Amid backlash, Centre set to refer FCRA Bill to JPC

Govt. likely to move resolution in Lok Sabha today; Tamil Nadu Assembly urges the Centre to withdraw Bill, undertake consultations with stakeholders; Mizoram Christians hold mass rally

The Hindu Bureau
CHENNAI/NEW DELHI

Faced with demands to scrap the Foreign Contribution (Regulation) Amendment Bill, 2026, from different corners of the country on Tuesday – including a unanimous resolution passed in the Tamil Nadu Assembly and mass protests in the streets of Mizoram's capital – the Union government informed its allies and other parties that it would move a resolution in the Lok Sabha on Wednesday to refer the Bill to a Joint Parliamentary Committee, sources said.

Moving the resolution urging the Centre to withdraw the Bill in its present form, Tamil Nadu Minister Rajmohan said the Assembly was deeply concerned by provisions in the legislation relating to the transfer, management, and sale of assets of charitable organisations to the government on grounds such as expiry of FCRA registration, non-renewal or refusal of renewal, cancellation of registration, or surrender of registration. "These provisions may adversely affect the autonomy of charitable organisations and, in particular, the functioning of educational and social welfare institutions run by the minority communities," the resolution said, urging the Centre to undertake comprehensive consultations with all stakeholders, including State governments.

The Tamil Nadu resolution, which was passed unanimously, raised concerns over several provisions of the amendment Bill. ANI

Fears that Christian institutions will be disproportionately affected by the Bill overflowed onto the streets in Mizoram, one of the three Christian-majority States in the country. Hundreds of Christians from different denominations participated in a rally in Aizawl under the newly formed Council of Churches in Mizoram. The Bill would give a designated authority sweeping powers over the land, buildings, funds, and other assets of churches and NGOs whose FCRA registrations are cancelled or not renewed, without judicial oversight, said R. Lalbiakliana, the council's president.

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Centre set to refer FCRA Bill to JPC

The Bill came up for discussion at a meeting of the Business Advisory Committee of the Rajya Sabha, but the government made no commitments at the meeting, despite strong Opposition objections.

According to sources, Union Parliamentary Affairs Minister Kiren Rijiju raised the issue at the meeting. Congress general secretary and Rajya Sabha Chief Whip Jairam Ramesh pointed out that the Bill was not on the agenda and said the Opposition was of the view that it should be withdrawn. Trinamool Congress deputy leader in the Rajya Sabha Sagarika Ghose echoed the demand. DMK leader Tiruchi Siva also strongly opposed the Bill. "The FCRA Bill in its current form is unacceptable to us. Sending it to a Joint Parliamentary Committee will not serve any purpose," he told *The Hindu*.

Sources said Mr. Rijiju did not make any commitment about the fate of the Bill, despite the Opposition insisting that a decision be taken at the meeting. However, the government later informed allies and other parties that it would move a resolution in the Lower House to refer the Bill to a JPC, according to sources.

The Tamil Nadu Assembly resolution said that "any amendment must preserve the principles of natural justice, proportionality, protection of property rights, legitimate expectation, and federalism. While ensuring transparency and accountability in foreign contributions, it must protect the rights of legitimate charitable, educational, religious, cultural and social welfare organisations."

Karnataka told to release water to T.N.

B.S. Satish Kumar
T. Ramakrishnan
BENGALURU/ CHENNAI

The Cauvery Water Management Authority (CWMA), which met in Delhi on Tuesday, affirmed and endorsed the decision by the Cauvery Water Regulation Committee (CWRC) to direct Karnataka to ensure the release of Cauvery water at the rate of 12,000 cusecs (around one tmc ft) daily from Wednesday for the next 15 days to neighbouring Tamil Nadu.

Responding to this, Karnataka Chief Minister D.K. Shivakumar said a decision on the next course of action will be taken after assessing the water availability in the State. He stressed the need to protect the interests of the State's farmers while complying with the orders of the courts and legal authorities.

The Chief Minister is set to hold a meeting with legal experts and bureaucrats on Wednesday on the possible legal options.

In a telephonic conversation with *The Hindu* later, CWMA chairperson, Saumitra Kumar Haldar, said Karnataka is in a "comfortable position" to comply with its order. CWMA arrived at the decision after considering the storage, inflows, and meteorological outlook for the next seven days, he said.

Earlier, Karnataka appealed to the CWMA to defer any decision on further releases as the Cauvery basin was reeling under "severe hydrological distress". Inflows into its reservoirs were declining, it said.

On its part, Tamil Nadu appealed to the CWMA to direct Karnataka to ensure releases of 37 tmc ft at Biligundlu [the measuring point of Cauvery flow on the inter-State boundary] by August end, taking cognisance of the backlog and the quantum that is due on pro-rata basis from August 13 to 31.

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NASA invites ISRO to join its mission for lunar outpost

The Hindu Bureau
BENGALURU

The National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) has invited the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) to join its Moon Base programme.

The formal invitation was extended by the U.S. space agency at the ninth meeting of the India-U.S. Civil Space Joint Working Group (CSJWG), held recently in Bengaluru.

"NASA invited ISRO to join its Moon Base program, building on the two countries' partnership under the Artemis Accords," the U.S. Embassy said in a statement.

According to NASA, the programme aims to establish humanity's first outpost on another celestial body near the South Pole of the moon.

The meeting also advanced civil and commercial space cooperation under the U.S.-India Transforming the Relationship Utilizing Strategic Technology Initiative, aligning with the February 2025 Joint Leaders' Statement issued by Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Donald Trump.

"Both sides discussed expanding cooperation following the successful launch of the joint NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) mission last year, as well as pursuing future science and human spaceflight technology collaborations. They reaffirmed their commitment to advancing the United Nations Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space guidelines on the long-term sustainability of outer space activities, as well as reviewed ongoing multilateral efforts for ensuring its effectiveness," the statement added.

Pilot of Air India flight that dropped 300 feet tests positive for marijuana

Sukalp Sharma
New Delhi, August 11

THE CONFIRMATORY drug test of the Air India pilot-in-command of a Phuket-Delhi flight that fell 300 feet, leaving 24 people injured, has come in as positive for marijuana, according to sources.

The Ministry of Civil Aviation (MoCA) had said on Sunday that the preliminary drug screening gave a "non-negative" result.

The samples were sent for confirmatory testing, and the result has come as positive with the substance identified as marijuana, it is learnt. Confirmatory tests are required in the case of a non-negative preliminary screening as certain foods and medications can throw up false positives in initial screenings.

Emails sent to MoCA, Directorate General of Civil Aviation (DGCA) and Aircraft Accident Investigation Bureau (AAIB) regarding the confirmatory drug test did not elicit any response. Air India didn't comment on the development.

The Air India Airbus A320

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24 people on the Phuket-Delhi flight on August 4 were injured

Relief to Adani: US court permanently dismisses criminal case against him

Welcome decision, committed to nation-building: Gautam Adani

Press Trust of India
New York, August 11

A US federal judge has permanently dismissed criminal charges against Adani Group chairman Gautam Adani and his nephew Sagar, removing a major legal overhang that had dogged the ports-to-energy conglomerate for nearly two years.

US District Judge Nicholas Garaufis of the Eastern District of New York approved the Justice Department's request to dismiss the charges.

Adani welcomed the decision, saying he accepted it with "humility" and "deep respect" for the judicial process.

In a 47-page order issued on August 10, Garaufis granted the Justice Department's Rule 48 (a) motion to dismiss Counts Two, Three and Four of the indictment against Gautam Adani, Sagar Adani, and former Adani Green Energy CEO Vneet Jaain.

The counts covered securities-fraud conspiracy, wire-fraud conspiracy and securities fraud. The dismissals were with prejudice, meaning the charges cannot be refiled.

Garaufis reserved judgment on Count One, alleging Foreign Corrupt Practices Act violations, and Count Five, alleging conspiracy to obstruct justice, both involving five non-appearing, India-based co-defendants: Ranjit Gupta, Cyril Cabanes, Saurabh Agarwal, Deepak Malhotra and Rupesh Agarwal.

The Justice Department has until August 31 to satisfy the court's requirements, while counsel for the non-appearing

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NATION PAGE 9

IN TAX DISPUTE OVER JUDGES' BENEFITS, DELHI HIGH COURT HALTS PROCESSING OF THEIR ITRs

US court dismisses Adani case

defendants must confirm their clients' consent by the same date.

The judge stressed that the dismissal was an exercise of prosecutorial discretion, not a verdict on the allegations. "No one should mistake" the ruling for the court's agreement with the government's decision or an opinion on the merits, Garaufis wrote. No trial was held, witnesses examined or evidence tested in court.

The indictment, returned by a grand jury on October 24, 2024 and unsealed on November 20, 2024, alleged three interlocking schemes between 2020 and 2024. It accused Adani executives of paying about USD 265 million in bribes to Indian officials to secure solar-power contracts projected to generate more than USD 2 billion in after-tax profits over two decades; misleading US and international investors to raise nearly USD 4 billion in financing; and destroying evidence and lying to the FBI, SEC and a federal grand jury.

The Adani Group has consistently denied the allegations, saying it acted in accordance with the applicable law.

In May, the Justice Department asked for the charges to be dismissed after an extensive review, citing jurisdictional and evidentiary challenges, the predominantly Indian nature of the alleged conduct, scrutiny of the matter by Indian authorities, the absence of identified investor losses and that pursuing it no longer aligned with the department's priorities.

It also argued that the case, unsealed during the closing weeks of the Biden administration, had little realistic prospect of reaching trial and appeared to have been a politically motivated "name and shame" exercise.

The request came after Adani hired a new legal team led by Robert J Giuffra Jr, co-chair of the US law firm Sullivan & Cromwell and a personal lawyer to President Donald Trump. Giuffra had reportedly met Justice Department officials earlier this year to raise concerns about the case.

Judge Garaufis initially resisted the government's request. In June, he said its explanation for abandoning the prosecution was insufficient and ordered officials to provide more information.

The judge also questioned whether Adani's pledge to invest USD 10 billion in the US and create 15,000 jobs had played a role in the decision to drop the charges.

Adani announced the investment in November 2024 in a post congratulating Trump on his election victory. Reports later said Adani's lawyers had raised the pledge during discussions with the Justice Department over the case. Adani's lawyers said the investment was never offered in exchange for dropping the charges. Garaufis ultimately concluded that the pledge had not influenced the Justice Department's decision.

Commenting on the ruling, Adani said "truth has prevailed", adding that he respected the judicial process and was grateful to those who supported the Group during proceedings.

"Throughout this challenging period, our faith in truth, fairness and the rule of law remained unwavering," Adani said in a post on X.

He reaffirmed the Group's commitment to nation-building, long-term value creation and serving a purpose "larger than ourselves".

India's rising dependence on U.S. LPG

India's reliance on the U.S. for two-thirds of its LPG signals a diversification of sources amid the crisis in the Strait of Hormuz. It suggests that the country's LPG security cannot be anchored to a single geography. India must strengthen local production and build more strategic reserves

EXPLAINER

Santosh V. Perumal

The Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Hardeep Singh Puri, said last week that 67% of India's liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) came from the U.S.

Although he did not mention the timeframe for when energy-hungry India "achieved" this, it is clearly a drastic shift from an earlier government decision to source about 10% of cooking gas from the U.S.

As part of crisis management, India, the world's second-largest importer of LPG, started buying cooking gas from the U.S., backed by a long-term deal signed by state-run oil refiners for 2.2 million tonnes in 2026, even as exact contracted \$/tonne or landed cargo price has not been publicly disclosed.

India's reliance on the U.S. for two-thirds of its LPG assumes significance, signalling prudent diversification of sources amid the crisis in the narrow Strait of Hormuz, which suggests that the country's LPG security cannot be anchored to a single geography.

As per Vortexa, India's LPG imports from West Asia fell almost 85% between February 2026 and June. However, India partially offset the lost flows by increasing LPG imports from other countries, including the U.S., from where India's imports in June reached 0.77 million metric tonnes.

The risk of overdependence

Overdependence on any market is risky, but relying more on a nation which keeps amorphous relations and sees partners through the lens of national interest could prove costly, as it may wield energy as a bargaining tool in bilateral trade talks. Energy-import dependence also makes monetary policy more complicated.

The U.S. has historically used financial sanctions, export controls and technology as foreign policy tools, going by the episodes in Iran, Iraq, Cuba, North Korea, Syria, Russia, Venezuela, Myanmar, Libya, Sudan and Afghanistan.

An Indian LPG carrier, *Shivalik*, at the Mundra Port in Gujarat. REUTERS

Even when commercial ties are extant, the U.S. can influence third-country transactions. The Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026, proposing tariffs of up to 100% on the top five buyers of Russian oil and natural gas, is a non-tariff trade barrier.

Proximity pricing

Unlike the West Asian supplies, largely based on long-term Strategic Partnership Agreements (SPA), U.S. energy exports could potentially be swayed by trade and other agendas, enhancing dependence risks. Traditionally leaning towards the Gulf region, India imports about 60% of the LPG (a mix of propane and butane) it consumes, with nearly 90% passing through the Strait of Hormuz. It could lose the advantage of proximity pricing, as U.S. shipments generally take 25-35 days, compared with 5-10 days from the Gulf.

Although the U.S. LPG (Mont Belvieu propane-based) claims a competitive edge over West Asian supplies; the reality is that the former could be cheap at the point of production, but the West Asian LPG (Saudi Aramco CP) is usually cheaper at the disembarking point because of the much shorter shipping distance although the arithmetic has changed now due to geopolitical risk temporarily inflating the West Asian supply costs.

Politically volatile fuel

For India, cooking gas is not merely a good but a politically volatile fuel, the shortages of which would have social and political consequences; and so the priority is making it available rather than cost optimisation.

The Strait of Hormuz disruptions have led to Gulf LPG prices surging sharply, with Saudi CP rising from about \$543 per tonne in February to around \$790 in June. Under such conditions, even costlier U.S. cargoes would become attractive because they were available and reduced supply risk.

Higher Gulf benchmark, shipping disruptions and risk premia can make the U.S. LPG competitive despite its longer voyage. India may have cut Hormuz risk, but remains exposed to commodity-price, dollar and freight risks.

If U.S. inflation remains elevated, the Federal Reserve may have to keep interest rates higher for longer. Tighter U.S. monetary policy can simultaneously strengthen the dollar, raising the rupee cost of each imported cargo.

If domestic LPG prices are held down when the global price rises amid rupee depreciation, then oil companies' under-recoveries expand, leading to more fiscal and external-sector issues.

The government recently informed the Parliament that the accumulated under-recoveries of public sector Oil Marketing Companies (OMC) was over ₹59,000 crore as of July 31 this year.

The way forward

The Petroleum Planning and Analysis Cell (PPAC) data suggests that as of July 1, 2026, the PSU OMCs (Indian Oil, Bharat Petroleum and Hindustan Petroleum) together have 33.14 crore active domestic LPG customers, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.6% during 2015-2026. The original LPG consumption estimate is 34,692 TMT for 2026-27.

India's LPG production, which remained nearly stagnant over the past several years, has not been keeping pace with consumption growth. While LPG production was 4.3 MMT (million metric tonnes), consumption was 6.5 MMT in the first quarter of FY27.

Refineries were directed to maximise the LPG output by diverting propane, butane and other streams into the LPG pool. As per Q1FY27, LPG production saw 35.73% year-on-year increase to a total of 4.26 MMT.

At the peak of the crisis, India's OMCs ramped up their cumulative daily production of LPG from 34,000 metric tonnes (MT) to 55,000 MT, which helped the country absorb some impact of lower imports.

Australia offers strategic advantages as it is in the Indo-Pacific, outside Hormuz, and has a shorter route than the U.S., but export volumes are much smaller.

However, energy security is not about replacing one supplier with another; it is about ensuring that no single player holds all the cards. Instead, India must strengthen local production, bolster multiple supply chains and build more strategic reserves.

THE GIST

- The Union Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Hardeep Singh Puri, said last week that 67% of India's liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) came from the U.S.
- Unlike the West Asian supplies, largely based on long-term Strategic Partnership Agreements (SPA), U.S. energy exports could potentially be swayed by trade and other agendas, enhancing dependence risks.

No path to peace

Israel's rejection of peace plan shows its intent to subjugate Gaza

It has been nearly a year since the U.S.-brokered ceasefire supposedly ended Israel's bombardment and decimation of Gaza. But since the ceasefire, Israel's strikes have killed nearly 1,300 Palestinians and its forces hold about 65% of the Strip, where much of the two-million population lives in tent camps amid rubble with schools and hospitals shut. Aid remains severely restricted, while Israel has blocked reconstruction, insisting that Hamas disarm first. Yet, when Hamas agreed to decommission and store its heavy weapons in phases, with U.S.-backed Palestinian technocrats in step with a gradual Israeli withdrawal – as part of a 15-point road map proposed by the Donald Trump-led "Board of Peace" – Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu refused to accept this. He said Israel was "ruling out the 15-point document" and that there would be no withdrawal until Hamas gave up "heavy weapons, lighter weapons, all weapons". Israel is keen not only on Hamas's disarmament, but also on the total subjugation of Gaza, at a continuing cost to civilians and children. It faces genocide proceedings at the International Court of Justice while the International Criminal Court has issued an arrest warrant for Mr. Netanyahu, who also faces a corruption trial still before the courts. By promising the complete destruction of Hamas, he has been trying to stay in power by retaining the support of the jingoistic right wing; any concession on withdrawal would invite political repercussions for his right-wing coalition in elections due in October.

The war on Iran launched by Mr. Trump and Israel on February 28 to effect a regime change has proved to be a disaster, setting off a fuel crisis that has affected several countries. With the Strait of Hormuz barely functioning, rising costs of American petrol and fertilizers have begun to affect the U.S. economy, leading to Mr Trump seeking a face-saving breakthrough in West Asia. Waning sympathy for Israel as the U.S. mid-term elections approach also explains the Board's proposal. While the farcical Board's vision of a "New Gaza" – free-trade zone, privatised infrastructure, no Palestinian representation on the Board – resembles an attempt at naked profiteering following the disastrous conflict, the 15-point proposal would actually be welcomed by the battered people of Gaza. For Hamas, which has few cards left, disarmament is an imperative, but must be matched by Israeli withdrawal. Mr Trump and his advisers must ask whether Washington's decades-long Faustian bargain – arming and shielding a militarised Israel on Israel's terms – is worth continuing, or whether it will use its leverage as Israel's principal arms supplier to compel a genuine withdrawal. It is still not too late.

Iran threat forced Trump to take catering truck, board secret flight out of Turkey

Reuters
Washington, August 11

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump took a secret military flight from Turkey last month in an operation that involved him being moved between aircraft in a catering truck, an extraordinary deception prompted by an Iranian assassination threat, the *Washington Post* reported.

The White House said at the time the president was flying aboard Air Force One from Turkey, where he attended a NATO summit, to Britain. But moments after Trump had boarded the plane, he left it in secret via the catering truck and boarded another aircraft for the flight to Britain, the *Post* said on Monday, quoting unnamed sources.

The *New York Times* carried a similar report, quoting unnamed US officials.

Two catering containers alongside Air Force One in Turkey. NYT

Trump had taken a newly renovated Qatari-donated jet to Ankara for the NATO summit but unexpectedly announced he would use an older Air Force One when departing the country, a move that prompted questions about the newer plane's security.

The trip to NATO was the first international travel for the new plane, whose speedy upgrades triggered questions over its cost and security, and took place as hostilities escalated with Iran, which borders Turkey.

Before departing Ankara, Trump said on Truth Social that he would use an older baby blue Air Force One plane "for old time's sake" to RAF Mildenhall in Britain while the new plane stopped at the same base so US service members stationed there could tour the aircraft.

After Trump boarded the old Air Force One in front of cameras in Ankara, he was secretly shuttled by the airport catering truck to a smaller plane, an Air Force C-32A, the *Post* reported citing a US official familiar with the operation and corroborating material it reviewed.

The deception operation was triggered by a credible threat to Trump, the *Post* reported.

On this occasion, the journalists who thought they were traveling with Trump on the older Air Force One, which was effectively used as a decoy, reported being advised to keep their window shades in the press cabin closed. The *Post* said aside from reporters, some White House staff also believed that the president was on board.

4 killed in Houthi strike on ship in Red Sea, says Yemen

Agence France-Presse
DUBAI

A drone being launched towards what the Houthi authorities said were Saudi troop concentrations at Mokha port in Yemen. AFP

An alleged strike by Iran-backed Houthi rebels on a cargo vessel killed at least four persons near the Bab al-Mandeb Strait off the coast of southern Yemen, the country's internationally recognised government said on Tuesday.

The strike marks the latest fatal attack on a ship in the contested Red Sea waterway after the Houthis announced a naval blockade of Saudi Arabia last month.

The Yemeni government's Transport Ministry accused the Houthis of launching the salvo that hit a cargo vessel named the *Tihamah* with "three successive ballistic-missile strikes while it was sailing through the Bab al-Mandeb Strait".

"The Houthi attack on the vessel which was carrying food supplies sparked a fire on board, killed four crew members – three Pakistanis and one Indonesian – and injured four others, as well as a member of the rescue team," said the Ministry. A source from the Yemeni government forces based in the port city of Mokha said five persons had been killed in the incident.

Earlier, British maritime security company Vanguard reported that at least two persons were killed in the incident on the *Tihamah*.

"Two crew members, one Pakistani and one Indonesian national, were killed, while four others, comprising three Pakistani and one Indonesian national, were injured," the agency added.

"The Yemeni Navy subsequently deployed to assist the vessel and came under fire, resulting in one additional casualty."

The incident comes after a years-long truce in Yemen's civil war between the Houthis and the Saudi-backed, internationally recognised government collapsed last month.

Syria sentences Bashar al-Assad to death in absentia over atrocities

The court convicts the former leader of crimes committed during Syria's 14-year civil war, including premeditated murder, as well as torture and repeated deprivation of liberty; those convicted also include former Defence Minister Fahd al-Freij

Agence France-Presse
DAMASCUS

A Syrian court on Tuesday sentenced former ruler Bashar al-Assad to death after a trial in absentia, convicting him of atrocities committed during the country's nearly 14-year civil war.

It is the first such ruling under Syria's transitional leaders who ousted Mr. Assad in December 2024, vowing to provide justice and accountability for crimes committed under his rule.

Mr. Assad fled to Moscow as Islamist-led forces closed in on Damascus after a lightning offensive.

At a court in Damascus on Tuesday, Judge Fakhr al-Din al-Aryan convicted Mr. Assad of crimes including "premeditated murder, the intentional killing of more than one person, the intentional killing of children under 15 years... torture, torture leading to death, and deprivation of liberty on multiple occasions – classified as crimes against humanity and war crimes".

A portrait of Bashar al-Assad at a Political Security Branch facility on the outskirts of Hama following the civil war, in 2024. AFP

"He is therefore sentenced to death," the judge said.

Syria in April began proceedings against Mr. Assad and other officials accused in person and in absentia of atrocities during the country's civil war, which erupted with brutal repression of pro-democracy protesters by the former authorities.

More than half a million people were subsequently killed and millions displaced, while tens of thousands disappeared, many into the country's prison system.

The court also sentenced six former military and security officials in absentia to death, including Mr. Assad's brother Maher, who ran the army's elite Fourth Division.

'War crimes'

Those convicted included former Defence Minister Fahd al-Freij and Louay al-Ali, who headed military intelligence in Daraa province in 2011.

The court convicted the officials of crimes including murder, incitement to murder, torture leading to death and repeated deprivation of liberty, also considered "crimes against humanity" and "war crimes".

Former security official Atif Najib – the only one in the dock – was sentenced to death for "crimes against humanity" committed when he was head of political security in Daraa province, the cradle of Syria's uprising.

A cousin of Mr. Assad who was arrested in January last year, Najib was convicted of crimes including "the intentional killing of children under 15", and "torture leading to death".

Judge Aryan said Najib had denied the charges and showed "no remorse".

Syrian Justice Minister Mazhar al-Wais told state television that the rulings would be referred to Syria's court of cassation for a final decision, adding that defendants had the right to appeal within 30 days.

Syria's uprising against Mr. Assad began in Daraa in March 2011.

MEDIATOR PAK SAYS WASHINGTON AND TEHRAN ARE CLOSE TO 'SOME SORT' OF DEAL

Iran: Strait to remain closed until US meets our demands

4 of crew killed in suspected Houthi attack on cargo ship

Reuters
Dubai, August 11

THE STRAIT of Hormuz will remain closed as long as the US does not change its behaviour and accept Iran's conditions to end the war, the newly appointed secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council said on Tuesday.

"As long as America does not change its behaviour and does not accept Iran's conditions, the Strait of Hormuz will not be opened," Mohsen Rezaei, a close ally of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Mojtaba Khamenei, was quoted by semi-official *Tasnim* news agency as saying.

"America must end the war, pay Iran's frozen assets, the war must end throughout the region, including in Lebanon and Gaza," he said. "If an agreement is reached between Iran and Oman regarding the transit route through the Strait of Hormuz, this agreement will be a matter separate from the closure of the Strait of Hormuz."

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi with Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi in Tehran on Tuesday. REUTERS

Rezaei, appointed Sunday as second-in-command of body that coordinates Iran's security and foreign policy, said the conditions had been transmitted to the US through mediators.

Mohammad Mokhber, an adviser to Khamenei, also said on X on Tuesday that "the punishment of the aggressor continues, and the Strait of Hormuz will not be opened until Iran's conditions are met". Oil futures extended their gains due to concerns over the fate of the strait.

There was no immediate comment from Washington on Iran's latest comments, but President Donald Trump had already raised a new US demand himself - that Iran pay compensation for people killed in wars, attacks and protests - and also accused Tehran of being "devious negotiators".

"We're going to ask for money for the damage they've done over a 50-year period," Trump said at the White House on Monday. In an interview released late on Monday, he described some of his current options in the war — "just bop along" and let Tehran fail economically or hit them "really, really hard".

"I'm sort of negotiating," Trump told *Real America's Voice* in the phone interview. "They're very devious negotiators."

Before the rhetoric escalated again, Pakistan, one of the main mediators in the conflict, had raised hopes the two sides might be closing in on a deal that would in effect reopen the Strait.

"The signals in the last two, three days are that we are close to some sort of an arrangement," Pakistani Defence Minister Khawaja Asif said in an interview with *Bloomberg News*.

Adding to the rhetoric from both sides, there were reports of new attacks on shipping in the Gulf of Oman and the Red Sea

Four crew were killed in a suspected attack by Yemen's Iran-backed Houthis on a small cargo vessel in the Bab el-Mandeb Strait on Tuesday, Yemen's Transport Ministry said.

A ship was also hit by a missile off Pakistan, while sailing through Gulf of Oman in a suspected US attack, sources said.

Congo says over 2,000 dead in Ebola outbreak, fastest growing on record

Associated Press
Bunia, August 11

AT LEAST 2,000 people have died in Congo's Ebola outbreak, the fastest-growing on record, according to the latest data, as health authorities struggle to get help to remote localities due to rebel conflict, bad roads and strikes over payment issues.

Government data published overnight into Tuesday showed the outbreak has recorded a total of 4,381 confirmed cases, including 2,011 deaths. A total of 704 patients are in admission and isolation.

The outbreak was declared on May 15 but health authorities say sequencing showed it began months earlier, in February.

It's already the second-largest outbreak in history, only behind the 2014-2016 West Africa outbreak that recorded more than 28,000 cases including over 11,000 deaths.

The Ebola outbreak is unlike most previous ones because the rare Bundibugyo virus responsible for it has no approved vaccines or treatments. Clinical trials for those have begun in Ituri province, the epicentre of the outbreak, in eastern Congo.

A health worker dries boots at the treatment centre in Bunia General Hospital in Ituri, eastern Congo, on Tuesday. AP

Aid workers say the outbreak continues to outpace response that's been expanding across the five eastern provinces affected. Many health workers have gone on strike to protest lack of payment for their work since the outbreak was declared.