

Congress leads protests seeking CEC's exit, arrest

Modi and Shah using Kumar to overcome public opposition through 'artificial manipulation', says Venugopal; Congress demands reversal of decisions taken by EC, including those related to SIR



Raising concerns: Youth Congress workers staging a demonstration demanding the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar in New Delhi on Friday. SUSHIL KUMAR VERMA

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

The Congress on Friday led nationwide protests demanding the resignation of Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar, accusing him of compromising the integrity of India's electoral process, with the party's general secretary (organisation), K.C. Venugopal, seeking Mr. Kumar's resignation and arrest for alleged electoral malpractice.

Civil society groups and other organisations held parallel protests in Delhi and several States.

Congress workers took to the streets across the country, with protests in several places being stopped by the police. Water cannons were used against demonstrators in

Patna, Lucknow, and Punjab, while protesters were detained in Assam, Jammu, Odisha, Manipur, and other States. In Manipur's capital, Imphal, the police fired a few tear-gas shells to disperse the protesters.

In Kerala's Malappuram, Mr. Venugopal said the nationwide protests would continue until the CEC stepped down. Targeting Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Home Minister Amit Shah, the Congress leader alleged that they were using Mr. Kumar to overcome public opposition to the government through "artificial manipulation".

"Resigning alone is not enough; he must be arrested. What he did is a criminal offence; he must be arrested," Mr. Venugopal said, adding that all decisions taken by Mr. Kumar,

including those relating to the special intensive revision, should be revoked.

In a post on X, he urged every Indian to mount "unbelievable pressure on the regime and its puppet for the daylight robbery of our vote and fix accountability".

The party's communication chief, Jairam Ramesh, said citizens and Congress workers hit the streets demanding accountability over the capture of their fundamental right to vote and the "Chief Election Commissioner's diabolical mischief".

"The frightened Modi Govt. has cracked down on protesters and detained Congress leaders and workers, young citizens and students, and civil society activists – in so many places across the country," he wrote on X.

Congress leader Pawan Khara told a press conference: "We want to say to Gyanesh Kumar: it's done, bro. Heed Rahul Gandhi's advice - resign and turn approver."

The Congress accused the Election Commission of an "unprecedented attack" on voter equality, alleging that a specific 'Mark VIP' feature had been created in the BLO application.

Amid mounting pressure from the Opposition, Mr. Kumar cancelled two scheduled meetings in Uttar Pradesh. Poll body sources said these were not linked to the protests and were routine decisions.

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Declaration part of Form 6 changed since SIR in Bihar

The Election Commission uses Form 6 for fresh voter registrations; new voters are now required to furnish details from last SIR, including Assembly constituency, polling booth and serial numbers

Sreeparna Chakrabarty
NEW DELHI

The declaration accompanying Form 6, which was introduced for the first time during the first phase of the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) in Bihar last year, has undergone substantial changes in the later phases. The Election Commission uses Form 6 for fresh voter registrations.

In Bihar, the declaration form was sought to confirm the exact period of the birth of a new voter, whether it was before 1987, between 1987 and 2004, or after 2004, based on which the prospective voter had to submit documents.

For those born before July 1, 1987, only the applicant's own document was needed to prove date and or place of birth; for those born between July 1, 1987 and December 2, 2004, the applicant needed their own document, along with one parent's document (either father's or mother's); for those born after December 2, 2004, the applicant needed their own document, with documents for both parents



Fresh tweaks: New voters filling Form 6 had to declare whether their or their parents' names appeared in the last SIR. FILE PHOTO

(father's and mother's) establishing date/place of birth.

If either parent was not an Indian citizen, a copy of that parent's valid passport and visa (valid at the time of the applicant's birth) also had to be submitted.

Change in second phase

In the second phase of SIR, new voters filling Form 6 had to declare whether their or their parents' names appeared in the last SIR. They also had to give the Assembly constituency number and polling booth number and the serial number at which the names appeared in the electoral rolls of the last

SIR. While filling the form online in the second phase, if the applicant did not have this information, they could choose the third option, on the ECINet portal. Though the field was not formally marked "mandatory", in practice, applicants could not submit the online form without completing it. This addition in the form continued in the third phase, which was announced in May this year.

It is this issue that Election Commissioners Vivek Joshi and Sukhbir Singh Sandhu flagged in separate notes and letters in May 2026 and August 2026, respectively.

Form 6 is attached to the Registration of Electors Rules, 1960. Since it is part of an official rule, it legally counts as part of that rule – the EC cannot redesign it on its own. Only the Union government (through the Ministry of Law and Justice, since these rules come under the Representation of the People Act, 1950) has the power to amend the rules, and therefore Form 6 too.

EC officials maintain that adding a separate declaration form with Form 6 and Form 8 (used for changing particulars) had been approved by the full three-member commission when the SIR process began in Bihar last year and was again ratified in the next phases.

They said that Form 6 in itself was never amended, only a declaration was added. What happened in the online module for filing the form was that the IT department made changes so that a person filling the form does not have to e-sign twice while doing it, they claimed. The EC officials also said that the power to add the declaration form was upheld by the Supreme Court on May 27.



French Rafales, A400Ms arrive for 'Tarang Shakti'

As part of Mission Pégase 26, the French Air and Space Force has deployed four Rafale F4 fighters, three A330 MRTT Phénix multi-role tanker transport aircraft, and two A400M Atlas aircraft to Jodhpur for the second edition of the multinational air exercise Tarang Shakti. The deployment arrived on Friday, and will participate in the Tarang Shakti air combat exercise hosted by the Air Force, from September 28 to October 12. The exercise is aimed at enhancing operational cooperation and interoperability between the participating air forces. Mission Pégase 26, the seventh edition of France's long-range air projection exercise, is being conducted from September 8 to October 15.

AFSPA extended in parts of Arunachal, Manipur, Nagaland

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

The Union Home Ministry on Friday extended the Armed Forces (Special Powers) Act (AFSPA) in parts of Manipur, Arunachal Pradesh, and Nagaland for another six months.

The AFSPA has been extended in the whole State of Manipur except the jurisdiction of 13 police stations in five valley districts, a notification said. Manipur has been affected by ethnic violence since May 3, 2023.

On November 14, 2024, out of 19 police stations in seven districts of Manipur, the Act was reimposed in the limits of six police stations in five districts, mostly in the valley, in the wake of the 2023 ethnic violence. President's Rule was imposed in the State on February 13, 2025 and revoked on February 4 this year.

The AFSPA was withdrawn from all valley police stations between April 1, 2022 and April 1, 2023 by the Manipur government

amid an improved security situation and a "large sense of security among general public". The provisions of the Act were withdrawn from the Imphal municipality area in 2004.

In Nagaland, the Act was extended for another six months in nine districts, and 21 police stations in five other districts, another notification said.

In Arunachal Pradesh, three districts and as many police stations in another district bordering Assam, were declared "disturbed area" for another six months.

Sweeping powers

The 1958 law gives power to the Army and the Central Armed Police Forces deployed in "disturbed areas" to kill anyone acting in contravention of law; arrest and search any premises without a warrant; and protection from prosecution and legal suits without the Union government's sanction. The Act has been applicable in Manipur since 1981. Manipur, a former Union Territory, attained Statehood in 1972.



Mandeep Bhandari is new CBSE chairperson

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Mandeep Bhandari, a 2001-batch IAS officer, has been appointed chairperson of the Central Board of Secondary Education, as per a notification issued by the Appointments Committee of the Cabinet on Friday. Mr. Bhandari has held key roles across government departments.

Mr. Bhandari's appointment comes at a crucial time when the board finds itself embroiled in a controversy over the implementation of the onscreen marking (OSM) system for Class 12 Board exams earlier this year.

The CBSE's IT system also came under scrutiny when ethical hackers accessed sensitive student data by breaching its web portals.

Jaishankar: Attacks on seafarers are indefensible

Press Trust of India

United Nations,
September 25

INDIA ON Friday said that repeated attacks on seafarers that disrupt maritime commerce and cost innocent lives are "indefensible" and "unacceptable", as Delhi launched a landmark maritime initiative with Liberia focused on safety and security of sea personnel and shipping.

"From the Black Sea to the Red Sea to the Gulf, attacks on civilian shipping have become a growing cause of concern. These actions that disrupt maritime commerce and cost innocent lives are simply indefensible. We are here to not just highlight this dangerous trend, but to urge the international community to close ranks and deter such attacks," External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said.

Jaishankar, along with Liberia's Minister for Foreign Affairs Sara Beysolow Nyanti, launched the 'Group of Friends on Safety & Security of Shipping & Seafarers' here on the margins of the high-level UN General Assembly session.

India and Liberia will serve as co-chairs of the Group of Friends, which would focus on various aspects of maritime trade, safety, and security. As an inclusive platform, Jaishankar said the endeavour has been to bring all relevant stakeholders together.

The group consists of major ship-owning member states, countries with the largest number of ship registries, and those that provide the maximum numbers to seafaring.

Addressing the inaugural meeting of the group, Jaishankar listed recent attacks against maritime vessels and seafarers that resulted in the death of Indian shipping personnel as well as damage to the containers.

He said that just two days ago, an Antigua and Barbuda-flagged bulk carrier MV Cape



External Affairs Minister
S Jaishankar

Dao was attacked in the Gulf of Oman, in which an Indian sailor lost his life.

Earlier, a Panama-flagged oil tanker El Gaia was struck while transiting the Strait of Hormuz. An Indian crew member went missing after that incident.

"These, regrettably, are no longer exceptional occurrences," Jaishankar said.

Given that India is a major source country for seafarers and Liberia hosts the largest shipping registry by tonnage, the two countries have joined hands on the initiative aimed at drawing greater global attention to issues pertaining to the seafarers and the commercial shipping industry.

Jaishankar noted that nearly two million seafarers operate the world's merchant fleet, "often navigating choppy waters, both literally and metaphorically".

With maritime shipping accounting for four-fifths of the global trade of USD 35 trillion last year, Jaishankar emphasised that the group will be an "inclusive, voluntary, and action-oriented platform aimed at deepening cooperation among member states and other stakeholders."

"It will promote exchange of views, sharing of experiences and practical cooperation, complement and strengthen the existing international frameworks, mandates, and instruments in these areas," he said.

Seafarer killed in missile strike joined ship one month ago

Manish Sahu

Lucknow, September 25

AROUND 1 PM on Wednesday, Suraj Yadav made a video call to his family from the commercial ship he was working on, excited to show them what life on board was like.

The 22-year-old proudly showed them around the vessel — which was sailing off Oman's eastern coast on its way back to India — pointing out where he worked and slept and the food he was served on board.

Thirty minutes later, a missile struck the ship near the Strait of Hormuz. Suraj was killed. His family, in Uttar Pradesh's Deoria, received the devastating news of his death hours later.

"Everyone in the house was thrilled to see the ship. Suraj was the first person from our family, and indeed the whole village, to ever travel on a commercial vessel. Our neighbours had gathered too, watching as he showed us around," said Suraj's uncle, Awadhesh Yadav. "We were stunned to learn that the incident had occurred just after our call ended."

Awadhesh said senior officials from the Mumbai-based shipping company broke the news to the family.

"They said on Wednesday, around 1.30 pm, the ship's staff were alerted to an incoming missile, following which they jumped into the sea. There were 28 people aboard the ship. A portion of the vessel was damaged in the blast and the debris struck Suraj's head, killing him."

Suraj's father, Om Prakash Yadav, has been working in Kuwait for the past three months. Suraj was the eldest of three



Suraj Yadav

brothers and was unmarried. His two younger brothers, aged 12 and 9, live with their mother in Karmajeetpur village.

The family said Suraj had joined the ship on August 19. "He joined the ship from Oman last month, and from there, travelled to Dubai and Berlin. The ship was heading to Surat when the incident occurred," Awadhesh said.

The family is making efforts to bring his body back home. The Indian Embassy in Oman said the merchant vessel, MV Cape Dao, came under attack while transiting towards India on Wednesday.

Union Ports, Shipping and Waterways Minister Sarbananda Sonowal said all surviving crew members, including the 19 Indian nationals, have been safely evacuated.

In June, another seafarer from Deoria, Shivanand Chaurasia, was killed in an attack on a tanker off the Oman coast.

Following repeated attacks on merchant vessels in the Strait of Hormuz, a high-level review chaired by Sonowal launched the 'Seafarer-First' initiative to protect Indian sailors in conflict zones like the Strait of Hormuz.

Iran's Araghchi suggests a deal to reopen Strait of Hormuz in 7 days

The offer is contingent on the U.S. lifting its naval blockade, waiving sanctions on Iranian oil sales, and observing a ceasefire; President Pezeshkian says Iran does not want to continue fighting and that 'it is America that must choose' to end the war

Associated Press
NEW YORK

Iran has offered to reopen the Strait of Hormuz and resume talks on its nuclear programme in seven days if the United States lifts its naval blockade, waives sanctions on Iranian oil sales and observes a ceasefire that would include Lebanon.

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi detailed the proposal in a private gathering on Thursday on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly in New York, according to one attendee.

Trita Parsi, executive vice-president of the Quincy Institute think tank,



Abbas Araghchi and other delegates attend the 81st United Nations General Assembly in New York City on Wednesday. REUTERS

who attended, said Mr. Araghchi suggested that a speedy agreement would help U.S. President Donald Trump ahead of November's midterm elections.

There was no immediate

comment from Iran's UN mission or other Iranian officials.

The proposal strongly resembles the so-called Memorandum of Understanding reached in June,

but with an accelerated timetable. The earlier agreement, which had called for a 60-day interim period, quickly collapsed as Iran resumed attacks on shipping in the strait.

Mr. Trump has said he is in no rush to reach a deal, even as high oil prices fuel inflation and exacerbate cost of living concerns. On the Iranian side, there are questions as to whether the hard-liners who dominate the security forces will accept compromises championed by relative moderates, like President Masoud Pezeshkian.

Meanwhile, Mr. Pezeshkian, in a U.S. television interview aired on Thursday, said that it is for the United

States to choose whether to end its war in Iran as Tehran does not wish to continue fighting. He took a defiant stand at the UN, for which he travelled to New York, telling the world that Iran would not "bend at the knee" to Washington – even as Mr. Trump acknowledged ongoing U.S.-Iran talks.

"When we can resolve issues through dialogue, we shouldn't resort to killing one another. But with the instigations conducted by Israel, they have imposed this war on us," he said on Fox News. "But we do not wish to continue. It's America that must choose whether it wants to end this or not."

Pak. claims it killed several Afghan Taliban fighters

Press Trust of India

ISLAMABAD

Pakistani security forces killed several Afghan Taliban fighters after they allegedly attempted to enter Pakistan and opened hostilities along the border in Balochistan province, state-run media reported on Friday.

The development comes after Pakistan conducted aerial and drone strikes on 10 locations in Afghanistan on Thursday.

Afghanistan's Taliban regime said the strikes killed four civilians.

The state-run *Associated Press of Pakistan*, citing security sources, said Afghan Taliban fighters attempted to enter Pakistani territory in Balochistan's Gulistan sector on Thursday and carry out an "act of aggression".



Taliban security personnel inspect the site after Pakistani air strike struck Gurbuz district in Afghanistan on Thursday. AFP

Pakistani forces retaliated, killing several Afghan Taliban fighters, the report said, adding that intermittent exchanges of fire continued after midnight. However, the claims about the casualties and the circumstances leading to the latest border clash could not be independently verified.

There was no immediate detailed statement from the Afghan Taliban

on the Gulistan clash.

Information Minister Attaullah Tarar said the strikes on Thursday were carried out after drones entered Pakistan from Afghan territory on Wednesday.

Mr. Tarar described the alleged drone incursion as a "blatant violation of Pakistan's sovereignty and territorial integrity" and a "grave act of aggression".

Final results of Russia's vote give record high parliament seats to Kremlin party

Associated Press

MOSCOW

Full results released on Friday from Russia's first wartime parliamentary election showed that the tightly orchestrated vote had further cemented the Kremlin's overwhelming political control of the country.

United Russia, the main Kremlin party, will get more than three-fourths of the seats in the State Duma, a record high, according to returns released by the Central Election Commission.



A screen displays the final results of Russia's parliamentary election at the headquarters of the Election Commission in Moscow. REUTERS

Virtually any genuine Opposition parties or candidates were excluded from running in the Sep-

tember 18-20 election. A massive state media campaign and tight control over the voting process al-

lowed the Kremlin to strengthen its political dominance despite Russia's economic troubles and long-range Ukrainian drone attacks.

Election commission chief Ella Pamfilova said United Russia got 349 out of 450 seats in the State Duma, the lower chamber. Several smaller parties representing the "systemic Opposition" that vote in line with the Kremlin on all key issues won 97 seats, and the remaining four seats were filled by regional officials who ran without a party affiliation.

Saudi allies unite as Iraq suspends more flights from Iran

Reuters

Riyadh, Cairo, September 25

SAUDI, TURKISH and Pakistani military chiefs are to discuss help for Saudi Arabia as it faces attacks by Yemen's Houthis, while Iraq further curtailed Iranian flights on Friday in line with US pressure, and an Iranian official threatened retaliation.

The Houthis have launched strikes on the Saudi-backed government in Yemen and repeatedly fired into Saudi Arabia, disrupting oil flows from the world's largest energy exporter, as part of a wider Middle East war that began with US and Israeli strikes on Iran on February 28.

The military escalation continued this week despite a push during the UN General Assembly in New York to revive diplomacy to end the conflict, which quickly spread to Lebanon and the Gulf in March before escalating in Yemen in recent weeks.

With talks stalled and during a lull in direct fire by the US and Iran, Washington had shifted tactics to extend the reach of its financial sanctions by targeting companies from third countries that do business with Iranian firms through "secondary sanctions".

Iranian airlines were barred from neighbouring countries including the United Arab Emir-

Top cleric urges troops to defend against Houthis

SAUDI ARABIA'S top cleric has issued a rare statement, calling on the kingdom's troops to defend the country from the Iran-backed Houthi rebels in neighbouring Yemen.

Israel's military, meanwhile, said two soldiers were killed in Gaza while inspecting an unexploded Israeli drone.

In New York, the wars in Iran and Gaza have dominated the agenda at the UN General Assembly, where the leaders of Iraq, Lebanon and Egypt were scheduled to address the United Nations later Friday. AP

ates and Oman on Thursday in response to new US sanctions, the first big impact of the shift.

On Friday, the three other Iraqi airports that operate flights to and from Iran joined Baghdad airport in suspending them, sources and state media said. A flight ban, if sustained, could deepen Iran's isolation and worsen an economic crisis in the country, which is already facing a US blockade of its sea-ports.