

SC agrees to 'take care' of Delhi voters whose names were removed

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court on Wednesday agreed to intervene for Delhi's voters whose names were deleted from the electoral roll pursuant to the special intensive revision (SIR), and are now effectively being asked by the Election Commission of India (ECI) to misrepresent themselves as fresh applicants.

A Bench headed by Chief Justice of India Surya Kant was informed by advocates Prashant Bhushan and Neha Rathi, appearing for petitioners Anjali Bhardwaj and Amrita Johri, that voters seeking to restore their names in the roll are being compelled by the ECI to file a declaration that they had never voted before or face imprisonment. "We are thinking of passing an order which will take care of this issue," the CJI remarked.



The EC should either

allow them [voters seeking re-inclusion] to file Form 8 or create a new form for voters deleted

in the SIR

PRASHANT BHUSHAN

Advocate for petitioners



"The ECI should either allow them to file Form 8 [for shifted voters] or create a new form for voters deleted in the SIR," Mr. Bhushan submitted. He said the Delhi SIR case was listed on October 30, but that would be too late as the last date for filing claims and objections was the same day. The Chief Justice advanced the date of hearing to October 28.

CONTINUED ON

» **PAGE 10**

Will take care of those deleted in Delhi rolls: SC

The application has asked the court to direct the EC to frame an appropriate mechanism for restoration/inclusion of deleted voters without forcing them to apply as first-time voters.

Form 6, prescribed under the Registration of Electors Rules of 1960, requires every applicant to affirm that they are “applying for inclusion in the electoral roll for the first time”.

During the enumeration phase of the SIR in Delhi, 47,56,722 electors were excluded from the draft electoral roll under the category of ASDD (Absent, Shifted, Dead or Duplicate). For any person on the ASDD list, the only mechanism for filing a claim for having their name restored in the voter list is through Form 6.

“This creates a fundamental anomaly as all these people were previously enrolled on the voter list but are now required to submit Form 6 and make a declaration that they are seeking inclusion in the electoral roll for the first time, which is factually incorrect and wholly inapplicable to their circumstances,” the application said.

Further, it said these persons would become vulnerable to punishment for giving a false declaration under Section 31 of the Representation of the People Act, 1950, which provides for imprisonment for a term which may extend to one year or with fine or with both.

The petition also pointed out that the additional declaration form required to be submitted along with Form 6 was without the force of law and must be struck down.

India's exports to China grow 40%, deficit crosses \$100 bn

Ananth Krishnan

BEIJING

India's exports to China grew 40% in the first three quarters of 2026 to around \$20 billion, although the trade deficit with the neighbouring country has continued to widen, already crossing \$100 billion this year, according to data released on Wednesday by China's General Administration of Customs.

India's two-way trade with China between January and September this year was up 25.4% to \$144.45 billion, while India's imports from China continued to rise, up 23.3% to \$125.19 billion.

Indian exports to China registered a robust 40.7% growth, albeit from a much

Widening gap

India's two-way trade with China rose **25.4% year-on-year to \$144.45 billion in Jan.-Sept. 2026**. While India's exports grew 40.7% to \$19.26 billion, **imports rose 23.3% to \$125.19 billion**, pushing the trade deficit to \$105.93 billion



smaller base, to \$19.26 billion after the first three quarters, already reaching last year's total. The trade deficit stood at \$105.93 billion and is on track to surpass last year's record figure of \$116.12 billion.

Indian officials say that while there is no expecta-

tion for trade to be perfectly balanced, the broader concern is the heavily lopsided trade relationship, a lack of market access for Indian firms, and the nature of India's imports.

CONTINUED ON
» **PAGE 10**

India's trade deficit with China crosses \$100 bn

The widening imbalance has remained a source of concern for New Delhi, with the deficit figuring in last month's talks between Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the BRICS summit.

While India requires large amounts of intermediates from China for manufacturing, the continued reliance on finished goods, including large quantities of electronics and machinery, remains a concern.

India's major exports to China this year have included seafood products, naphtha, and printed circuit boards, which until recently India was buying in bulk from the neighbouring country.

India is also concerned by Chinese export controls in an increasing number of sectors, from fertilizers to rare earths. At last month's meeting in New Delhi, Mr. Modi and Mr. Xi "underlined the need to address each other's concerns, including structural trade imbalance and supply chain issues, and facilitation of meaningful and predictable market access", a statement from the Ministry of External Affairs said. Both leaders also "took note of the progress in people-to-people ties and underscored the need to further promote cultural exchanges, business linkages and greater mobility between the two countries," the statement said, following the normalisation in relations since the October 2024 meeting between the two leaders.

A statement from China's Foreign Ministry after the meeting said the "two sides should also address each other's economic and trade concerns in a balanced way and promote the sound and steady development of economic and trade relations."

If no chip self-reliance, risk of failing in future conflicts: DRDO units

**Johnson T A
& Soumyarendra Barik**
*Bengaluru, New Delhi,
October 14*

EXPERTS FROM the Defence Research and Development Organisation have cautioned that if India does not achieve self-reliance in designing, manufacturing and deploying semiconductors by 2047, the target year for Viksit Bharat, the country will be at severe risk of “failing in future conflicts” which will be driven by artificial intelligence, cyber technologies and space power.

Although India produces 20 per cent of total data for the global generation of artificial intel-

ligence, only three per cent of AI data centres are in the country. While 20 per cent of the global computer chip design workforce is in India, 90 per cent of the chip/semiconductor industry is dependent on imports.

On Tuesday, participating in a curtain raiser to the ‘Semiconductors and Next-Gen chips’ session at the Emerging Science, Technology and Innovation Conclave later this month, heads of several DRDO units linked to technology management, semiconductor labs, and DRDO Director General B K Das, provided an overview of India’s position in the

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

DRDO

world in the semiconductor sector.

The experts said while India cannot aspire to be a leader across the semiconductor ecosystem by the 2047 deadline, the country must strive for leadership in some domains in the ecosystem to be taken seriously as a global strategic power.

Dr Anesh Sharma, Director of DRDO's Solid State Physics Lab, said, "We should try to be a leader in some domain so that if we have something powerful to give to some other country, they will also listen to us. So, it's some kind of a give and take. otherwise today we do not have any expertise in terms of fabrication or materials or products in the semiconductor part."

While the US dominates the sector with advanced chip design capabilities, automation, system architectures and intellectual property rights, the manufacturing foundries are in Taiwan and South Korea, while Japan, Europe and the Netherlands have critical infrastructure for production of wafers, chemicals and other production aspects. He said China has maturity in node fabrication (the dimensions used in the fabrication of semiconductor devices).

Sharma said India should

strive to be relevant in the semiconductor sector by 2047, aiming for leadership in manufacturing of two nanometer chips, 3D structures with at least two foundries that are among the top 10 in the world "so we can contribute at least 20% in the very high, top niche kind of technology". "These technologies are denied, we do not get them from other countries. We need to focus on these technologies so that we have strategic relevance in the future for the country's requirements," he said.

"The vision we have for the semiconductor mission now is not only fabrication. When we talk about the total ecosystem, we need to start independence from the materials itself. If the materials for these technologies are still coming from outside, we will not be able to get technology independence," Sharma said.

Among futuristic domains identified by DRDO for India to establish early intellectual property leadership "because these are the domains in which we have started already" are quantum computing and photonic integrated circuits and neuro-morphic computing, he said.

Dr Anupam Sharma, DRDO DG for Technology Management, said, "...Without significant research advancements, India will be unable to fight or win future technological conflicts," he said.

OVERALL LNG IMPORTS ROBUST DESPITE HORMUZ HIT

Oman replaces US as top LNG supplier to India

Sukalp Sharma

New Delhi, October 14

INDIA'S LIQUEFIED natural gas (LNG) import slate underwent a discernible reshuffle in September with the US slipping a couple of positions from the top supplier spot, as European importers stepped up competition for American cargoes.

The US had secured the top supplier spot in recent months after the outbreak of the West Asia conflict.

Nonetheless, New Delhi continued to import higher volumes of super-chilled gas on a year-on-year basis from a diversified pool of sources despite the disruption in supplies through the Strait of Hormuz crisis.

Robust LNG demand in India has led to Indian importers competing hard to pick up cargoes from the spot market at higher prices, even as some of the other major Asian LNG buyers have curtailed imports.

The West Asia crisis has pushed India to secure cargoes from non-hormuz dependent supply sources, as New Delhi has been prioritising supplies over price considerations amid demand from various sectors, which include city gas distribution (CGD), fertiliser, power, and ceramics.

According to tanker data, Oman and Nigeria topped the list of LNG suppliers in September, followed by the US.

In August, the US was the top supplier to India, followed by Nigeria, Oman, and the UAE.

Imports from the UAE rose significantly on a sequential basis in September, and volumes from Qatar also saw an uptick, reflecting the growing risk appetite of these Gulf states in sending their cargoes through the fraught waters of the strait, according to trade sources.

Prior to the West Asia conflict, Qatar was India's top source of LNG, while the UAE and the



LNG imports from the US declined 60.7% in September.

US frequently traded the second and third places between them.

LNG imports from the US in September declined 60.7% month-on-month to 0.34 million tonnes, while volumes from Oman rose 11.6% to 0.59 million tonnes, according to vessel tracking data from commodity market analytics firm Kpler.

Imports from Nigeria declined 35.1% from August to 0.35 million tonnes, while those from the UAE rose 27.3% to 0.31 million tonnes.

LNG imports from Qatar rose 6.7% sequentially to 0.1 million tonnes in September, but were down 88.5% year-on-year.

India's total LNG imports in September were down 12.7% month-on-month at 2.24 million tonnes, largely due to seasonal demand fluctuations. On a year-on-year basis though, September LNG imports were 7% higher.

According to industry insiders and experts, the UAE has been able to export sizeable cargoes despite the Hormuz blockade using tactics like switching off the LNG tankers' transponder to avoid detection and capitalising on windows of opportunity based on maritime security assessments in the region.

While Qatar has also exported some cargoes using this strategy, the UAE has been far more ag-

gressive, displaying a higher risk-tolerance.

India depends on LNG imports to meet about half of its natural gas requirement, and about 60% of those imports came through the critical maritime chokepoint of the Strait of Hormuz, primarily from Qatar and also the UAE.

The two Gulf countries are major LNG exporters at the global level as well. Unlike Qatar and the UAE, Oman's LNG exports don't depend on the strait.

"September LNG imports were also supported by higher gas-fired power generation, as weaker hydropower availability and stretched coal-fired generation increased the call on gas despite the power sector's high price sensitivity. We expect India's LNG demand to remain resilient through the end of 2026 despite elevated prices, as growing city-gas consumption, including LPG-to-PNG (liquefied petroleum gas to piped natural gas) switching, and declining domestic natural gas production sustain import requirements," said Sonal Ranjan, LNG and natural gas analyst at Kpler.

"While elevated Asian spot LNG prices should constrain discretionary demand in the industrial sector, these underlying requirements provide a firmer

floor for imports," Rajnan said.

According to her, India is competing hard for LNG cargoes in the international market, while other major Asian buyers like China, Japan, and South Korea aren't buying as much in the current high-price environment, and are curbing natural gas use by shifting to alternative fuels. China is also buying LNG from Russia.

India and most other large importers don't import Russian LNG due to Western sanctions on Moscow's LNG projects.

After falling in March and April — the first two months of the West Asia war — India's LNG imports have trended consistently higher on a year-on-year basis. In the May-September period, its imports rose 17.8% year-on-year to 11.87 million tonnes, as per Kpler data. In the five-month period, the US was India's largest source of LNG with volumes at 3.41 million tonnes, or 28.7% of total LNG imports. US LNG import volumes during the period were almost 175% higher than the year-ago period. But over the past couple of months, aggressive pre-winter buying from European importers have altered global flows with a large number of American LNG cargoes going to Europe.

India's LNG imports from Oman were 2.33 million tonnes, up nearly 419% year-on-year and accounting for almost a fifth of India's LNG imports in May-September. LNG imports from Nigeria in the five-month period stood at 2.20 million tonnes, up nearly 169% year-on-year and accounting for 18.5% of India's LNG import basket.

UAE had a share of 9.3% and LNG volumes from the country declined 10.1% over May-September of last year to 1.11 million tonnes. Qatari LNG volumes crashed 90.2% year-on-year in the five-month period to 0.41 million tonnes, and had a paltry market share of 3.4%. FULL REPORT ON

WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

NOT A DISINVESTMENT, A RESTRUCTURING: SITHARAMAN

FDI windfall as Cabinet clears 60.7% IDBI stake sale to Canada's Fairfax

Toronto-based holding company chosen as strategic buyer for Rs 52,878 crore

Siddharth Upasani
New Delhi, October 14

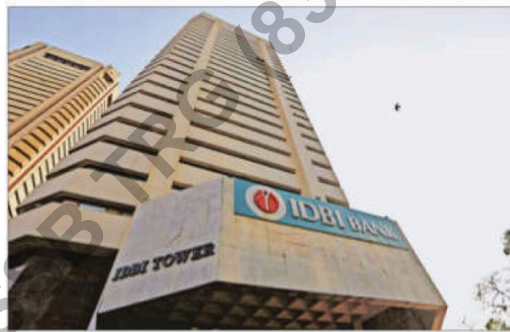
THE CABINET Committee on Economic Affairs Wednesday cleared the long pending disinvestment of IDBI Bank, choosing Toronto-based Fairfax Financial Holdings, backed by Indian-Canadian billionaire Prem Watsa, as the 'strategic buyer' for Rs 52,878 crore.

The sale of 60.72% stake in IDBI Bank, the largest ever Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in India's financial sector, is expected to be completed by March 2027.

Following the CCEA nod, Union Finance Minister Nir-

mala Sitharaman said, "It is not a disinvestment, but a restructuring. This is because the government will remain invested in IDBI Bank."

The decision Wednesday is the latest in a series of overseas investments in the country's financial sector. In June this year, Emirates NBD completed its 60% purchase in private lender RBL Bank for nearly \$3 billion. And just before that, Japan's Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group (MUFG) bought 20% of non-bank lender Shriram Finance for \$4.4 billion. Last year, another Japanese financial giant, Sumitomo Mitsui Banking Corporation (SMBC),



The sale is expected to be completed by March 2027. REUTERS

bought 24.2% of YES Bank for a little under \$2 billion.

The IDBI Bank strategic restructuring also continues the government's disinvestment process, prominent ones in recent years being that of Air

India and Neelachal Ispat Nigam Limited in 2022, Ferro Scrap Nigam Limited in early 2025, and Indian Medicines Pharmaceuticals Corporation Limited in May this year.

A public sector bank for

e EXPLAINED

Meeting a target

The green light for Fairfax completes a process that has gone on for more than four years and ensures that the Centre's FY27 disinvestment target will be met. It is also the latest foreign investment in India's financial sector, with entities from Japan and West Asia having poured in billions of dollars over the last year or so.

long, IDBI Bank became a private bank in 2019 after continued poor financial health led to Life Insurance Corporation

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

FDI windfall as Govt clears 60.7% IDBI stake sale to Canada's Fairfax

of India (LIC) acquiring a majority stake and becoming the promoter. Before the strategic restructuring announcement, LIC held 49.24% in IDBI Bank, while the Government held 45.48%. After the sale, LIC will hold 19% and the Government 15%.

On Wednesday, the price of IDBI Bank shares surged 9% to close at Rs 90.39 on the National Stock Exchange amid constant speculation that the bank's disinvestment would be announced any day. LIC's share price was flat at Rs 394.

Fairfax's winning bid was Rs 81 per share, higher than the Rs 70.38 on the last trading day before the invitation of 'best offer bids' on May 18.

Once the deal is completed,

the proceeds of Rs 52,878 crore will help the Centre meet its disinvestment target of Rs 80,000 crore for 2026-27 as a whole. According to the latest data from the Department of Investment and Public Asset Management (DIPAM), the Centre has so far raised Rs 55,757 crore.

The share purchase agreement signed by Fairfax is for three years from the completion of the deal. This means Fairfax, as the new promoter of IDBI Bank, must retain the name of the bank for that period of time. Moreover, the capital invested by Fairfax must be locked in for five years.

Sources said IDBI Bank employees have nothing to worry about since the bank is a going

concern. Further, a separate fund has been created for the pension of former employees. IDBI Bank officers and the employees union have opposed the sale of the bank, saying the price is too low.

This will not be Fairfax's first foray into the Indian banking sector as it currently owns, through its subsidiary FIH Mauritius Investments Ltd, 40% of Kerala's Thrissur-based CSB Bank. But since the same promoter can't own two banks, Fairfax has to, within two years, either merge CSB Bank and IDBI Bank or exit CSB Bank.

Shares of CSB Bank also jumped 4.3% Wednesday to settle at Rs 321.30.

Fairfax must reduce its stake in IDBI Bank to 26% over

a period of 15 years, although the exact details of the glide path for the stake reduction will be between Fairfax and the Reserve Bank of India (RBI). For now, Fairfax must go through the central bank's compliance process.

The LIC must reduce its 19% stake in IDBI Bank to 15% within two years of the deal's completion.

The Ministry of Finance, in a statement, said, "The CCEA has also delegated powers to the Alternative Mechanism to undertake minority stake sales of the GoI residual shareholding (15% of the total shareholding of the IDBI Bank Ltd.) through the open market in accordance with the standard operating procedure. The LIC will be free to manage its residual shareholding in accordance with its internal procedures while ensuring compliance with the directions of its regulators."

The long and rocky road to a trade deal with US



RAVI DUTTA MISHRA
& ANIL SASI

ON SATURDAY, Commerce Minister Piyush Goyal said that India and the US would finalise their interim trade agreement framework in line with "changed circumstances". That statement appeared to indicate that negotiations for the first phase of the bilateral trade pact still have some way to go despite a framework being agreed in February.

Negotiations for the long-delayed trade deal have continued for nearly a year. This month, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said talks had reached a plateau beyond which a compromise would be difficult. This followed comments from United States Trade Representative Jamie-Son Greer that a trade deal was in its final stages, "but not imminent". Meanwhile, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Wednesday that the two countries are continuing to engage, and that negotiations are heading towards a "landing point".

While trade negotiators have suggested that they are making progress, much of the political signalling in the interim has suggested the opposite. So how far away are both parties from a deal?

Areas of progress

There are some positives. The first relates to "overcapacity" — a situation when a sector or a country's production capacity exceeds the demand in the market. Increased supply can push down prices and affect manufacturers in other countries.

China is often accused of having overcapacity in sectors such as automobiles, electric vehicles, batteries, chemicals, semiconductors and solar panels.

The US has launched an investigation into overcapacity under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, targeting China and 15 other economies, including India.

Last Wednesday, the US government said that India, along with 13 other countries and blocs including the European Union, Australia and Japan, has decided to take "effective actions" against structural excess capacity. The joint statement, released after the G20 trade ministers' meeting, in Mil-



waukee is significant on two counts.

FIRST, India's inclusion could mean that it may fall outside the Section 301 tariff net. The convergence on overcapacity comes just weeks before the US is expected to release the results of the Section 301 probe.

SECOND, tariffs on India were reduced from 12.5% (proposed earlier this year) to 10% after New Delhi issued a notification banning imports of goods produced through forced labour.

Sticking points

While the new Section 301 agreement suggests some tangible progress, the concerns in New Delhi are on two counts.

ONE, whether entering into a deal, which entails significant concessions given the Donald Trump administration's usual approach, will indeed result in any competitive tariff advantage for India over its competitors.

TWO, the US has, on various occasions, imposed fresh curbs despite having signed trade agreements. This was particularly evident in its dispute with Canada despite signing the United States-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) during Trump's first term in 2020.

Ajay Srivastava, founder of thinktank Global Trade Research Initiative, said that while Chinese President Xi Jinping secured a tariff pause from Trump over China's Russian oil purchases, India continues to face

PM Narendra Modi with US President Donald Trump at the G7 Summit in France in June. *NYT*

Trade lens

The US's Section 301 investigation is evaluating 16 economies for 'overcapacity'.

These are China, the EU, Norway, Switzerland, Mexico, South Korea, Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Cambodia, Thailand, Vietnam, Taiwan, Bangladesh, Japan and India.

that threat from the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026. That legislation gives Trump the power to impose up to 100% tariffs on buyers of Russian oil and gas.

"We saw this pattern in July 2025, when Washington spared China but imposed an additional 25% tariff on India for buying Russian crude. If Russian oil purchases are the issue, why does India face the tariff while China gets an exemption? The tariff threat appears aimed at forcing India to cut Russian oil purchases and sign a deeply unequal bilateral trade agreement. Washington could offer a lower rate in return for concessions, but that would give India no lasting certainty. India should not trade its energy security for temporary tariff relief or let US tariff threats dictate its national energy policy," said Srivastava.

Asked about the US-China trade truce extension, a government official had earlier told *The Indian Express*: "It's just (for) two months. The Chinese wanted it till the end of Trump's term. That hasn't happened. Our side has also expressed concerns to DC over the scope of the sanctions legislation."

There is considerable unease in New Delhi over the arbitrariness of the trade negotiations with Washington DC. Last year, India faced some of the highest US tariffs imposed on any country, a move the US Supreme Court later struck down.

Currently, the talks have also been com-

Despite convergence on the issue of overcapacity, India is worried about the concessions US wants & the uncertainty that may remain even after inking a deal

plicated by the new US legislation against Russian oil.

When the US Supreme Court invalidated the reciprocal tariff regime, the February framework that had offered to reduce India's reciprocal tariff from 25% to 18% in return for concessions lost its sheen.

"While there has been considerable narrowing of differences since the February framework signing, the sticking points that remain continue to be too significant to be papered over. At this point in time, a situation of suspended animation, with somewhat lower tariffs, is perhaps a better option than getting into a deal involving significant concessions by India. There is uncertainty even after signing a deal, as multiple other countries are finding out," an official aware of the negotiations told *The Indian Express*.

Lingering uncertainties

India and several other economies are awaiting the results of the Section 301 investigation into overcapacity. The government's stance is that India does not have structural excess manufacturing capacity in the sectors identified by the G20 presidency, and that the country's manufacturing capacity serves both domestic and global needs.

Indian exporters have said that US buyers have become cautious and are refraining from placing large orders in a single country. This is affecting low-margin products such as footwear and textiles. However, US concessions on electronics and pharmaceutical imports have so far helped India maintain its overall export levels to the US. Without those, the figures would have been more adversely tilted against India.

Goods exports to the US showed a sharp 21% jump in August to \$8.3 billion compared to August last year, when India began facing 50% tariffs. Between April and August, too, India's exports jumped by over 6%, driven by electronics and engineering goods. India's electronics exports jumped 89% to \$5.5 billion compared to \$2.9 billion.

However, India's imports from the US, driven by energy products, are also rising sharply. In August, imports went up by 65% to \$5.97 billion. This comes as India has also been making several regulatory changes to aid American companies by lowering tariffs on US bourbon whiskey and motorcycles, among several other items. New Delhi has also announced a tax holiday for data centres and opened its nuclear sector, moves that align with US commercial interests.

'Painful' that Trump chose different side, says Zelenskyy; London reaffirms support

Reuters

London, October 14

VOLODYMYR ZELENSKYY received a strong show of support in London on Wednesday, meeting Prime Minister Andy Burnham and King Charles after the Ukrainian leader's relationship with the US took a sharp turn for the worse.

Zelenskyy was given the red-carpet treatment, arriving in Britain after another night of heavy Russian attacks and after Ukraine accused Elon Musk's SpaceX of crippling its drones by limiting services.

The diplomatic display, which included a 25-minute audience with Charles and a ceremonial guard in Downing Street, echoed Zelenskyy's February 2025 visit to London after he had clashed with US Presi-



Britain's PM Andy Burnham with Volodymyr Zelenskyy at 10 Downing Street, Wednesday. AP

dent Donald Trump and his deputy JD Vance.

At the start of Wednesday's Downing Street meeting, Zelenskyy said he wanted to discuss the difficulties over Starlink and intelligence sharing, and that Ukraine still relied on its partnership with the US. Trump said at the weekend

Zelenskyy should be replaced as Ukraine's leader, days after he cut a deal with Moscow to lift sanctions on Russian diesel. Britain has said it does not support the US-Russia diesel deal, and called for allies to keep up economic pressure on Moscow.

In an interview with broadcaster Piers Morgan, Zelenskyy said it was painful when Trump sided with Russia over Ukraine. "It's painful when President Trump chooses one side, not our side."

Burnham said the last few days had been "very dark and difficult" for Ukraine, but that Britain remained a staunch ally. "We're behind you, and that will not change," he said.

Earlier Burnham announced the planned delivery of \$59.60 million of surface-to-air missiles used to target jet-powered Russian drones.

Ukraine drones strike Russia's top data centre

Moscow: Ukrainian drones hit Russia's biggest data centre on Wednesday, part of a series of attacks appearing to target Moscow's ambitions to develop Russian AI capabilities on a par with those from the US and China.

The strike on the Balakovo data centre followed three attacks in the past week on data centres owned by Russian technology group Yandex.

"We confirm the data processing centre was attacked. But... all of Sberbank's services are operating normally....", Sberbank First Deputy CEO Alexander Vedyakhin said. REUTERS

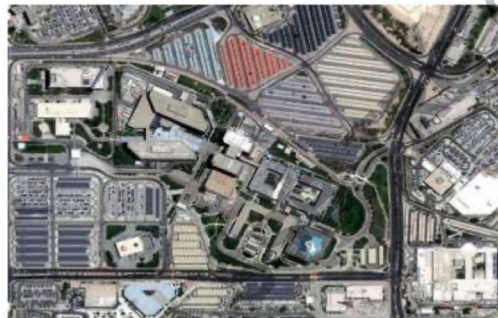
Houthis vow more strikes on Saudi airports, oil sites after Aramco hit

An attack on Aramco's Dhahran headquarters reportedly caused a blaze spreading across several floors; the group says its strikes on 'legitimate targets' are a retaliation for Saudi attacks on Yemen and the kingdom's support for Yemeni govt. forces

Reuters
RIYADH/DUBAI

Yemen's Houthis (Ansar Allah) vowed on Wednesday to press on with attacks on airports and oil facilities in Saudi Arabia, a day after a strike that sources said caused extensive damage to the headquarters of oil giant Saudi Aramco.

The Houthis said the threatened locations were legitimate targets and described their attacks as retaliation for Saudi strikes on Yemen, threatening to escalate a conflict reignited by the U.S.-Iran confrontation in the Gulf.



Critical strike: The headquarters of Saudi Aramco in Dhahran, Saudi Arabia, before it was attacked on Tuesday night. REUTERS

Saudi Arabia has faced widening Houthi strikes over the past week, including an attack on King Khalid International Airport in Riyadh on Saturday that

killed 13 people.

Tuesday night's attack on Saudi Aramco's base in the eastern city of Dhahran caused a fire that spread across several floors, three

people with knowledge of the matter told Reuters. The Saudi Energy Ministry had said the strike caused a limited fire.

Operations at Aramco were continuing normally, with employees working from home, according to two of the sources.

The escalating conflict has dealt a blow to Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's ambitious plans to transform and diversify the Saudi economy and reduce its reliance on oil.

The Houthis say they have been retaliating for the kingdom's backing of Yemeni government forces in the Yemen war that res-

tarted last month.

The Saudi-led coalition said it had intercepted a ballistic missile fired by the Houthis towards Riyadh on Wednesday, and several loud booms were heard in the Saudi capital.

Saudi authorities earlier issued an alert for a possible aerial threat in Riyadh on Wednesday before the warning was lifted, a witness said.

In their statement on Wednesday, the Houthis said they had launched ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and drones at the Saudi Aramco facilities in Dhahran, Riyadh airport and an Aramco refinery in Riyadh.

UN wants Lebanon stability as UNIFIL mandate nears end

Agence France-Presse

BEIRUT

A visiting senior United Nations official on Wednesday reaffirmed the UN's commitment to stability in Lebanon as the mandate of its peacekeeping force in the country is set to expire.

Under-Secretary-General for Peace Operations Jean-Pierre Lacroix met officials as well as representatives of countries contributing to the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), which counts some 7,500 personnel from nearly 50 countries.

"I thanked them for their critical support to UNIFIL and reiterated the UN's strong commitment



Jean-Pierre Lacroix

to supporting peace and stability in Lebanon," Mr. Lacroix said.

UNIFIL has served as a buffer between Israel and Lebanon since 1978.

Under U.S. pressure, the UN Security Council last year voted to end UNIFIL's mandate on December 31, 2026.

Iran says a ship sank after hitting a mine in Strait of Hormuz

Agence France-Presse

DUBAI

Iran's Revolutionary Guards said on Wednesday that a ship caught fire and sank in the Strait of Hormuz because of a mine, while British security firm Vanguard also reported a sinking.

"A container ship attempting to cross the Strait of Hormuz using an unauthorised and dangerous shipping lane struck a mine that exploded," said the navy of the Revolutionary Guards, the ideological arm of Iran's military.

Images released by the Guards show a plume of black smoke rising from a ship, while dozens of con-

tainers that have fallen into the sea float on the water. The Guards said the ship was carrying more than 2,500 containers.

According to Vanguard, the *GFS Pride*, a Singapore-flagged container ship, was struck by a projectile on Tuesday and sank. It was not clear if the two statements referred to the same ship. Vanguard reported three other ships struck on Tuesday, with two of them continuing on their way and the fate of the third unknown.

The United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations Centre reported on Wednesday that two container ships were struck on Tuesday by projectiles.