recipients of public money, 15 have investment ties to seven members of the selection committee, raising questions of conflict of interest and propriety. These together got over Rs 1,377 crore. Nine of the firms are linked to the chairman of the selection panel, the founder of an angel investing network who also has a personal stake in at least one of the companies selected.

These members are part of the Investment Committee of the Technology Development Board (TDB), one of the two organisations under the Ministry

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• Which firm got how much, what's the link

Saurabh Srivastava

Former Chairman, NASSCOM & IVCA and Co-founder, Indian Angel Network

Company & funding approved

- Noccarc Robotics (Medical) ₹11.41 cr
- EndureAir Systems (Advanced Manufacturing) ₹30.01 cr
- e-TRNL Energy (Energy) ₹94 cr
- Dhruva Space (Space) ₹105 cr
- BigEndian (Semiconductors) ₹130 cr
- Astrome Technologies (Space) ₹64.05 cr
- Peptiris Technologies (Pharma) ₹86 cr
- Serigen Mediproducts, (Medical) ₹20 cr
- Manastu Space Technologies (Space) ₹116 cr

Debashish Bhattacharjee

Former Vice President (Technology



TASHI TOBGYAL

Dept of Science & Technology.

and R&D). Tata Steel, Managing Partner, Lionstead Ventures & TDB Board Member

- Neo Seekermetals (Minerals, metals) ₹10 cr

Sanjay Nayak

Former CEO & Co-founder, Tejas Networks Ltd.

- Ather Energy (Semiconductors) ₹211.89 cr
- Tejas Networks

Anand Deshpande

Chairman, Persistent System

- Serigen Mediproducts

Gopal Srinivasan

Chairman & MD, TVS Capitals Fund

- Agnikul Cosmos (Space) ₹200 cr

Sudhir Mehta

Founder and Chairman, Pinnacle Industries and EKA Mobility

- Replus Engitech (Energy) ₹42.75 cr

RDI FUNDING APPROVED IN ₹CR, SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY, RoC RECORDS

Soft loan for R&D in private sector to cut red tape: How it works

Amitabh Sinha
New Delhi, August 6

THE RESEARCH, Development and Innovation (RDI) Fund, with a corpus of Rs 1 lakh crore, was created by the Government last year to provide collateral-free, low-cost, long-term loans to private sector companies engaged in advanced research and innovation in priority deep-tech sectors like artificial intelligence, quantum technology, space

science, defence, robotics, clean energy, semiconductors and digital healthcare.

Who administers the fund?

The fund is housed under the Anusandhan National Research Foundation (ANRF), a recently established statutory body under the Ministry of Science and Technology to promote research and innovation, especially in the university system, mobilise additional financial resources for R&D activities, and strengthen industry-academia collaborations. A Special Purpose Fund (SPF) has been created under ANRF, which is the custodian of money allocated for the RDI Fund.

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Govt deep-tech fund

of Science and Technology entrusted with picking firms for the Rs 1-lakh-crore Research, Development and Innovation (RDI) Fund launched in November 2025 (see accompanying story).

When contacted, the seven panel members denied any impropriety and said the fund's guidelines forbid them from participating in the evaluation process in situations of conflict of interest. They said they had communicated their interests to the Government in advance and, as required under the guidelines, recused themselves from decisions concerning firms linked to them.

However, this issue was flagged in Parliament by Congress Rajya Sabha MP Praveen Chakravarty. In a written reply submitted on July 30, Science and Technology Minister Jitendra Singh listed the names of the seven members who had disclosed financial interest in companies selected for funding.

Since it was not specifically asked, the Union Minister's reply did not detail the nature or extent of their investments. The next day, the Department of Science and Technology clarified that the selections were done "purely on merit" and that there was "zero involvement of any conflicted members during the evaluation or sanction process of concerned proposals".

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Chakravarty suggested that "perhaps, the committee to fund R&D in deep tech can comprise mainly of scientists, academics and others with no for-profit indulgences". "Commercial viability and financial evaluation can always be received from experts external to the committee," the MP said, adding that "the optics is as important as the intent".

Consider the findings from Registrar of Companies (RoC)

and Parliament records, and information posted on official company websites about the selection committee members, and the selected firms linked to them:

1. SAURABH SRIVASTAVA, former chairman of NASSCOM (National Association of Software and Service Companies) & IVCA (Indian Venture and Alternate Capital Association), and co-founder of Indian Angel Network (IAN) Group, an investment firm.

Srivastava chairs the 12-member Investment Committee (IC) of the TDB. RoC records and IAN's website show he is linked to most number of companies on the list, with a personal stake of 0.75 per cent in Noccarc Robotics, Pune, for which Rs 11.41 crore was approved from the RDI Fund. Consider this:

- Noccarc Robotics, Pune: Funded initially and later by IAN Group; VISTRA ITCL (India), a trustee for IAN Fund, holds 44.05% stake; Srivastava is a director in Noccarc and has a personal stake of 0.75% in the company.

- EndureAir Systems, Noida (RDI Fund Rs 30.01 cr): 2.35% held by Foundation for Innovation & Research, in Science & Technology (FIRST), IIT-Kanpur, as of March 2025; Srivastava is a director in FIRST. Also funded by IAN Fund.

- BigEndian Semiconductors, Bengaluru (RDI Fund Rs 130 cr): IAN Fund.

- eTRNL Energy, Mumbai (RDI Fund Rs 94 cr): IAN Fund.

- Dhruva Space, Hyderabad (RDI Fund Rs 105 cr): IAN; Srivastava holds one preference share.

- Astrome Technologies, Bengaluru (RDI Fund Rs 64.05 cr): IAN Group holds 1,501 shares through Vistra ITCL and IAN Services as of November 2025.

- Peptris Technologies, Bengaluru (RDI Fund Rs 86 cr):

IAN Fund.

- Serigen Mediproducs, Pune (RDI Fund Rs 20 cr): IAN (5 preference shares); IAN Alpha Fund (1,004 preference shares).

- Manastu Space Technologies, Thane (RDI Fund Rs 116 cr): IAN Services (67 preference shares).

"The IC (Investment Committee) comprises professionals from industry with a background in technology and investing... In such a situation, conflict of interest is not unexpected, not so much from IC members having invested in a company but from investments made by Funds where they are members. In all such cases, the rules are very clear: the concerned IC member must recuse himself/ herself. This is recorded in the meetings," Srivastava said.

2. KRS JAMWAL, who retired this year as Executive Director of Tata Industries, has links to seven of the selected companies. RoC records show they include:

- Tejas Networks, Bengaluru (RDI Fund Rs 250 cr): A Tata Group company. Jamwal was Executive Director of Tata Industries till June 2026.

- Manastu Space Technologies, Thane (RDI Fund Rs 116 cr): 67 preference shares.

- ThinkMetal, Chennai (RDI Fund Rs 6.7 cr): 53 preference shares.

Parliament records show Jamwal has also disclosed interests in EndureAir Systems, BigEndian Semiconductors, Peptris Technologies and Noccarc Robotics. "I even recused myself from the Tejas Networks evaluation meeting and decision as I was then ED, Tata Industries, even though no financial stakes were involved either in my personal or professional capacities," Jamwal said.

3. GOPAL SRINIVASAN, Chairman and Managing Director, TVS Capital Funds, holds 33 preference shares in Chennai-based Agnikul Cosmos, which was picked for Rs 200 crore under the RDI Fund.

"The rules on this are pretty elaborate and stringent. Members not just have to disclose their interests in companies that have applied for funding, but even in their rival companies — standards that are above and beyond typical ICs in the industry," Srinivasan said.

4. SUDHIR MEHTA, Founder and Chairman, Pinnacle Industries and EKA Mobility, disclosed interests in Pune-based Replus Engitech (RDI Fund Rs 42.75 cr).

"These kinds of conflict of interest situations are not unusual. We encounter these all the time, in banks, corporate world or financial institutions... The standard procedure in such situations is full disclosure and mandatory recusal. This is what has happened in the case of RDI Fund as well. Transparency is important," Mehta said.

5. SANJAY NAYAK is co-founder and former CEO of Bengaluru-based Tejas Networks (RDI Fund Rs 250 cr), and an independent director on the board of Bengaluru-based Ather Energy (RDI Fund Rs 211.89 cr). "The best people in the deep-tech ecosystem would obviously be connected to this ecosystem... There are adequate safeguards, adequate protection for public money, at the same time it (the fund) is focused on creation of a strong deep-tech ecosystem," Nayak said.

6. ANAND DESHPANDE, Chairman, Persistent Systems, holds 65 preference shares in Pune-based Serigen Mediproducs (RDI Fund Rs 20 cr). "There is no perfect system. But very clean processes have already been put in place. All of us understand conflicts of interest, and everyone is extremely conscious of this," Deshpande said.

7. DEBASHISH BHATTACHARJEE, former Vice President (Technology and R&D), Tata Steel, and Managing Partner, Lionstead Ventures, has disclosed interests in Hyderabad-based NeoSeeker Metals (RDI Fund Rs 10 cr), Parliament rec-

ords show.

"As far as conflict of interest is concerned, I think it is important to ensure that the process is not just fair but is also seen to be fair. And I think that the detailed guidelines on this that have been put in place, and which are followed strictly in letter and spirit, do take care of this aspect," Bhattacharjee said.

Detailed responses from these 7 members are available on www.indianexpress.com.

Rajya Sabha MP Chakravarty said: "I am not casting any aspersions on anyone, and I am not saying some wrongdoing has happened here. My only concern is institutional robustness... I fully back the idea of the Government having to fund R&D in cutting edge tech. This is not a financial investment programme but a strategic public goods initiative using public money. So it is extremely important to get the processes right."

According to Chakravarty, "conflict of interest situations arise pretty often, and are dealt with through disclosure and recusal" in the corporate world. "But there has to be a distinction between the corporate world and public money. Dealing with public money requires additional set of guardrails. What is adequate for corporate world may not be good enough for public policy. An initiative like this should not only conform to the highest levels of transparency but seen to be conforming too," he said.

The seven remaining private firms with no links to the investment committee are: Eyestem Research, Bengaluru (RDI Fund Rs 125 crore); Ubify Technologies, Mumbai (RDI Fund Rs 285 crore); QuNu Labs, Bengaluru (RDI Fund Rs 150 crore); Galaxeye Space Solutions, Chennai (RDI Fund Rs 63.84 crore); Multi Nano Sense Technologies, Bengaluru (RDI Fund Rs 37.51 crore); ideaForge Technology, Thane (RDI Fund Rs 151 crore); Endimension Technology, Mumbai (RDI Fund Rs 3 crore).

Govt. okays ₹23,371 cr. GOBARdhan scheme

The National Circular Bioenergy Scheme aspires to raise local production of CBG by tenfold, mobilise private investments on a large scale

Saptaparno Ghosh

NEW DELHI

The Union cabinet approved the National Circular Bioenergy Scheme - GOBARdhan, provisioning ₹23,731-crore to catalyse the growth of compressed biogas (CBG).

The GOBARdhan (Galvanising Organic Bio-Agro Resources Dhan) outlay, to be in place until FY2035-36 seeks to raise local compressed biogas production almost tenfold via assured offtake, administered pricing, capital subsidies, boosting pipeline infrastructure and easier access to finance, the Centre said.

The government emphasised the scheme would seek to impart a “strong and predictable framework” to fuel the up-tick of the CBG ecosystem.



Energy security: The compressed biogas plant at Brahmapuram currently processes about 50 tonne of biodegradable waste a day.

The programme would involve the use of agricultural residue, cattle dung, sugar industry waste such as press mud, municipal organic waste and other biomass to produce compressed biogas, which can be blended into CNG used in automobiles and also piped natural gas (PNG).

Three imperatives

Welcoming the government initiative, A.R. Shuk-

la, President of the Indian Biogas Association said the scheme addresses three imperatives – remunerative price, assured offtake and capital support – sought by the industry.

“This scheme delivers all three,” he said, adding, “moving from 300 operating plants towards 5,000 [plants] will create lakhs of rural jobs. Industry must respond with speed, quality and discipline.”

'Proposed deal will give Tehran control over inbound strait traffic'

Under the proposal, Tehran will be able to intervene if necessary with any inbound traffic in the strait, while outbound traffic will follow a route between Iran and Oman, with exit clearance granted through Muscat after notifying Iran

Reuters
LONDON

A proposed deal between Iran and Oman that would give Tehran control over ships entering the Gulf through the Strait of Hormuz is not easily workable due to U.S. sanctions and restrictive insurance clauses on any payments, four industry sources said.

Under the latest proposal, Tehran would be able to intervene if necessary with any inbound traffic, while outbound traffic would follow a route between Iran and Oman, with exit clearance granted through Oman after notifying Iran, a senior Iranian



A small boat sails past cargo ships and other commercial vessels anchored in the Strait of Hormuz off Bandar Abbas in Iran. AP

source told Reuters.

The ability of merchant ships to navigate international waterways "safely, predictably and without unnecessary impediment is fundamental to resilient

supply chains, economic stability and energy security", the world's leading shipping associations said in an open letter this week.

Introducing compulsory charges through the

strait for transit or service fees was "a toll in all but name", the letter said, which was sent to the UN's shipping agency.

What is known as a two-way traffic separation scheme was adopted by the UN's shipping agency in 1968 with the agreement of countries in the region. It created the current ship routing system that split sailing corridors through Iranian and Omani waters. Iran is seeking fees of between 5% and 7% of the price of cargoes from ships using the strait. Oman is discussing fees of around 3%.

For shipping companies and oil traders, any imposition of fees creates major

compliance issues given the U.S. has imposed sanctions on the Persian Gulf Strait Authority, which Iran set up in May to operate the waterway. The U.S. Treasury has also prohibited U.S. persons from receiving services from Iran's government related to a "guarantee of safe passage". Any payment could lead to asset freezes, the industry sources said.

A further complication is the introduction in late July by Lloyd's Market Association of a clause for use by war underwriters that terminates insurance cover for a vessel if it has paid a transit fee for passage through the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran to Gulf: Tell Trump to desist or face attacks

Saudi urges Trump to delay military action, pursue talks

Reuters

August 6

IRAN HAS made a concerted diplomatic push with Gulf states, warning them explicitly that Tehran will hit their oil, power and water plants unless they convince Donald Trump to end US strikes on Iran and instead seek a negotiated end to the war.

The warning envisaged attacks on the energy facilities, oil fields, refineries, electricity grids, water infrastructure, transport networks and other strategic assets of Washington's closest Arab allies, according to a senior Iranian official.

The message, part of a broader Iranian effort to deter further US military action by raising the prospect of severe economic disruption across the Gulf, was delivered through a flurry of high-level diplomatic contacts after Trump threatened on July 28 to strike Iran's energy infrastructure, the sources said.

Two senior Iranian officials, two Gulf sources and a senior regional diplomat with knowledge of the discussions said Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi spoke with his Saudi, Turkish and Qatari counterparts, as

well as Pakistan's army chief. All spoke on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter.

Araghchi urged Washington's Gulf allies to use their influence with Trump to dissuade him from launching renewed strikes, the senior diplomat said, warning that any attack on Iran would prompt retaliation against US assets and critical infrastructure across the Gulf.

His message was consistent in every conversation, the diplomat said: "We're ready to retaliate, but finding a diplomatic solution is the best way to avoid wider escalation and destruction across the region."

"The Iranian warning was unequivocal: if America targeted Iran's infrastructure, they would retaliate by striking Gulf energy facilities and other regional targets," one Gulf source said.

The diplomatic campaign underscores how Iran is seeking to turn Gulf vulnerability into leverage, confronting regional governments with the prospect that any renewed US-Iran confrontation could place the infrastructure underpinning their economies directly in firing line.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman subsequently spoke with Trump, urging him to delay military action, return to negotiations, secure a ceasefire and pursue a diplomatic settlement, the senior diplomat and Gulf sources said.

Donald Trump in the Persian labyrinth

“When we are finished, take over your government. It will be yours to take. This will be probably your only chance for generations,” United States President Donald Trump told Iranians on February 28, 2026, after the U.S. and Israel assassinated Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and launched a war against the country. More than five months later, the war that Mr. Trump believed would be over in weeks, if not days, is far from over. The Islamic Republic has not only survived but has also consolidated its position, at home and in the region. Mr. Trump has alternated between strikes, ceasefires, talks, threats, ultimatums, renewed strikes, and U-turns in an attempt to shape the course and outcome of the conflict and the behaviour of the Iranian state, while seeking a face-saving exit. But with the war unresolved and his objectives unmet, Mr. Trump, confronting a resolute yet risk-tolerant Tehran, has found himself in a strategic cul-de-sac.

The U.S. and Israel launched the war with four principal objectives: destroy Iran's nuclear programme; dismantle its missile capabilities and military industrial base; end Tehran's support for its non-state quartet (Hamas, Houthis, Hezbollah and Hashad) and bring about a regime change. The first three objectives, however, were inseparable from the fourth. Without toppling the Islamic Republic, achieving any of the other goals appeared impossible even before the war began. This makes regime change or regime collapse the central strategic aim of the war on which all the others depended.

The President's grave miscalculation

The challenge before Mr. Trump was to engineer regime change through an aerial campaign alone. He was unwilling to commit ground troops, and the U.S. lacked a credible local ally capable of leading an armed insurgency against Tehran. Mr. Trump initially seemed aware of the risks of attacking Iran. In June 2025, the U.S. joined Israel in striking Iran's nuclear facilities but quickly stepped back. He then declared that he had “obliterated” Iran's nuclear programme and compelled Israel to accept a ceasefire. Determined to avoid a wider regional conflict, he sought to prevent the war from spiralling out of control.

But by February 2026, two developments, along with sustained pressure from Israel, appeared to have convinced him that Iran could be defeated in a short war. The first was the U.S. invasion of Venezuela in early January, which in Mr. Trump's view was a resounding success. U.S. forces abducted President Nicolás Maduro, and withdrew without suffering casualties. Venezuelan Vice-President Delcy Rodríguez, who assumed the acting presidency, quickly offered full cooperation with Washington. The second was the wave of violent protests and riots across



Stanly Johny

Iran in January, which reinforced the belief in Washington and Tel Aviv that the government in Tehran had been fatally weakened. They believed that by bombing Iran and decapitating its leadership, the regime would either collapse or result in a new leadership willing to cooperate with Washington, much as they believed had happened in Venezuela. This proved to be a grave miscalculation.

The three pillars of Iran's response

Iran's response rested on three pillars – preserving the state; regionalising the war; and enhancing its economic cost through horizontal escalation. Tehran understood that because Mr. Trump's other war aims were dependent on regime change, preserving the Islamic Republic would, by itself, deny Washington its broader objectives. Mr. Trump mistook Iran for a personality-driven authoritarian regime, which could crumble once the head was taken out. But the Iranian state is sustained by a deeply-entrenched institutional system and an ideology that fuses Shia notions of sacrifice with the ideals of political revolution. Under attack, the state – designed and built to withstand both internal and external shocks – consolidated, while millions rallied around the flag.

The second element was to turn the U.S. bases in the region, built to project American power and protect its allies, into vulnerable targets. Tehran shut down the Strait of Hormuz through which roughly 20% of the world's seaborne crude oil passed before the war. It turned the Persian Gulf into a battlefield and kept American warships out of it. The Iranian view was that if it was not allowed to export crude, nobody in the Gulf would be able to do so through the Strait. Surprisingly, the U.S. had no contingency plan for the closure of the Strait. Once the waterway was shut, the dynamics of the war began to shift. It was at that point that Mr. Trump began to lose the strategic initiative.

After 40 days of bombing, Mr. Trump announced a ceasefire on April 8. Since then, he has been searching for a dignified exit from the conflict. On June 17, he signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Iran, under which Washington made significant concessions. Unable to present the MoU as a victory at home, however, Mr. Trump soon resumed military strikes, only to be met each time with Iranian retaliation. The ensuing cycle of escalation pushed Washington even farther from its original objectives, while Iran's willingness to take risks continued to grow.

The war has inflicted immense damage to Iran's military infrastructure and economy. Yet, Tehran, which has lived under U.S. sanctions for nearly five decades, seems willing to absorb the pain because it sees a strategic opportunity to reshape the regional balance of power at a time when the U.S. is confronting the limits of its own overreach.

As the war dragged on, Iran stepped out of the shadows of asymmetric warfare and increasingly shaped both the course and the pace of the conflict. When U.S. bombing resumed in July following the collapse of the MoU, Washington's primary objective shifted to reopening the Strait of Hormuz, which had remained open until February 27. Four months into the war, Iran had forced the U.S. to set aside its original objectives – from regime change to the destruction of Iran's nuclear programme – and instead contend with a new strategic problem created by Tehran itself. In July, while responding to U.S. strikes, Iran widened the conflict by intensifying attacks on Jordan and targeting Iraqi Kurdistan, Syria, and the Persian Gulf monarchies. Yemen's Ansar Allah (the Houthis) struck Saudi oil facilities and imposed a naval blockade on the kingdom's Red Sea ports. The conflict thus expanded horizontally in July, something which Mr. Trump was unprepared.

Trapped in escalation

Consider America's major military campaigns in the 21st century. In Afghanistan, U.S. forces achieved an initial swift victory by toppling the Taliban and establishing a new political order. They began losing the war only after the Taliban began regrouping and started a sustained insurgency. In Iraq and Libya, Washington succeeded in bringing down the regimes, even though the interventions destroyed those states and societies. In each of those theatres, the U.S. at least achieved its immediate military objectives, before failing to manage the post-war order.

But in Iran, the U.S. lost the war in the first phase itself. The U.S. now faces a diminished presence in West Asia, while Iran, with Hormuz under its control, is reasserting itself as a Persian Gulf regional power. Mr. Trump is no longer talking about Iran's missile programme, its foreign policy or the character of the Iranian state. Forget regime change; today, he is asking the Islamic Republic, the same regime he sought to topple, to make a deal with Washington.

Trapped in this Persian labyrinth, Mr. Trump has few good options. He can acknowledge defeat and exercise diplomatic patience to reach a deal with Tehran and extricate the U.S. from the conflict. For Washington, which has been the dominant power in the Persian Gulf at least since the 1956 Suez War, this would come at a significant strategic cost. Alternatively, Mr. Trump could turn his failed air campaign into a full-scale invasion, with more devastating strikes and the potential deployment of ground troops. But there is no guarantee that escalation would help him win the war. On the contrary, it could draw the U.S. deeper into the sands of Iran, where a military of roughly 6,00,000 soldiers would be waiting.

America's Iran war stalls as Tehran turns pressure into strategic advantage

The Hasina factor in India-Bangladesh ties



SUBHAJIT ROY

OUSTED BANGLADESH Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina had her first media interaction through virtual mode on Wednesday, where she said she plans to return to her country, stand with its people, and help improve their lives.

The statement, made while she is in India, its timing, and Hasina's willingness to answer or dodge questions have implications for herself, Bangladesh's politics, and New Delhi's ties with its neighbour.

Bangladesh, predictably, has reacted with outrage that "the absconding convicted genocider Sheikh Hasina was allowed this evening to engage in live interaction with the media in New Delhi..." according to a statement by its foreign ministry.

The timing

Hasina, who fled Bangladesh on August 5, 2024, amid raging protests, has been living in India in an undisclosed location for the last two years. She had addressed the media at the Foreign Correspondents' Club of South Asia in January through an audio-recorded message, but had not taken questions. That message was played out a month before the national elections in Bangladesh.

This time, Hasina took questions, and was also joined online by her son, Saieeb Wazed Joy, who was an adviser in her government and lives in the US.

The tone and the statement

Hasina's statement was emotional and rhetorical, with her voice choking as she spoke from a prepared text. In the statement that lasted about 23 minutes, she highlighted the violent political unrest in Bangladesh, the destruction of public and private properties, the killing of police officers, and the targeting of media.

She emphasized the economic decline, with GDP growth falling to 2.2% from 6.8%, and called for international support to restore democracy and justice in Bangladesh.

She declared, "Whatever fate awaits me,



I will return to my people. I cannot stay away while my beloved countrymen are suffering." The former prime minister has been sentenced to death over the killing of protesters in July-August 2024, and also faces a number of corruption cases.

Asked when she plans to return, Hasina referred to the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war and said, "December is our victory month, so I want to go back in the month of December." Her statement is aimed at shoring up support in favour of her party, the banned Awami League, against the incumbent Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP) government.

The BNP government is facing economic challenges amid oil and gas price pressures due to the war in West Asia. Hasina hopes to make a political comeback before the next elections in Bangladesh.

However, her dodging the question of apologies and regret for the killings of protesters in July-August 2024 has been a sore point for many in Bangladesh.

Asked whether his mother had any regret for the killing of students and protesters, Joy said: "Look, this question of regret and apologies has been raised, but you see the Yunus regime and the BNP regime has continued... They have legalised the killings of police officers, the killings of civilians, the killings of Awami League members... And you have heard my mother express that this

Former Bangladesh PM Sheikh Hasina addresses a press conference in New Delhi via audio link. PRAVEEN KHANNA

Tricky ties

The Ganga Water Treaty of 1996 is due for renewal this year. The Teesta water treaty is still to be signed.

While Bangladesh has removed visa curbs, some trade restrictions remain. Delhi also views illegal immigration from Bangladesh as a major irritant.

was a violent situation. So, if one set of killings is legal, then how does the question of apology arise? Why does it arise?"

Hasina's statements were barred from being broadcast in Bangladesh's mainstream media, using the same draconian laws that the Hasina government had used against current Prime Minister Tarique Rahman 17 years ago

New Delhi and the BNP govt

Hasina in her statement directly targeted the BNP government, with which India has tried to cultivate ties.

Rahman had also signalled a positive relationship with India in his pronouncements. But there have since been challenges — Delhi views illegal immigration from Bangladesh as a major irritant, and the BJP-led West Bengal government has upped the ante on this. The fact that Rahman has visited China but not India yet also signals that there is some tension.

Amid the outstanding bilateral issues, the Ganga Water Treaty of 1996 is due for renewal this year. The Teesta water treaty is still to be signed. While Bangladesh has removed visa curbs on Indians, some trade restrictions remain.

In such a complicated bilateral situation, Hasina's statements targeting the BNP government are certain to create acrimony. "Dhaka deeply regrets that in spite of con-

Sheikh Hasina's press conference in New Delhi can be seen as India using the Bangladesh ex-PM's statements and silences as a diplomatic lever

cerns conveyed apriori to the Government of India about the likely ramifications of this event on the reset of our bilateral relations, this public event was permitted to be held," its foreign ministry said on August 5.

Indeed, it is learnt that New Delhi allowing a platform for the former PM has had a negative impact in Dhaka.

BNP leaders feel that this only reinforces the belief that India is pro-Awami League, and is unable to reconcile to the new political realities. Many in Dhaka view this as a misstep at a time when the Rahman government was trying to repair ties. This also puts the possible visit by Rahman for the BRICS summit in September in jeopardy. And India will have to work hard to assuage the suspicion this episode might have instilled in the minds of Bangladesh's decision-makers.

For Delhi, a robust and healthy bilateral relationship with Dhaka is essential, especially since it needs Dhaka to access its north-eastern states easily. A peaceful and stable Bangladesh, where anti-India statements and activities are kept in-check is important for Delhi's internal security.

Bangladesh too needs India, since it is surrounded by the large neighbour from three sides. The Hasina episode highlights New Delhi's tough balancing act to deal with a tricky bilateral relationship.

India's tightrope

In 2024, India gave Hasina refuge instantly, even when other doors were closed to her. She has lived here since. On how the Indian government had been treating her, Joy said she is being treated like a Head of State, with full services and security.

While the Ministry of External Affairs has clarified, for the record, that it was not involved in Hasina's press interaction, the event can be seen as New Delhi creating leverage by using the former PM — her statements and her silences — to gain some diplomatic quid pro quo in negotiations on trade, water, economy, politics, security, and a range of tricky areas with Bangladesh.

The fact that India has kept her in safe custody with full security is similar to how New Delhi has treated the Dalai Lama — much to China's annoyance. He is allowed to conduct spiritual activities and not political activities, but the Tibetan leader has the ability to fuse the two with finesse.

Ukraine strikes Russian oil refineries far from frontline

Agence France-Presse

MOSCOW

Ukraine struck two Russian oil refineries hundreds of kilometres from the border in an overnight attack, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Thursday, as Russia hit a train station and commercial ship in Ukraine.

Both sides have been intensifying their long-range attacks in recent months, leading to a jump in civilian deaths.

Kyiv has been firing record numbers of drones at Russia, while Moscow has been launching all-time high missile attacks.

Mr. Zelenskyy said Ukraine had hit oil refineries in the Bashkortostan and Yaroslavl regions – about 1,300 and 700 km from the front. The attacks were “strengthening the pros-



Smoke rises after a Ukrainian drone attack on an oil refinery, as per the regional governor, in Yaroslavl region of Russia. REUTERS

pects for diplomacy”, Mr. Zelenskyy said.

“Russia must choose peace,” he added, posting a video from Russian social media of black smoke rising above an oil facility.

Russia’s Defence Ministry said earlier it had downed 605 Ukrainian drones in the night.

Russian missile attacks on Kyiv a day earlier had

killed at least 17 and destroyed warehouses belonging to a number of retailers in what was widely seen as a direct response to Ukraine’s campaign targeting Wildberries.

Kyiv was unable to down any of the missiles Russia fired, prompting urgent calls from Mr. Zelenskyy for air defence supplies.

China-Japan row escalates after Tokyo terms Beijing 'greatest strategic challenge'

Press Trust of India

BEIJING

China has lodged a "serious diplomatic" protest with Japan over its latest defence white paper, which portrayed Beijing as Tokyo's "greatest strategic challenge" and made "brazen comments" on Taiwan, further escalating tensions between the two countries.

"The white paper once again targeted China with groundless accusations, rehashing the so-called 'China threat' and grossly interfering in China's internal affairs with brazen comments on China's Taiwan region," Foreign Ministry spokesperson Lin Jing said on Wednesday.

"We deplore and firmly reject this, and have lodged serious representations with Japan," he said while answering questions over Japan's new defence white paper.

'Internal affair'

Defending recurring military drills around Taiwan, which China claims as part of its territory, Mr. Lin said, "Taiwan is an inalienable part of China's territory. The Taiwan question is entirely China's internal affair. How to resolve it is a matter for the Chinese ourselves and Japan is in no place to interfere."

About disputed islands in the East China Sea, he said, "Diaoyu Dao and its affiliated islands have been



Shinjiro Koizumi

China's territory since ancient times."

The islands, called Senkaku by Japan and Diaoyu Dao by China, are controlled by Tokyo. The Chinese coast guard periodically conducts patrols around them to assert Beijing's sovereignty.

The white paper approved by Japan's Cabinet

on Tuesday said China's growing military actions are Japan's top security challenge and "must be addressed through overall national strength and cooperation with allies and like-minded nations".

The nearly 600-page white paper contained a detailed assessment of the increasingly volatile regional security environment.

In his preface to the white paper, Japanese Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi hoped that it would "deepen the public's understanding of Japan's defence and security, and serve as an opportunity for people to reflect on how security is linked to the future of every citizen".