

Further demands on India-U.S. deal 'very difficult': Sitharaman

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan

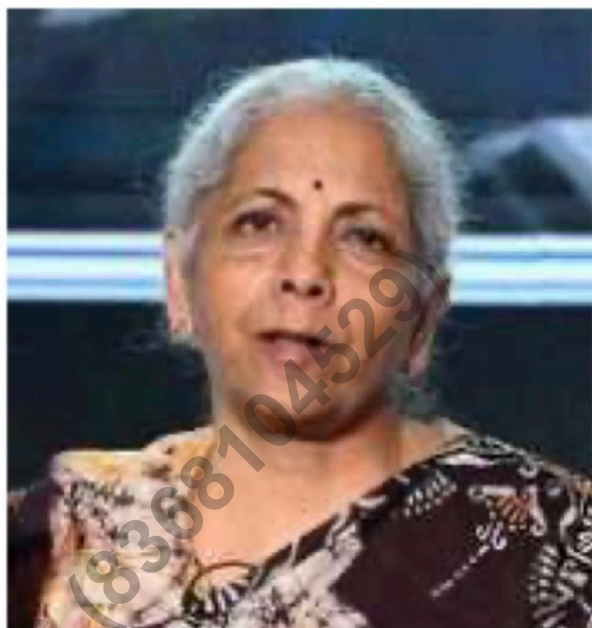
NEW DELHI

Negotiations for the India-U.S. trade deal have reached a "plateau", where it will now be "very difficult" to add to the list of demands and concessions that have been agreed to, Union Finance

Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Monday.

Speaking at the Munich Leaders Meeting here, Ms. Sitharaman said that India's imports of Russian oil did not feature as a condition during the negotiations for its free trade agreement (FTA) with the European Union, which is set to be signed in December.

"One thing about the U.S. agreement, which is yet to get finalised, it has been a hard and very rigorously negotiated agreement," the Finance Minister said. "The negotiations are still ongoing but we would like to believe that



Nirmala Sitharaman

both sides have reached a plateau beyond which giving or taking might be very difficult."

She added that a predominant feature of the India-U.S. trade relationship is that India has a substantial trade surplus, something the U.S. is looking to address.

"The trade imbalance with China for India, for instance, since 2014 has been growing exponentially," the Union Finance Minister said.

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India, Switzerland to boost defence, nuclear ties: Modi

The two sides agree to extend visas, student permits based on equal treatment principles; other agreements promote research, innovation, and explore opportunities in transport, infrastructure

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

India and Switzerland have identified new opportunities for cooperation in areas of defence and nuclear energy, Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, following a bilateral meeting with Swiss President Guy Parmelin on Monday.

Agreements signed by the two sides included one to extend visa durations and student permits.

Mr. Parmelin is in India for a three-day visit to commemorate the first anniversary of the Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) between India and the four-country European Free Trade Association (EFTA), which came into force on October 1, 2025.

"Today, we identified new opportunities for cooperation in military exchanges and defence production," Mr. Modi said in a statement following the meeting. "We also agreed to further deepen cooperation in nuclear energy."

The two countries also signed an agreement on



Swiss President Guy Parmelin and Narendra Modi at a joint press meet at Hyderabad House in New Delhi on Monday. ANI

transport, mobility, and infrastructure. "We invite Swiss infrastructure companies to invest in India at a large scale and participate in capacity building, design, and manufacturing," Mr. Modi said.

Mr. Parmelin is accompanied by a large business delegation, underscoring the Swiss business community's desire to make the most of the TEPA. However, the Swiss President noted that there are unfinished aspects, which will spur further investments once complete.

"To continue stimulat-

ing investment, Switzerland hopes to conclude an investment protection agreement quickly," Mr. Parmelin said. "In this context, it is equally important to achieve results in the discussions on intellectual property protection."

Multiple-entry visas

The two countries signed five agreements, including Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) and Letters of Intent (LoI), across a wide variety of sectors, the External Affairs Ministry said.

The MoU on Migration

and Mobility Partnership "aims to develop migration and mobility cooperation under equal treatment principles, and to prevent and combat irregular migration/human exploitation/trafficking in accordance with national laws," the MEA said. "It provides for multiple-entry visas for up to 5 years, including stays of up to 6 months on each visit, and renewable 1-year student permits," it added.

The Agreement on the Exchange of Young Professionals covers young people taking up temporary employment in the other country to enhance their professional and language skills within their field. This agreement incorporates an exchange of 300 people annually per country, which "may" increase to 500, among other provisions.

An LoI was signed between the Department of Science and Technology (DST) and the Swiss National Science Foundation to promote long-term cooperation between the Indian and Swiss research communities.

CEC has lost public trust, must be removed: activists

Suruchi Kumari

NEW DELHI

A group of retired bureaucrats, civil society activists, and academics on Monday accused Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar of six instances of “proved misbehaviour” and sought his removal.

They could not submit their “notice of impeachment” to him in person, as heavy barricading and police deployment prevented the delegation from reaching the Election Commission’s office.

They subsequently emailed their “chargesheet” to the CEC. It invokes Article 324(5) of the Constitution, which protects the CEC from removal except on grounds of “proved misbehaviour or incapacity”, and alleges that the CEC’s conduct amounted to a sustained disregard of law and constitutional duty.

The 14-member delegation included former Delhi Lieutenant-Governor Najeeb Jung, former Union



Taking a stand: Activist Anjali Bhardwaj and former Delhi Lieutenant-Governor Najeeb Jung in New Delhi on Monday. ANI

Home Secretary G.K. Pillai, and other former IAS officers and Ambassadors.

Six accusations

The chargesheet lists six accusations against Mr. Kumar, including that he undermined the collective functioning of the EC, made unauthorised changes to the statutory Form 6, centralised electoral-roll functions through the ECI-NET platform, and presided over the special intensive revision of electoral rolls that the activists alleged has resulted in large-scale disenfranchisement.

The group said the charges amounted to a “people’s impeachment” of the CEC and argued that he had lost the public trust necessary to continue in office. “EC is functioning illegally and failing in its responsibility. We believe that the CEC must resign,” activist Anjali Bhardwaj said.

The chargesheet alleges that the conduct of the EC had compromised citizens’ ability to establish their eligibility for inclusion in the electoral rolls, adding that such conduct undermined the EC’s public credibility.

HC asks EC: If citizens are being removed, what is purpose of SIR?

Bombay HC is hearing petition against deletion of names of 6 members of a Goa family from rolls after their applications for address change were rejected

Pavneet Singh Chadha
Panaji, October 5

STATING THAT the Election Commission has an obligation to ensure all citizens are on the electoral rolls, the High Court of Bombay at Goa on Monday asked what was the purpose of "this entire SIR process" if citizens are being removed from the voters' list.

"If citizens are excluded, what will we do with SIR?" the HC asked.

Hearing a petition where names of six members of a family had been deleted from the electoral rolls after their Form 8 applications for a change of address were rejected, the HC said the voter is

facing "a Catch-22 situation" in this matter.

A division bench of Justices Amit S Jamsandekar and Valmiki Menezes said, "If a gentleman comes and says 'I have shifted, I am giving you [ECI] Form 8 [for change of address]'. You cannot tell him 'I will not hear you'... You can't do that... because the roll that is being referred to in Rule 21 [Registration of Electors Rules, 1960] is the existing roll, not the draft roll."

It said, "Everything must be seen qua the existing roll, otherwise the voter has absolutely no way out of this... look at this complete Catch-22 situation before him. If he gives Form 6, it is a false declaration.

He gives Form 8... you say 'I cannot accept it and you must give the enumeration'. He says 'I don't want to give the enumeration'. But [Rule] 21 says you have to hear him before removing his name... not from the draft, from the original roll."

The bench said the ECI has an obligation to ensure all the citizens are on the list. "If citizens are excluded, what will we do with SIR? If citizens are being removed from the list, then what is the purpose of this entire SIR process?" it asked.

The petitioners — Paresch Salgaonkar and five members of his family — had moved to a new house in the same Santa Cruz Assembly constituency eight years ago and were instructed by the booth-level officer (BLO) to submit Form 8 for change of address.

The petitioners submitted that the Assistant Electoral Registration Officer informed them that their EPICs (Elec-

tors Photo Identity Cards) had been deleted from the rolls and consequently, their Form 8 applications could not be processed. The only recourse available was to submit Form 6 (which is for new voters) since there was no option in ERONET for reviewing or restoring the deleted EPICs.

'No voter should sign a false declaration'

"...in the enumeration form, the declarations are such that I have to declare in a pre-filled form for a ward, where I used to reside... I have to make a declaration that please include me in that same place, and I state that I am not there in any other place. How will a person make such a declaration when he knows he is in another place? The moment he makes such a declaration, he is open to prosecution," the court said.

"We are asking this. Why will he sign this? This is a false statement... Why should he

give a false declaration? No voter should sign this," the bench said.

The Election Commission of India (ECI) told the court that the guidelines clearly state that if someone has not submitted the enumeration form, their name is liable to be deleted from the roll.

✓ "In case an elector is unable to submit their filled-in enumeration form within the specified time, they may fill Form 6 along with declaration for inclusion during the claims and objection period... Ordinarily, Form 8 is by a person whose name is there in the draft roll, but says I am no longer residing here and I have shifted. He submits his Form 8 because it refers to an existing residence on the roll," the counsel for ECI said.

So, if you are not there on the draft roll only, what entry am I transferring under Form 8? I can't transfer a non-existent entry," the counsel for ECI added.

J&K sends 150 'Bangla immigrants' on IAF aircraft to Bengal for deportation

Bashaarat Masood
Srinagar, October 5

AS MANY as 150 Bangladeshi nationals who were allegedly living illegally in Jammu and Kashmir were airlifted Monday to West Bengal's Bagdogra, from where they will be deported. The 150 are among 500 people

who were detained from different parts of the Union Territory during a survey to identify illegal immigrants and kept in a facility manned by the police.

From Bagdogra, the 150 will be deported to Bangladesh, officials said.

This comes two months after a high-level committee on

demographic changes, set up by the Union Home Ministry in May this year, visited Jammu and Kashmir for its first field visit. Police sources said that the batch of 150 immigrants was sent in an Indian Air Force aircraft. They would be handed over to the Border Security

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J&K sends 150 'illegal immigrants' to Bengal

Force (BSF) and deported on October 7, sources said.

J&K police have conducted a special exercise over the last few days to identify "illegal immigrants" in the Union Territory, sources said, adding that around 500 people — mostly from Bangladesh — were detained and shifted to the facility on the outskirts of Srinagar city.

"Most of these people have been settled in different parts of the Kashmir Valley for many years now," said a police officer. "They were mostly doing menial jobs like ragpicking, etc."

Sources said some of those detained are Rohingya from Myanmar. Others will also be sent out in batches in the coming days and deported, sources said.

The high-level committee, during its visit to Jammu and Kashmir, was informed that there are 7,656 Rohingya and 504 Bangladeshi nationals in Jammu and Kashmir — 6,737 Rohingya and 46 Bangladeshi immigrants in Jammu, and the

rest in Kashmir. The committee was also informed that 117 cases are registered against them — 101 in Jammu and 16 in Kashmir.

The committee's mandate is to study demographic changes arising from illegal immigration and other factors and to recommend measures to address them. It has been asked to submit its report within one year.

It had sought details from states and Union Territories regarding "visible changes" in religious demography across districts, industrial clusters and border districts over the last 15 years.

In a letter dispatched to states and UTs over the last two months, the Committee sought "time-series data" indicating changes over the years, alongside other administrative datasets, an assessment by state governments of "major trends" in demographics, and data on the religious composition of tribal populations since 2011.

WITH PTI

EASE OF DOING BUSINESS IN FOCUS: NO ARREST, MINIMUM SENTENCING TO Rs 10,000-FLOOR FOR NOTICES

GST process reforms pin hope on data, tech to ensure compliance

Siddharth Upasani &
Aanchal Magazine
New Delhi, October 5

THE GST Council's meeting on Thursday will take up the second half of the reform exercise that was kicked off with the Goods and Services Tax (GST) rate cuts announced in September 2025. Officials said the process reforms on the agenda will cement the indirect tax regime for the next half a decade or so and "systems built on technology and good quality data" can help ensure correct behaviour from businesses without "onerous compliance".

"GST rates were cleaned up last year. Now, the focus is on moving towards a stable tax system with predictability, as was the demand from the industry. It may take a year or two to stabilise and then the GST regime will only require minor tweaks for the next 5-6 years," an official said. "If the proposals are approved by the Council, then the framework will be set," the official added.

A key proposal in the process reforms that will be discussed in the Council meeting on October

8 is going to be the removal of the power to arrest by GST officers, as reported by *The Indian Express* on Sunday. This power, officials said, has led to the creation of unnecessary leverage over businesses even before the actual arrest stage is reached.

"Tax disputes will be resolved through civil consequences, namely recovery of the tax, interest for the delay, and penalty," the official said. However, prosecution will remain available, with the GST Council expected to discuss some tweaks. Additionally, the threshold for prosecution is likely to be increased from Rs 1 crore to Rs 5 crore.

The sentencing provisions are also proposed to be softened, with the minimum sentence likely to be removed altogether. This, officials said, means courts won't be bound to impose a term of imprisonment regardless of circumstances. Also, a fine will be available as an option in every case. Furthermore, it is proposed that no notice will be issued at all where the amount involved is below Rs 10,000. Crucially, this change is expected to apply to new cases as well as those pending, whether in adjudication or



The GST Council last met in September 2025. REUTERS

in the appeal phase.

"Such cases are about a fifth of all cases by number and a negligible part of the money. For a small business, a notice of this size costs more to answer in fees and time than the amount in dispute. Removing that category will be a real relief, and will free up officers for matters of substance," the official said.

The GST Council will deliberate on a wide variety of issues on October 8 that encompass all the tax dealings of an entity during its lifecycle—getting regis-

GST Council to now meet on Thursday

New Delhi: The 57th meeting of the GST Council has been rescheduled to Thursday from Wednesday, an office memorandum said, citing "unavoidable circumstances". This will be the Council's first meeting after it announced an overhaul of Goods and Services Tax rates in early September 2025. This week's meeting is expected to focus on process reforms. ENS

tered, filing returns and correcting them, claiming refunds, and answering demands.

"All four processes are proposed to be redesigned on a single principle, namely that the system should do what can be done from data and the officer should be left with what needs judgement," an official said.

One major process change is set to be for the export of services, which will help align GST laws with the practice on ground. Citing the example of a testing laboratory which receives a proto-

type from a foreign client, tests it, sends back the report, and is paid in foreign exchange, the official explained that the place of supply followed where the work was performed. "It will now follow the location of the customer, and such work therefore qualifies as an export. This opens the whole field of testing, certification, repair, calibration, research and analysis to export treatment, and India has substantial capacity in all of them."

Wednesday's meeting comes over 13 months after the last one in September 2025 which announced the major rate overhaul that saw the number of tax slabs being reduced to 5% and 18%, with a 40% rate for demerit goods. "There have been no meetings of the GST Council in the interim, but discussions have been ongoing to bring all stakeholders on the same page, and that takes time. What has helped is that there have not been any major concerns about revenues being adversely impacted by the rate rationalisation exercise of September 2025. This has made it easier to go ahead with the process reforms discussions at this week's GST Council meeting."

Hundreds of French schools stay closed ahead of nationwide day of student protests

Dominique Vidalon

Paris, October 5

HUNDREDS OF French high schools will begin a second week of closures on Monday as protests over dilapidated schools and classrooms, overcrowding and teacher shortages precede a nationwide day of demonstrations on Tuesday.

The nationwide demonstrations and blockades underline a fraught social atmosphere as France's government embarks on trying to pass a deficit-narrowing 2027 budget. France's 10-year bond yield briefly topped 5% last week, its highest since 2002, as the protests compounded investor concerns over the country's fiscal outlook.

About 400 to 500 high schools are expected to remain completely or partially closed on Monday in France, out of a total of 3,700, Education Minister Edouard Geffray said on Sunday evening.

The protests began in late September at a high school in a Paris suburb over teacher short-

ages before spreading nationwide.

"Our priority is to restore order," government spokeswoman Maud Bregeon told CNews television on Monday.

Geffray said that 24 schools had been burned or ransacked and that 78 teaching staff had been injured since the beginning of the demonstrations.

On Monday, BFMTV showed images of police and students clashing in Lille in northern France, tear gas being used in Toulouse in the southwest and of a fire being lit as people tried to break into a school in central Paris.

Carole Zerbib, head of the vandalised Lycee Vauquelin in the 13th district of Paris, said her school had been attacked by a "very determined" group wearing hoods and masks who tried to break through the school's entrance door and then lit a fire. Police and firefighters quickly put out the fire and the school was evacuated and classes were suspended.

REUTERS

Yemeni govt forces drive out Houthis from Bab el-Mandeb

Reuters

October 5

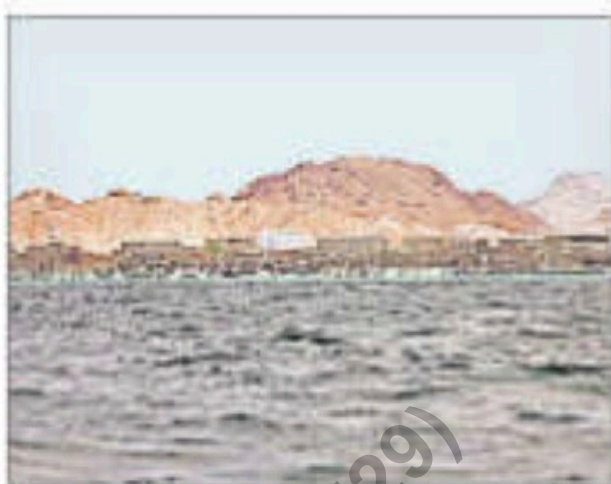
SAUDI-BACKED Yemeni government forces staged a lightning advance on Monday to retake the coast around the Bab el-Mandeb Strait up to the city of Mocha, the government said, pushing the Iran-backed Houthis out of most of the areas they seized last month.

The forces of the internationally recognised government, backed by heavy Saudi air strikes, reached the outskirts of Mocha late on Monday and Houthi fighters were retreating into the highlands, four government sources said. The Defence Ministry said the city had fallen.

The government forces had already taken key positions including an airstrip in the Dhubab district at the mouth of the strait, a vital oil route whose seizure by the Houthis last month sent shockwaves through energy markets.

Reuters could not independently verify the extent of the government gains. The Houthis, who have controlled many of Yemen's more populous areas including the capital Sanaa since 2014, said the Saudi-backed government's claims were baseless.

While recapturing the coastal area around the strait would make it harder for the Houthis



Houthis seek to control the vital Bab el-Mandeb Strait

to disrupt shipping between the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean, they could still attack vessels with drones from positions further up the coast and inland.

Meanwhile, the Houthis themselves made important advances near the city of Taiz, gaining sections of a mountain road to leave government forces there besieged, according to five military sources with the Yemeni government. One government source denied the road had been cut.

The group also threatened to attack air traffic in Saudi airspace.

Fighting has raged along several frontlines in Yemen for weeks since a dormant civil war erupted in a spillover from the US-Iran conflict, with the Houthis seeking to control the Bab el-Mandeb Strait and firing missiles and drones at Saudi cities and infrastructure.

DECISION COMES ONE WEEK AFTER SUSPECTED TERROR PLOT AT FAIRFORD BASE

US bombers moved from UK to 'protect our guys': Vance

Kate Holton
& Jonathan Landay

London, Washington, Oct 5

US VICE President JD Vance said on Monday that the decision to move B-1 bombers from a British airbase was done out of an abundance of caution after a suspected Iranian plot at the site last week.

The planes had been stationed at RAF Fairford, the preferred European base for US bombers, and had recently been used in US strikes on Iran.

Last week, five British men were arrested near the base - which Iran's Revolutionary Guards previously said was a legitimate target — on suspicion of preparing terrorist acts.

"So, what you saw there is the Secretary of War, out of an abundance of caution, trying to protect our guys," Vance said as he left Washington for a trip to Alaska. "We do feel with some confidence that the Iranians are, you know, they're trying to do what the Iranian state has done for 49 years, which is engaged in acts of terrorism against the



A B-1 bomber takes off from RAF Fairford airbase on Sunday. REUTERS

United States (and others), so we are being extremely cautious, and that's all I'd say about that."

Earlier, US Secretary of State Marco Rubio said there was no direct link between the sudden removal of the bombers and the suspected Iranian plot. He said the Pentagon is "constantly reallocating resources where they need to be."

A NATO military source had said on Monday: "It is still believed that Iran poses an acute

threat to US assets in the UK".

While much about the incident remains unexplained, British PM Andy Burnham said any plot was likely backed by Iran.

Iran has said accusations that it was involved in any plot are baseless, and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi wrote on X: "I can confirm Iran's belief that releasing supposed terrorists working for foreign states really says it all. You're barking up the wrong tree."

Rubio said on Monday the US had confidence in the security of all its bases. During the current conflict, the US had permission to use Fairford only to strike Iranian missile sites that were attacking ships in the Strait of Hormuz, or so-called defensive strikes. London had refused permission for the US to use British bases for offensive strikes on Iran. That approach has strained ties between the US and Britain, typically one of Washington's closest allies.

A Pentagon official confirmed on Sunday that all US bombers which had been deployed to Fairford had headed to their home stations in the US.

The Pentagon said the US bomber force remained ready to deliver precision global strike capabilities "anywhere, anytime".

The *New York Times*, citing two US officials, said the US had rushed over the weekend to move the bombers after commanders received new threats about an Iran-backed plot. It said some of the planes had left while aerial refuelling aircraft were still being scrambled. **REUTERS**

Brazil lurches to the right as Lula falters

President trailed his challenger Flávio Bolsonaro by about 1.8 percentage points, or 2.2 million votes; the right-wing Liberal Party broke voting records in Congress, emerged as the dominant force in the Senate and made significant gains in State assemblies; Lula and Flávio will face a run-off on Oct. 25

Shobhan Saxena
SAO PAULO

Sunday night was supposed to be historic for Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, who was seeking a record fourth term as Brazil's President. But when the results came in, the night looked gloomy. Instead of winning in the first round, as his supporters had expected, Lula trailed his challenger Flávio Bolsonaro by about 1.8 percentage points, or 2.2 million votes. With Flávio also falling short of the 50% needed for an outright victory, the election now moves to a second round on October 25 – leaving Lula facing a tougher contest than anticipated, while Bolsonaro heads into the runoff with the momentum of having finished first.



Men look at newspapers displaying coverage of Brazil's presidential election results at a newsstand in Rio de Janeiro on Monday. AFP

The two candidates struck sharply different notes as the results became clear. Flávio, the eldest son of former President Jair Bolsonaro, declared that Brazilians were demanding change. "It is the end of the era of the Workers Party (PT); it is a big change in our country," he told reporters in

Brasília. Lula, speaking to supporters in São Paulo, acknowledged that the result had been unexpected. "I confess to you that I was convinced I would win the election in the first round," he said. But Lula insisted that the contest had now entered a new phase. "The second round is a new campaign," he said, argu-

ing that the runoff would give voters a direct choice between the two candidates and their visions.

Political pundits agree that the second round is a new election and can go either way. But there is little doubt that, for now, the momentum is with the right. As if Flávio staying ahead of Lula in the presidential election was not shocking enough for Brazil's left, the results for Congress, the Senate and State governors came as a big jolt too. Candidates from the Bolsonaro's Liberal Party (PL) broke voting records in Congress, while the party emerged as the dominant force in the Senate and made significant gains in State assemblies. Flávio's supporters also account for a majority of the governors elected in

the first round, pointing to a broad rightward shift that extends beyond the presidential race.

But the most significant feature of the rightward shift may be that the PL has not grown at the expense of Lula's party. The far-right party has expanded its base by eating into the traditional conservative and centre-right political space. With 19 senators elected, the PL will increase its representation from 15 to 28 seats from February 2027, giving it the second-largest single-party bloc in the Senate since Brazil's return to democracy.

While the left has maintained its position in the Chamber and Senate, the far right has grown by devouring much of the right.

Another factor behind

Flávio's strong performance was the evangelical vote, which has increasingly consolidated behind the Bolsonaro family, while Lula failed to translate Brazil's large Catholic population into the electoral advantage his campaign had expected. The contrast was particularly striking after the controversy surrounding Nossa Senhora Aparecida, Brazil's patron saint, which became a political issue during the campaign. In municipalities with an above-average concentration of evangelicals, Flávio won 52% of the valid votes. The contrast was even sharper in municipalities with the highest concentration of Catholics. Lula's share there fell by 11 percentage points compared with his previous performance.

BEIJING

Philippines involved in 'provocative acts' in South China Sea, says China



AP

China warned Philippines on Monday against “provocative acts” in the disputed South China Sea, accusing a Philippine aircraft of an airspace violation. The Philippine forces said a Chinese fighter jet interfered with a “routine military patrol” carried out by a Cessna 208 turboprop near the Scarborough Shoal on Saturday. AFP

Pakistan, Turkiye to deploy forces in Saudi Arabia

Reuters

ISLAMABAD

Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkiye agreed on Monday to move immediately to implement their collective defence commitments and ensure the “rapid deployment” of agreed military forces and capabilities in Saudi Arabia, the three countries said in a joint statement shared by Pakistan’s Foreign Ministry.

The decision was taken at an emergency meeting of the Mecca Defence Alliance in Riyadh and would be carried out under “approved arrangements” and the laws of the three countries, the statement said.

The meeting “reaffirmed the solidarity and unity of our countries in confronting the heinous at-

tacks against the Kingdom and the holy sites,” Saudi Defence Minister said on X.

The three countries signed the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement in August, under which an armed attack on one member is considered an attack on all.

Forces of the Saudi-led coalition fighting in Yemen have recaptured several key areas around Bab el-Mandeb Strait from Iran-backed Houthi rebels, Yemeni officials said Monday.

The offensive came just after the rebels said they had captured more territory in the southwestern Yemen, taking a key town in a blow to the Saudi-backed forces as they advanced toward a strategic provincial capital in the region.

(With AFP inputs)