

Karnataka outfits call for bandh on Aug. 13 over Cauvery water

B.S. Sathish Kumar

BENGALURU

Various organisations in Karnataka have called a State bandh on August 13 in protest against the Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA)'s directive to release water to Tamil Nadu.

On Thursday, the CWMA upheld the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee's (CWRC) earlier order to Karnataka to release 3,500 cusecs of Cauvery water to Tamil Nadu for 15 days. Citing poor storage in its reservoirs, Karnataka has been reiterating its inability to release water to Tamil Nadu.

A decision to call the bandh was taken at a meeting of various Kannada organisations held in Bengaluru on Friday under the leadership of veteran leader and former MLA Vatal Nagaraj.

Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar appealed to the organisations not to go



A protest in Bengaluru on Friday. SUDHAKARA JAIN

ahead with the bandh. He said the government would decide its next move only after getting advice from legal experts and after consulting the Opposition parties at an all-party meeting on Sunday.

In view of the tense atmosphere in the State, Mr. Shivakumar appealed to his Tamil Nadu counterpart, C. Joseph Vijay, to put off his visit to Karnataka.

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Karnataka outfits call for bandh on August 13

Mr. Shivakumar's appeal came in the wake of protests across Karnataka's Cauvery basin, particularly in the command area of Mandya, where demonstrators tore posters of Mr. Vijay's recently released film *Jana Nayagan* and forced theatres at some places to halt its screening.

Mandya district continued to witness protests as Opposition BJP workers staged a demonstration outside the main entrance to the KRS reservoir in Mandya district. The police detained a large number of BJP workers and leaders, including party's State president B.Y. Vijayendra and Leader of the Opposition in the Legislative Assembly R. Ashok. The BJP has threatened to boycott Sunday's all-party meeting if the "Chief Minister does not give a commitment on not releasing water" to Tamil Nadu.

The Chief Minister said the inflow into the reservoirs in Karnataka's Cauvery basin had improved in the last two to three days and described it as a "reassuring sign". Referring to the storage position of four reservoirs in the State's Cauvery basin, he said Harangi reservoir had a storage of 95% of its full capacity, while that in Kabini was 83%, KRS 36%, and Hemavathi 67%.

"The release made till July in this year has been the smallest quantum of water released in the last 100 years to Tamil Nadu," he said. In fact, Tamil Nadu had sought release of 9.94 tmcft of water, but the CWRC recommended roughly half that amount, he noted.

Lok Sabha passes Births and Deaths Bill amid protests over police crackdown

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Lok Sabha on Friday passed the Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill, 2026 without debate amid loud protests by the Opposition against the police crackdown on student protesters at Jantar Mantar on July 20.

The Opposition protests began as soon as the House convened at 11 a.m., forcing Speaker Om Birla to adjourn it till noon. The ruckus continued when the House reassembled.

BJP MP Dilip Saikia, who was in the chair, asked for listed papers to be laid on the table. These included grant of deadline extension to the Joint Parliamentary



Proceedings under way in the Lok Sabha on Friday. ANI

Committee examining the Constitution (130th Amendment) Bill, 2025 for submission of report. The Constitution Amendment Bill proposes the automatic removal of Ministers, Chief Minister, or Prime Minister if they are arrested and held in custody for 30 days on serious criminal charg-

es carrying a jail term of five years or more.

Following this, Minister of State for Home Nityanand Rai put up the Registration of Births and Deaths (Amendment) Bill for discussion. It seeks to make delayed registration of births and deaths more stringent by requiring an

order from a judicial magistrate (first class) for registrations done after two years.

Unfortunate, says Rijiju

The Opposition MPs then trooped into the Well of the House demanding the presence of Home Minister Amit Shah even as Mr. Saikia called out the names of MPs listed to speak during the debate. The Bill was passed by voice vote amid sloganeering.

Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju said the passage of the Bill in this manner was unfortunate. "Please do not repeat this in the future. People who sent you to Parliament will seek answers from you," he said.

Cong. moves privilege motion over Jitendra Singh's 'no firing' claim

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday stepped up its challenge to the government's account of the student protests, with party general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal submitting a notice to move a privilege motion against Union Minister Jitendra Singh for telling the Lok Sabha that "no firing took place".

In the notice to Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, Mr. Venugopal accused the Minister of "knowingly and deliberately" placing incorrect information on record and misleading the House during his reply to the debate on the Public Examinations (Prevention of Unfair Means) Amendment Bill, 2026, on July 29.

Mr. Venugopal cited Mr. Singh's statement: "Secondly, it has been repeatedly clarified that no firing took place at all; tear gas was used; so when no fir-



K.C. Venugopal

ing took place at all, the question of giving an order does not arise."

"Contrary to the Minister's assertions, firing did occur. The injured person is still under medication, with data available in the public domain," he said.

Mr. Venugopal said misleading the House constituted a breach of privilege and contempt of Parliament.

He urged the Speaker to initiate privilege proceedings against Mr. Singh and refer the matter to the Committee of Privileges for examination and necessary action.

Centre extends PM-Kisan for four more years, allocates ₹3.15 lakh cr.

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Union Cabinet on Friday approved continuation of the Pradhan Mantri Kisan Samman Nidhi (PM-KISAN) Scheme from 2026-27 to 2030-31, with a total financial outlay of ₹3.15 lakh crore.

The scheme provides a financial assistance of ₹6,000 per year for farmers. The government said it had transferred more than ₹4.47 lakh crore directly to farmers' bank accounts in 23 instalments under the scheme which was

The govt. had transferred over ₹4.47 lakh crore to farmers' accounts in 23 instalments

launched in February 2019. "Under the 23rd instalment, more than 9.49 crore farmers benefited, with over ₹18,984 crore released," the Union Agriculture Ministry said in a release.

Women beneficiaries

The government added that women farmers had

received more than ₹1.06 lakh crore under PM-KISAN, and nearly one out of every four beneficiary was a woman farmer.

"The assistance provided under PM-KISAN has enabled farmers to make timely investments in seeds, fertilizers, irrigation, agricultural machinery and other agricultural requirements. This has enhanced farmers' productive capacity, reduced their dependence on informal credit and strengthened the financial stability of rural households," the Ministry added.

{GENERAL VN SHARMA • 1930-2026 }

Ex-Army Chief who oversaw IPKF withdrawal from Lanka

Man Aman Singh Chhina
Chandigarh, July 31

GENERAL VISHWA Nath Sharma (ret'd), who led the Army from 1988 to 1990, died in New Delhi on Friday. He was 96. A cavalry officer, the General is known to have refused to carry out a withdrawal of forces facing the Chinese Army in the Wangdung crisis — also called the Sumdorong Chu stand-off of 1987-88 — while serving as Eastern Army Commander.

Known in Army circles as 'Tich' Sharma, the veteran officer will be cremated at Brar Square Crematorium in Delhi Cantonment at 10.30 am on Saturday.

In 1987, Gen Sharma replaced Lt Gen J K Puri as Eastern Army Commander when the stand-off with China in the Wangdung area was already in

progress. Lt Gen Puri, who was six months senior to Gen Sharma, proceeded as Vice Chief of Army Staff. Lt Gen N S Narahari was General Officer Commanding (GOC) 4 Corps, and he was the commander who was dealing with the area where the Chinese had made an ingress.

In an interview to Maj Gen Nilendra Kumar on YouTube for the channel 'Lex Consilium Foundation' in 2025, Gen Sharma had said the Army Headquarters had laid down a limit of patrolling on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) because they did not want to provoke a war with China. "This limit was 15 km as set by Rajiv Gandhi's government," he said.

"I had visited Narahari's Corps at the time and flew over the entire area in question in a helicopter, including the places



General Vishwa Nath Sharma

where the Chinese had made an ingress. So I straightaway gave the orders, 'no withdrawal'," he said.

When this order was relayed to Army HQs, Gen Sharma got a call from the then Director General Military Operations (DGMO) Lt Gen Bipin Joshi, who later became the Army

Chief. "He said, 'Sir, you are disobeying the orders of the Government of India'. So I said, 'This is not disobedience of orders; your orders themselves are incorrect. Under the Army Act, I am only supposed to obey the lawful command of the superior officer'. Then the Chief (Gen K Sundarji) called me up and said, 'This is ridiculous'. I said, 'Go to the Supreme Court and check if it is lawful,'" he said.

The strong military response by India in the crisis eventually led to the stand-off getting resolved, and the armies of the two countries moved back under mutual agreement.

As Army Chief, Gen Sharma oversaw the orderly withdrawal of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) from Sri Lanka.

While serving as Additional Director General Military Oper-

ations (ADGMO) in the Military Operations (MO) Directorate, Gen Sharma had advised the then Army Chief General A S Vaidya in 1984 that they should not get involved in any operation to flush out Jarnail Singh Bhindranwale and his supporters from the Golden Temple as it was a political move.

Born on June 4, 1930, he hailed from a distinguished military family. Son of late Major General Amar Nath Sharma, he was commissioned in 16 Light Cavalry and commanded 66 Armoured Regiment. The family hails from Dadh Village in Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh.

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh condoled his demise and said, "A distinguished military leader, General Sharma served the Nation with unwavering dedication, courage and honour."

Taslima returns to Kolkata after 19 yrs: 'Good to be back'

Sweetie Kumari
Kolkata, July 31

WEARING A traditional Bengali lal paar shada saree (white saree with red borders), a smiling Taslima Nasrin stepped out of Kolkata airport onto a hot and humid Friday afternoon to the sound of conch shells and a cheering crowd.

For the Bangladeshi author who has been living in exile for decades, it marked an emotional return to a city that is her second home, one she had been forced to flee almost overnight nearly two decades ago.

Greeting the crowd, which had been waiting patiently for her and welcomed her with flowers, a beaming Nasrin said, "It feels extremely good to be back."

Leading the welcome party was BJP MLA Sourav Sikdar. "Her arrival is a perfect example of *'bhoi out, bharosa in* (fear out, confidence in)," said the legislator from Dum Dum North. "Kolkata is her favourite city and she has time and again said this. She could only come because of Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari. Had she not been given that security and assurance, she wouldn't have come. Wherever



Bangladeshi author Taslima Nasrin at the airport in Kolkata, Friday. PARTHA PAUL

she wants to go as per law and whatever she wants to eat, she can. I would like her to enjoy her stay, eat phuchka, and speak her mind. Kolkata is waiting to hear her tomorrow."

The event at the Rabindra Sadan cultural centre on Saturday will be Nasrin's first public appearance in Kolkata in 19 years.

On November 21, 2007, tensions over the second volume of her autobiography, *Dwikhondito* (Split: A Life), spilled

onto the streets as demonstrations organised by the All India Minority Forum led to road blockades and incidents of arson in parts of Kolkata. To bring the situation under control, the Left Front government led by Buddhadeb Bhattacharya called in the Army to help restore order. Facing political pressure and worried about the situation spiralling out of control if Nasrin remained in the city, the government pressured her to leave the city. She lived in New Delhi for a few months after that before leaving the country and moving to the US for a few years.

Nasrin's writings have faced opposition from conservative groups since she published her best-known novel *Lajja* (Shame) in 1993. The book was about the persecution of a fictitious Hindu family in Bangladesh in the aftermath of the Babri Masjid's demolition. She left Bangladesh the following year following death threats and protests and lived across Europe, including Germany, and North America.

During this period, Sweden granted her citizenship. She subsequently found refuge in Kolkata, the city culturally closest to her home. In 1998,

Nasrin published *Meyebela* (My Bengali Girlhood), the first volume of her autobiography. *Dwikhondito* was the second part of the autobiography and ran into legal challenges and opposition from conservatives. In 2004, she moved to Kolkata after receiving a temporary residence permit.

The Rabindra Sadan event — where Nasrin's poems will be read and may see the author discuss the circumstances under which she left Kolkata and her years away from the city — is being organised by NGOs Secular Mission, Paschimbonger Jonno (For West Bengal), and Human Rights Beyond Frontiers. Chief Minister Suvendu Adhikari and author Shirshendu Mukhopadhyay are expected to attend the event.

"We will not bow down before fundamentalists. We expect her to come here more and stay. The courage Suvendu Adhikari has shown by inviting her, no other person could have done that," Santanu Singha, a committee member of Human Rights Beyond Frontiers, told *The Indian Express*.

As per her tentative schedule, Nasrin will meet the press on August 3 and leave the following day.

Case against Noida woman for 'abusing' PM moved to Delhi

Suruchi Kumari

NEW DELHI

A day after reports of an FIR registered in Noida against a woman named Ruchika Singh for "abusing" Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to light, a Delhi Police officer on Friday said the case has been transferred to the Parliament Street police station.

When reached for comment, Deputy Commissioner of Police (New Delhi) Sachin Sharma said the

case had not yet been handed over to them as of Friday evening. "We will decide the course of action once we get it," he said.

On Wednesday, the U.P. police had registered a zero FIR at the Expressway police station based on a complaint by a Ghaziabad resident, Smriti Singh. The complainant alleged that Ms. Ruchika used "abusive and objectionable" language against Mr. Modi, thereby undermining "the dignity of the constitution-

al office". She claimed that the remarks were intended to "spread hatred and disrupt public peace".

'Misuse of machinery'

Reacting to the development, Cockroach Janta Party (CJP) spokesperson Saurav Das said on X: "The misuse of criminal machinery against Ruchika Singh is unacceptable. Profanity does not attract a criminal case. The police can focus their energy elsewhere, not on a 25-year-old."

In a video statement, CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke said, "Law should be the same for everyone. It cannot be used against the youth of the country and not against political leaders for using abusive language."

The FIR comes against the backdrop of the CJP-led protest at Jantar Mantar, which was called off on July 25 after Dharmendra Pradhan stepped down as the Union Education Minister. Since then, media clips and social media con-

tent posted by women protesters have been circulated on social media and they have been subjected to online harassment.

One such post on Friday by an X user identifying himself as Shashi Kumar, a co-convenor of the Bharatiya Janata Party's Uttar Pradesh social media unit, contained a video of three women and sought an FIR against them purportedly for similar "offences" as those Ms. Ruchika Singh is accused of.

‘Misguided children used abusive words, want to forgive them’

Sandeep Phukan

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Friday said some “misguided children” during the Jantar Mantar protests used abusive language but he wanted to forgive them.

“What happened in Jantar Mantar, the country and the world witnessed it. Some mischievous children used abusive language that doesn’t dignify any civilised society. They not only abused me but even my late mother,” Mr. Modi said in a video posted on his X and Instagram handles.

The Prime Minister said one could make an error of judgment during one’s youth but such mistakes could also be corrected.

‘Cultural shock’

“I understand the anger in our society. There is a cultural shock about our daughters using such language. This is the time to give them a hug and show them the right path...I want to forgive them,” Mr. Modi said.

Appealing for restraint from the wider society, the Prime Minister said there could not be any solution by making the youngsters run around police stations



Narendra Modi

and courts.

“The children are ours and we have to show them the right path even if it is difficult to do to people who have been misled,” he said.

‘Cannot threaten Gen Z’

Mr. Modi’s message came on a day when a zero FIR in Noida (Uttar Pradesh) was filed against a 25-year-old woman for using expletive against Mr. Modi at the Jantar Mantar protests on July 25.

Reacting to the news, Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi said the Prime Minister should not “threaten Gen Z”.

“PM Modi and Amit Shah – you cannot threaten Gen Z into silence,” Mr. Gandhi said in a post on X, adding, “You are India’s past. Be careful about how you treat India’s future.”

Don't threaten Gen Z, you are the past, Rahul tells PM; Kharge seeks Shah's exit

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge and Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi on Friday accused the Narendra Modi government of targeting student protesters by filing FIRs, detaining them, and getting their social media accounts blocked, days after they called off their agitation.

In separate posts on X, the Congress leaders alleged that the government had reneged on the understanding that no action would be taken against the students after they withdrew their protest.

Mr. Gandhi, in his post, accused the government of trying to intimidate a generation of young protesters. "PM Modi and Amit Shah – you cannot threaten Gen Z into silence," he said.

"First you broke their bones. Now you are filing FIRs and taking down their accounts. You are India's past. Be careful about how you treat India's future," Mr. Gandhi added.

Mr. Kharge alleged that



Congress leaders Mallikarjun Kharge and Rahul Gandhi accused the government of targeting student protesters. ANI

women protesters were being "doxxed", or having their personal information exposed online.

"Ten days ago, your government suppressed the youth with batons-pellet guns. When the students withdrew their movement, now you're filing FIRs against them out of a sense of revenge, forcibly detaining them," Mr. Kharge said.

He alleged that the students had withdrawn their movement on the assurance that no action would be taken against them, but "now your governments have gone back on their own word". Mr. Kharge further claimed that the government was getting the social media accounts

of students blocked and that girls were being doxxed.

He also renewed his attack on Union Home Minister Amit Shah for his absence from Parliament during the confrontation over the handling of the student protests. "The arrogance is such that Home Minister Amit Shah didn't even set foot in the Parliament House, kept fearing to give a statement on accountability," he said.

He said attempts at "face-saving" and "image protection" would no longer work as the youth had "already" seen through the government's actions. He also demanded Mr. Shah's resignation.

Cabinet okays ₹84,084-cr. Samudra Manthan for offshore exploration

Saptaparno Ghosh

NEW DELHI

To boost India's offshore exploration efforts, the Union Cabinet approved an outlay of ₹84,084 crore to the Union Petroleum Ministry's National Offshore Exploration Scheme Samudra Manthan.

The corpus is to be utilised until FY2030-31. The overall outlay is categorised into four key components the most important of which relate to drilling 60 deepwater exploration wells for which the Cabinet has allocated ₹43,200 crore.

This is inclusive of the government of up to 50% of eligible drilling cost or ₹675 crore per well.

The other component relates to offshore data acquisition which carries an outlay of ₹28,534 crore.

Development of common offshore infrastruc-



Well oiled plan: The scheme aims at catalysing reserves of over 600 MMTOE. (For representational purpose only) GETTYIMAGES/ISTOCK

ture hubs to facilitate commercialisation of discoveries, which would be accounting for an outlay of ₹10,000 crore.

Finally, the establishment of oil and gas manufacturing and services zones - seeking to promote domestic manufacturing and localisation of critical equipment and services - tabulate an outlay of ₹2,000 crore.

Overall, the Union government's flagship scheme for offshore exploration aims at catalysing reserves of more than 600 million metric tonnes of oil equivalent (MMTOE).

Stimulating investments

It envisages to "stimulate significant investments across the exploration and production value chain, creating long-term oppor-

tunities for industry, innovation and economic growth."

Essentially, with hydrocarbon exploration being a capital-intensive activity with long gestation period but essential for a country's domestic energy security, the scheme seeks to reorient growth into this sector (via offshore exploration) to overcome difficulties from ageing oil and gas fields.

Reflecting on the announcement, Rajnish Gupta, partner for tax and economic policy, EY India held, "Investments in large-scale seismic data acquisition and drilling of exploratory well in deep and ultra deep waters will reduce geological uncertainty and de-risk exploration and lay the foundation for future discoveries. Good results can catalyse greater private investments in the sector."

Pak crackdown on PoK protests kills 40, India flags 'ruthless' use of force

Divya A

New Delhi, July 31

THE ONGOING crackdown by the Pakistani establishment in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir has resulted in the death of 40 civilians and injuries to many, India said Friday, calling upon the international community to scrutinise Islamabad's "ruthless" use of force against peaceful protesters and hold it accountable for the "atrocities" being committed there.

Responding to a question on the situation in PoK during a media briefing, Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson for the Ministry of External Affairs, said, "As you have yourself witnessed, the Pakistani establishment continues to unleash ruthless force against peaceful civilians in PoJK. This crackdown has resulted in the tragic death of over 40 civilians and serious injuries to many." He called the rigged elections there a rejection of the

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



EXPLAINED

Why anger in PoK

Protesters say Islamabad has disproportionate control over the PoK Assembly. The ruling party in Pakistan usually wins the PoK elections — Pakistan People's Party in 2011, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz in 2016 and Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf in 2021.

PoK

Pakistani establishment.

Elections for 45 contesting seats in the PoK legislative assembly are being held in three phases and will conclude on August 10. There are 53 seats in PoK: 45 members are directly elected while eight seats are reserved for women, technocrats and clerics.

After the first phase on July 27, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) won nine of the 13 seats, authorities said amid allegations of massive rigging. The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) reportedly won the remaining seats.

New Delhi has described the ongoing elections as an attempt by Islamabad to camouflage its illegal occupation and hide its "grave" violation of human rights in the region.

Over the last two months, PoK has witnessed massive protests – the Joint Awami Action Committee (JAAC), a civil society group, has been spearheading the protests – over 12 seats reserved for non-residents.

The JAAC has said Islamabad manipulates these seats to install a Prime Minister of its choosing. Protesters say these externally voted seats dilute local representation and give Is-

lamabad disproportionate control over the PoK legislative assembly.

Besides political disenfranchisement, the latest wave of demonstrations, sources said, also reflects growing anger over economic hardship and increasing restrictions on civil liberties.

According to sources closely monitoring the developments in the area, the ongoing unrest was triggered by "a total collapse of local governance, with authorities imposing an economic blockade that has caused critical shortages of subsidised wheat and essential medicines".

The anger is also driven by "economic extraction". "The dams in PoK, including Mangla, generate power far beyond the local demand of about 400 MW, yet residents face up to 15-20 hours of load shedding and pay tariffs several times the cost of generation," the sources said.

In fact, the 38-point charter of protesters directly targets financial corruption and unchecked privileges of the ruling elite. The number of lives lost by indiscriminate firing by security forces on peaceful protesters is pegged at 150.

As the internet remains shut down in the region, there have been reports of widespread violence by security personnel in the wake of the elections. According

to the JAAC, at least 14 its activists were killed and more than two dozen injured in clashes with security personnel during the first phase of elections.

In a television interview, Pakistan's Defence Minister Khawaja Asif defended the government's violent crackdown on demonstrators, stating that he placed the protesters in the same category as India, and called them "enemies like India". He ruled out holding any dialogue with the protesters.

Commenting on the Pakistan government's approach, Jaiswal said, "Its absolute disdain for the innocent people of PoK was laid bare when the Defence Minister branded the protesting civilians as enemies."

"Adding to this, the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Political Affairs, openly admitted that the very 'mujahideen' that the Pakistani establishment trained, armed and sent to bleed India have now turned their guns inward, weaponising themselves against the state," he said. The people in PoK, Jaiswal said, have requested international organisations for an independent investigation into the unlawful killings. "We urge that the international community should scrutinise Pakistan's actions and hold it accountable for its atrocities," he said.

the right path is our job.

He appealed to the youth to come forward and fulfil their dreams and take the country ahead.

"To show the right path to the misguided is our job. So I want to say to the children: Come, let us move forward together for the country. Let's learn something new from our mistakes and let's move forward towards our dreams. The country is moving forward and to ensure that you also move forward is my dream. I am working for all of you, and work tirelessly for your bright future. Let's take the country forward together," he said.

"Come, let us make the nation progress, just learn from your mistakes, and move forward," he said.

Earlier, following the abuses that were captured in multiple videos circulating on social media, police in Delhi and Noida registered FIRs for defamatory posts and content.

In Telangana, police registered two cases over alleged morphed and objectionable social media content targeting the Prime Minister, naming operators of Facebook and Instagram accounts, and Meta India's head. "We are in touch with the agencies concerned, and are cooperating with them to resolve the matter," a Meta spokesperson said.

Jaishankar to Iran's Araghchi: No matter what, do not attack merchant vessels

Divya A

New Delhi, July 31

A DAY after the government in-
formed Parliament that 16 In-
Indian nationals, including 10
seafarers, had been killed and
another 75 injured in West Asia
since the start of the conflict in
February, External Affairs Min-
ister S Jaishankar spoke to his
Iranian counterpart Syed
Abbas Araghchi Friday and
"strongly urged" Iran to avoid
attacks on commercial ship-
ping and seafarers under any
circumstances.

Jaishankar's phone conver-
sation with Araghchi came a
day after he conveyed
India's concern over attacks on
cargo vessels and seafarers to
Ukrainian Foreign Minister An-
drii Sybiha

"Had a tele-conversation
with FM Araghchi of Iran this
evening. Conveyed our deep
concerns at the ongoing hostil-
ities in the region," Jaishankar
said after the conversation.

"Strongly urged that attacks
on commercial shipping and
seafarers be avoided under any
circumstance," he said in a post
on X, adding, "India condemns
any such attack by any party."

"Was apprised of Iran's per-
spective of current develop-
ments and discussions under-

way," Jaishankar said,
underlining that "India is al-
ways supportive of dialogue
and diplomacy".

Over the past few days, New
Delhi has expressed deep worry
over a spate of attacks on mer-
chant vessels in the Strait of
Hormuz and the Black Sea,
which have resulted in the
death of Indian seafarers. It has
condemned such actions by
any party in the conflict.

This is the first time India
has framed such a strong re-
sponse and conveyed it to all
parties concerned, having lost
10 seafarers in the West Asia
conflict in attacks by either Iran
or the US.

MoS for External Affairs
Kirti Vardhan Singh told Rajya
Sabha Thursday that 16 Indian
nationals, including 10 sea-
farers, were killed and another
75 injured in the West Asia con-
flict since February.

On July 14, the Ministry of
External Affairs had sum-
moned Iranian Deputy Chief of
Mission, Mohammad Javed
Hosseini, to register a
"strong protest" after an Indian
sailor died and several were
seriously injured when two
UAE-flagged energy tankers
carrying Indian seafarers were
hit by Iranian cruise missiles
earlier in the day.

Iran strikes 2 tankers trying to pass Hormuz under U.S. 'air escort'

Agence France-Presse
TEHRAN

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said on Friday that they had struck two tankers attempting to pass through the strategic Strait of Hormuz under the "air escort" of the U.S. military.

The IRGC said the "non-compliant oil tankers... were struck and brought to a halt, while four other oil tankers quickly changed course and returned to their previous positions".

The Guards said the

tankers had attempted to pass the strait via "an undeclared route", the U.S.-backed alternative to Tehran's designated waterway closer to its own shores.

Iran has effectively maintained control over navigation through Hormuz since the outbreak of the war on February 28, requiring vessels to obtain permission and pay transit fees. On Thursday, the Guards said two oil tankers attempting to transit the Strait had turned back after one caught fire.

Trump mulls \$100,000 fee for students keen to work in the U.S. after graduation

Press Trust of India
WASHINGTON

The U.S. is planning to impose a \$100,000 fee on visas issued to international students for working in the U.S. after graduation from an American university, *The Wall Street Journal* reported.

The Trump administration move comes after a U.S. court struck down a proposal to levy a \$100,000 fee on H-1B visas.

According to *The Wall Street Journal*, the Department of Homeland Security is mulling the high fee



The OPT programme allows foreign graduates to work up to 3 years on their student visas in areas related to their studies. REUTERS

on Optional Practical Training (OPT) visas which are an extension of F-1 visas issued to students. The OPT programme allows fo-

reign graduates to work for one to three years on their student visas in areas directly related to their studies.

Roughly 4,19,000 foreigners were working on OPT in 2024, the latest year for which data are available.

Tech companies, which conduct most of the recruitments from U.S. universities, opposed the \$100,000 fee on H-1B visas.

A DHS spokesperson said in a statement: "No policies should be considered final until formally announced. At DHS, we are always having conversations about how to use all tools in our arsenal to protect the integrity of our legal immigration system."

Trump touts Gaza deal, Hamas seeks Israeli exit

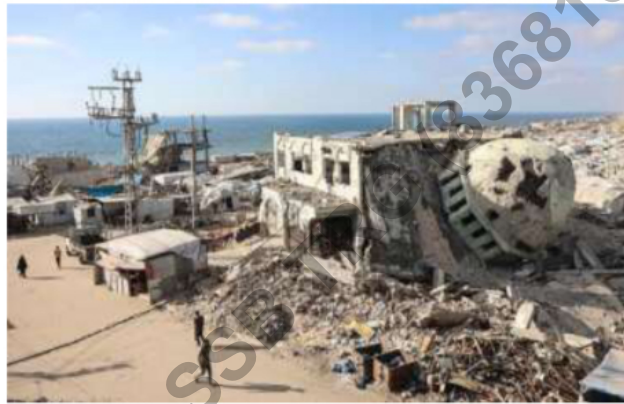
U.S. leader hails 'historic agreement' on disarmament; Palestinian militant group acknowledges deal, says it will abandon weapons only if Israel withdraws troops and 'stops killing Palestinians'

Stanly Johnny

U.S. President Donald Trump on Friday announced that the Board of Peace, an organisation Washington established to oversee a Gaza ceasefire, has reached a "historic agreement" for the disarmament of Hamas and other militant organisations in the Palestinian enclave.

"Today, the Board of Peace reached a historic agreement for the complete disarmament of Hamas and all other armed groups in Gaza. This is a monumental step toward lasting peace and security," Mr. Trump wrote in a social media post.

Hamas, the Palestinian militant group that runs parts of Gaza, made an official statement acknowledging the deal, but added that it would abandon wea-



Displaced Palestinians walk past destroyed buildings and makeshift shelters near the al-Shati refugee camp, west of Gaza City. AFP

pons and end its rule only if Israel, which currently occupies more than 60% of the enclave, withdraws its troops and "stops killing Palestinians".

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did not immediately respond to Mr. Trump's announcement, but National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir said the deal was "unac-

ceptable". He said the "assassinations in Gaza must continue". Israeli media quoted "a senior official" as saying in a statement that "there will be no IDF withdrawal from Gaza without the genuine disarmament of Hamas".

According to Mr. Trump, the agreement is a step towards Gaza finally being governed by a new

Palestinian government in coordination with the Board of Peace. "At the same time, Israel will have the security it deserves, with Gaza no longer used as a base for terror attacks," he wrote.

"This is a major milestone in the implementation of the Trump 20-Point Plan. The agreement will be carried out in carefully structured phases," Mr. Trump said on Friday. "As disarmament is completed, Israeli forces will withdraw, and the International Stabilization Force will work with a new Palestinian police force to take responsibility for Gaza being safe for its residents and its neighbours."

The U.S. leader thanked Egypt, Qatar, and Türkiye for their mediation efforts.

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Trump touts Gaza deal, **Hamas seeks Israeli exit**

Ghazi Hamad, a member of Hamas's political bureau, said the group made "concessions for the sake of the Palestinian people".

The issue of weapons is "linked to Israeli withdrawal, the entry of the National Committee, and reconstruction [of Gaza]", he said, adding that Israel should not interfere in the governance of Gaza and its reconstruction. He insisted that Israel "will not interfere in this issue".

Meanwhile, the Palestinian Islamic Jihad said in a statement that reports about the agreement were "inaccurate". The group said it has reservations about the version of the agreement currently being circulated.

The Board of Peace released a 15-point road map for peace saying all parties "aim at ending the cycle of destruction, securing the complete Israeli withdrawal from Gaza Strip, restoring normal life, enabling Palestinian governance, reconstruction, security, recovery and economic development, rehabilitating damaged sectors and facilitate launching a credible political path that achieves self-determination and Statehood".

SPANISH PM SANCHEZ SAYS BREACHES ARE A 'VIOLATION OF TERRITORIAL INTEGRITY'

60,000 cross into Spain's Ceuta, 57 die after breach

37,500 migrants have returned to Morocco: Spain's interior ministry

Associated Press
Ceuta, July 31

ABOUT 60,000 MIGRANTS crossed from Morocco into Spain's tiny Ceuta territory in the past 24 hours, Ceuta's president said Friday, a figure that is equivalent to 70% of the population of the city in North Africa. At least 57 migrants died on the journey.

But roughly half of the people who made the crossing soon made their way back voluntarily, the Spanish government said, after the sudden arrival of so many triggered chaos and a humanitarian crisis.

Some migrants swam several miles through the sea and faced down authorities who tried to turn them back with water cannons, tear gas and warning shots. Those who died included some who drowned or were killed in a stampede to cross a breakwater barrier near a border checkpoint.

Spain deployed its armed forces and additional police to restore order in Ceuta, which sits on the Strait of Gibraltar at the entrance to the Mediterranean Sea and has been a Spanish possession since 1580. On the Moroccan side of the border, security forces clashed with migrants.

"The situation that Ceuta is going through is absolutely unsustainable," Ceuta President Juan Jesús Vivas told journalists.

Meanwhile, migrants from

• THE IMPORTANCE OF CEUTA

The peninsula, Ceuta, is one of only two cities on the African mainland that are officially part of Europe.

What happened this week?

• About 1,500 migrants had entered Ceuta in recent days. On Thursday, Spanish official Fernando Rodríguez Contreras said the working estimate of new arrivals had risen to the tens of thousands, though the figure could not be confirmed. At least 18 migrants died attempting the crossing, and Spain said it was deploying military platoons to reinforce border security, platoons to enforce border security.

WHY DOES THIS MASS CROSSING MATTER?

• Ceuta's border with Morocco has long been a flashpoint in both Spanish politics and relations with Rabat. Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez has sought to portray

Why is Ceuta a crossing hot spot?

A six-mile-long peninsula on Morocco's northern coast, Ceuta is a Spanish enclave fortified by double border fences and guarded by Spanish police and paramilitary forces. Along with Melilla, it forms the EU's only land border with Africa. Both enclaves are frequent crossing points for migrants, many from Morocco, seeking to enter Europe.



Spain as an immigrant-friendly nation, particularly welcoming Spanish-speaking Latin Americans. But his government has faced criticism from conservative

opponents, who accuse it of weak border control, and from migrant rights advocates, who say it relies on overly harsh enforcement at the frontier.

Morocco also attempted to cross into Melilla, Spain's other territory at the tip of North Africa, where they clashed with police.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez visited Ceuta on Friday and condemned the border breach, which he described as "a violation of Spain's territorial integrity."

The Spanish Interior Ministry released its own figures shortly after Vivas' spoke, estimating that some 50,000 people had crossed from Morocco since Thursday. It added that 37,500 had already returned to Morocco by Friday afternoon, with hundreds more going back by the hour.



Migrants from Morocco cross into the Spanish enclave of Ceuta by sea on Friday. AP