

Centre committed to meeting demands of Ladakh: official

Chief Secretary calls for dialogue and discussion on a Union Home Ministry proposal rejected by Ladakh groups on Friday; he expresses surprise over the rejection of proposal 'in just two hours'

Peerzada Ashiq
SRINAGAR

Calling for dialogue and discussion over a recent proposal by the Union Home Ministry, Ladakh Chief Secretary Ashish Kundra on Saturday said the Union government was committed to the process of shaping the constitutional structure to provide a customised *sui generis* model to meet the demands of the region.

Mr. Kundra's assurances came a day after key civil society bodies, the Leh Apex Body (LAB) and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), rejected the Ministry's 32-page proposal, saying it was "a significant departure from the assurances and commitments made during previous meetings" by the Centre.

The Ministry's document proposed a "two-stage approach involving a constitutional amendment and a subsequent regulation under Article 240 of the Constitution, with provisions envisaged for a directly elected Union Territory-level body and safeguards concerning land, natural resources, culture, and other issues



Ladakh Chief Secretary Ashish Kundra said tangible progress was made on people's demands this year. SPECIAL ARRANGEMENT

raised by the representatives," said Mr. Kundra. He stressed that meaningful negotiations require mutual trust, an open mind and patience.

Commenting on the ongoing dialogue between the Centre and local groups, the Chief Secretary said, "Ladakh political movement is for deepening democracy. This year tangible gains were made progressively on demands of people like employment, land, religion, culture, environment, natural resources and how constitutional protection and safeguards could be put in place." He said the Centre was pushing a *sui generis*

model to meet the demands of the local people under special provision of "K" under Article 371. "Ladakh needs a creative solution and Article 371 has enough flexibility to provide constitutional protection," he said.

He expressed surprise over the document being dismissed outrightly "within just two hours of being received". "Officials had spent three to four weeks preparing the proposal in good faith", he added.

"The proposed constitutional provisions and the subsequent regulatory framework would require detailed examination and deliberation before being

finalised," he added. He said several institutional questions remained open for consideration and examination, including the nomenclature and composition of the proposed body, the method of election, representation of women and under-represented communities, nominated and ex-officio members, the authority responsible for conducting elections, delimitation of constituencies, electoral rolls, tenure, and the relationship of the proposed body with existing institutions such as the Ladakh Autonomous Hill Development Councils, Panchayats, and municipalities.

On the key demands of inclusion in the Sixth Schedule, Mr. Kundra explained that these demands can be met only in a specific context. "It has specific geographical and historical context," he said.

On the demand of Statehood with legislature, Mr. Kundra said, "Ladakh as a U.T. depends 100% on the Centre for funding to meet salaries and pension of the employees. Like J&K and Delhi, which have separate public accounts, it has to generate its own revenue to give salaries."

Congress terms Census enumerator posts for private persons an 'RSS employment scheme'

Vijaita Singh
NEW DELHI

A day after the Union government authorised the appointment of private schoolteachers and members of "institutions, societies and trusts" as Census enumerators, senior Congress leader Jairam Ramesh on Saturday alleged that the move appeared to be an employment scheme for Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) and BJP members.

Mr. Ramesh said in a post on X, "The Census Notification of October 16, 2026 has to be seen in light of the RSS training camp of July 10-12, 2026 and the Demographic Change Com-

mittee's call for inputs on October 14, 2026. It is clear this is a Rozgar Guarantee Yojana for thousands of RSS/BJP workers. This will most certainly further contaminate an already subverted Census. Another institution is being destroyed. Like SIR, the Census will also be dangerously doctored. There are no limits to the diabolical designs of the PM-HM duo."

A former Census official said that though the provision of "any person" being appointed as Census enumerators existed in the Census Rules, 1990, there was no precedent of private persons being engaged for the exercise, and a simi-



Jairam Ramesh

lar suggestion for the 1991 Census had not been accepted because of concerns over accountability, the official said.

The Population Enumeration (PE) phase, which will be conducted across India in February 2027, also coincides with annual school examinations and

board examinations.

Former Deputy Registrar-General of India K. Narayanan Unni told *The Hindu* that the government schoolteachers had not increased in proportion to the population.

"The move seems to have been triggered by the fact that not enough government schoolteachers, or even those from government-aided schools, are available for the exercise. Government schools have not grown in proportion to the population, and that is why the need to engage private teachers," he said.

Though the category of "any person" existed in the Census Rules, 1990, the Registrar General and Census

Commissioner of India on Friday broadened the category of people who could be engaged as enumerators. Until now, mostly government schoolteachers, revenue officials and other State government employees had been engaged to carry out the enumeration work, and there was no precedent of private people being engaged in the previous Census.

On Friday, the Punjab and Haryana High Court stayed two Haryana government communications seeking details of teachers for Census 2027, granting interim relief to private unaided schools against the deployment of their staff for the exercise.

Dipke granted bail, Delhi Police nod for Cong rally at Ramlila Maidan Nov 1

Sakshi Chand

New Delhi, October 17

COCKROACH JANTA Party founder Abhijeet Dipke and All India Students' Association (AISA) president Neha Bora were released Saturday, a day after they were among the over 100 detained by the Delhi Police during the 'Lehra Do Tiranga' march called by the CJP at Central Park in Connaught Place.

Meanwhile, the Delhi Police on Saturday said it has given a no-objection certificate (NOC) to the Congress for a rally at Ramlila Maidan on November 1. Last month, the Opposition INDIA bloc had announced a joint action plan to protest against Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Gyanesh Kumar and the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls, including a mega rally in the Capital on November 1.



CJP founder Abhijeet Dipke leaves Mandir Marg Police Station, Saturday. PRAVEEN KHANNA

“The Indian National Congress has planned a rally at Ramlila Maidan on November 1, 2026, and had approached the Delhi Police for the requisite NOC. The NOC for holding the rally at the designated protest site has been issued for the period from October 25 to November 3, 2026. The Delhi Police is in constant coordination

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Over 1.28 lakh Form 7s filed just before Karnataka SIR; 45,878 by third parties

Third-party applications comprise 35.6% of deletion requests made between the announcement of SIR and the freezing of rolls; in at least 28 Assembly constituencies, more than 1,000 Form 7 applications were filed before enumeration began

Rishita Khanna
Pon Vasanth B.A.
BENGALURU/CHENNAI

In the month just before the special intensive revision (SIR) of electoral rolls began across Karnataka, more than 1.28 lakh Form 7 applications seeking deletion of names from the rolls were filed, including 45,878 by third parties – people other than the electors concerned or election officials, *The Hindu* has found.

Of the 45,878 third-party applications, 2,254 were “bulk applications” filed by just 112 objectors, each of whom submitted at least 11 or more Form 7 applications.

Basamma from Sindhanur filed 96 applications, the highest during the pre-SIR period (84 against electors in the same polling booth). Hanamant Calavadi from Bagalkot filed 62 applications, all targeting a single polling station.

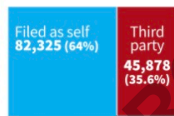
The third-party applications accounted for 35.6% of all deletion requests received between the announcement of the exercise on May 14 and the freezing of the rolls on June 16 (to establish a baseline for the revision). Of the 45,878 applications, 36,439 cited death as the

Deletions en masse right before SIR?

Karnataka officials processed at least 1,28,696 Form 7s for deletions right before the enumeration phase of SIR, between May 14 and June 16

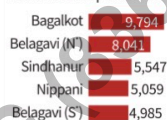


At least 2,254 were ‘bulk’ applications filed by just 112 objectors. 64% of the 1.29 lakh Form 7s were filed in the name of self and 36% by third parties



Official: 493 (0.4%)

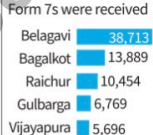
Five segments where most number of Form 7s were processed



*N-North | S-South

Source: Form 10s available on ECI's portal for statutory reports. Form 7s are consolidated and reported as Form 10s.

Five districts where most number of Form 7s were received



reason for seeking deletion, while 6,775 mentioned “absent or permanent shifted”.

In at least 28 Assembly constituencies, more than 1,000 Form 7 applications were filed before enumeration began. Of these, 20 are represented by the Congress. More than 28,441 of the total applications were concentrated in just four constituencies – Bagalkot, Belagavi North, Sindhanur and Nippani. Barring Nippani, the other three are represented by the Congress.

District-wise, Belagavi reported the highest number of applications, at 38,713, followed by Bagalkot with 13,889 and Raichur with 10,454.

All three are Congress-

The Hindu had reported that pre-filled Form 7s targeting Muslim voters were distributed in Belagavi North

dominated districts, with Raichur and Bagalkot also among the State's backward districts.

The Hindu recently reported on Belagavi North, where BJP workers distributed pre-filled Form 7 applications targeting Muslim electors to Booth Level Officers (BLOs) in at least six polling stations.

The 1.28 lakh-plus Form 7 applications were filed before BLOs began distributing enumeration forms

on June 30 as part of the SIR. This meant that deletion requests were made even before the electors' details could be verified through the enumeration process.

In the week before the rolls were frozen, between June 10 and June 16 alone, 20,671 Form 7 applications were submitted. On May 14, the day the SIR was announced in Karnataka, 3,624 applications were filed. However, it remains unclear why Form 7 applications were accepted before the SIR began, when the enumeration phase was intended to identify the same categories of electors for whom Form 7 can be used to seek deletion. Form 7 can be filed to seek deletion of a name on

grounds including death, permanent shifting, duplicate entries, underage enrolment or non-citizenship.

During the SIR, BLOs were to distribute enumeration forms to electors and identify those who were Absent, Shifted, Dead, Duplicate and Others (ASDDO) – the very categories on which Form 7 applications can seek deletions. At the draft-roll stage, 1.07 crore names had been excluded under these categories in the State.

Multiple Assistant Electoral Registration Officers (AEROs) confirmed to *The Hindu* that Form 7 applications had been accepted before enumeration began and processed after the mandated one-week period.

When asked why Form 7 applications were accepted before the SIR, Karnataka Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) V. Anbu Kumar said, “The pending forms were processed till June 16, 2026, and on the basis of records Form 7s were accepted.” He did not clarify whether the names targeted by these applications had been deleted from the existing rolls before enumeration began or whether the electors concerned had been served notices.

CRPF may bring back Naik ranks to boost morale

Press Trust of India
NEW DELHI

Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF), the country's largest paramilitary force, is mulling reintroducing the military ranks of Lance Naik and Naik, 30 years after they were abolished, to address delayed promotions and accommodate Agniveers retiring from the Army, officials said on Saturday.

The CRPF headquarters has asked hundreds of field formations of the force across the country to conduct stakeholder meetings or 'Sainik Sammelans' and obtain the views of the personnel in this context in two days, they told *PTI*.

The Lance Naik and Naik ranks were abolished in the force in 1997 and merged with the police ranks of constable and head constable through a Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) order.

The two ranks are still operational in the Army.

According to the hierarchy, a jawan who joins the force as a constable gains the first promotion of Lance Naik in five years, followed by the promotion to Naik in 10 years and subsequently head constable in 20 years.

The Lance Naik and Naik ranks were abolished in the force in 1997

Currently, the about 3.25 lakh personnel-strong CRPF is facing acute stagnation in promotions in these ranks, as a constable gets his first promotion in 22-25 years on average.

This stagnation in one rank has led to grievances among the jawans.

The officials said the aim of reintroducing the Lance Naik and Naik ranks is to provide two more promotions to the constabulary before they reach the head constable rank, which will not only help address their grievances but also boost their morale.

The move is also aimed at making the CRPF service attractive for the Agniveers from the Army, whose first batch will begin retiring later this year, and will be eligible to join the Central Armed Police Forces (CAPFs), including the CRPF, the officials said.

Agniveers are short-term military personnel recruited into the three forces for four years under the Centre's Agnipath scheme.

Children have fundamental right to access Internet: SC

Court says blanket bans are unproven measures of proven disproportionality; favours parental oversight, age-appropriate safeguards, dedicated 'child mode' and better efforts from stakeholders

Krishnadas Rajagopal

NEW DELHI

The Supreme Court has held that children, like any other individual, have a fundamental right to access and use the Internet.

"We have no hesitation in saying that the right to access and use the Internet is a fundamental right of every individual under Article 21 read with Article 19 (1)(a) of the Constitution.

Our children, irrespective of their age, enjoy the same rights, and to deny the same altogether would be absurd," a Bench of Justices J.B. Pardiwala and Vinod K. Chandran held in an order.

The court said denying children this right would be akin to saying that individuals below a certain age did not have a conscience worth protecting or freedom of speech worth expressing.

The safety of children and their freedom were not at odds with each other, it said. "Our children are entitled to both," the Bench observed.

Issuing a slew of directions for protective me-



The court said keeping children away from social media would not reduce incidents of online abuse reported in the media. FILE PHOTO

chanisms, restrictions drawn from other jurisdictions and grievance outlets, the court emphasised that intelligent restraints, rather than blanket bans, were the need of the day.

The court took a practical view that children did not cease to use the Internet merely because the law prohibited them from doing so. "They continue to use the same, albeit without the knowledge of their parents or the authorities. They move to other platforms and websites that are unregulated and even more unsafe," it said.

An atmosphere of hostility and stringent restrictions could stop children, enticed or threatened on-

line, from reporting such incidents to parents, guardians and trusted adults for fear of reprisal for using the Internet. "This would significantly undermine the safety of our children, who are already apprehensive about confiding such incidents, even without such restrictions, and defeat the object of the POC-So Act," the court said.

Even otherwise, it said keeping children away from social media platforms would, by no stretch of imagination, reduce incidents of online abuse reported in the media.

"All that we are trying to say is that any blanket restriction on access to the Internet by children is noth-

ing more than unproven measures of proven disproportionality. No jurisdiction has so far been able to demonstrate that children are any safer on account of such measures. Its efficacy is at best contested, and without question, not a substitute for the initiative and efforts required from all the stakeholders, be it the intermediaries, the law enforcement agencies, the Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology or the courts," the Bench observed.

The Bench, however, said that their observations were not against age-based restrictions on online access. "We acknowledge that some form of safeguards are necessary for the safety of our children online and the moderation of the content accessible at their fingertips," it said.

The court suggested a system that placed greater emphasis on parental consent, guidance and supervision of children's access to social media platforms, along with a dedicated "child mode" for such accounts, with measures proportionate to the objective of ensuring their safety.

India adapts fast as West Asia simmers

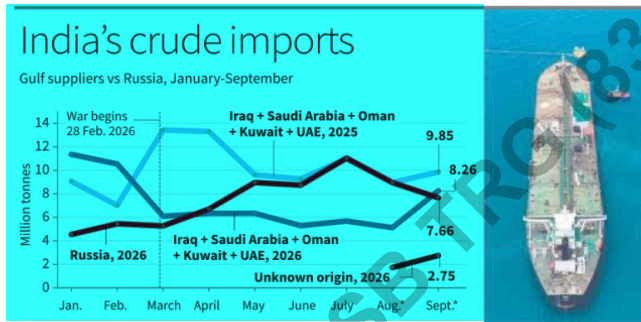
Kpler figures indicate in September Iraqi crude exports to India tripled over August; shipping industry sources said India was buying large parcels from many nations depending on availability; the same strategy would be deployed if Gulf crude disruptions occurred in October also

M. Kalyanaraman
CHENNAI

In September, the Consultative Shipping Group, a group of leading maritime nations, said conflicts such as over the Strait of Hormuz and Black Sea are "not episodic shocks; they are signals of a structural shift in the operating environment of global trade."

Shipping routes are increasingly instruments of leverage and risk."

September saw shipping attacks intensify across the Black Sea even as attacks on ships across the Strait of Hormuz continued but with less intensity. The UN general assembly saw major world figures gathering in New York. Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghi spent almost a week in New York, holding talks with the U.S. government



*August and September 2026 figures are Kpler ship-tracking data, converted at 7.33 barrels per tonne. All others data, including the 2025 figures for August and September: Ministry of Commerce and Industry trade statistics (TradeStat), HS27090010. Unknown origin is a Kpler category; it has no TradeStat equivalent

through intermediaries. The Iranian President addressed the general assembly and spoke to an American television channel. But there was no sign of an immediate truce.

September was the month Gulf oil exports rebounded. Since the war

started, Saudi Arabia had been sending nearly half of its typical crude oil exports via its western ports on the Red Sea by piping the oil across the country.

Despite the attack on that pipeline disrupting the flow in September, Saudi Arabia was able to quick

ly ship out from Ras Tanura on the Persian Gulf and eventually through ship-to-ship transfers off Oman. Overall, oil exports from Gulf countries plummeted when the war started and crawled up to some 60% in June-July, rebounded to 80%-100% of pre-war le-

vels in September.

Pivot to Gulf

As Russian imports dipped, India was able to pivot toward Gulf oil in September. Kpler figures, which are typically off eventual Ministry of Commerce figures by a few percentage points, indicated that in September Saudi crude export to India rose 50-60% over August.

Iraqi imports almost tripled while Kuwaiti and Omani imports to India ramped up, too. Gulf oil imports crossed Russian shipments to India for the first time since March.

"Gulf crude oil imports to India that was at 1.2 million barrels a day rose to 2.4 million barrels per day in September. Flows across the Strait of Hormuz, Red Sea via Bab el-Mandeb, Red Sea via Suez Canal, as well as the land bypass of

Strait of Hormuz to Fujairah helped almost catch up with pre-war levels," says Pankaj Srivastava, senior VP, Rystad Energy.

End of September saw ship attacks ramping up, turning the most intense since the war started. More than a dozen attacks have been reported already in October and two ships sunk. Mr. Srivastava is, however, confident that Gulf crude exports would be comparable to September via multiple channels.

Shipping industry sources said India was buying large cargoes from many nations as per availability. The same strategy would be followed if Gulf oil disruptions occurred in October. Government figures show occasional purchases of over 1 million tonne/month from countries such as Brazil, Angola, Nigeria, Venezuela and the U.S.

DECISION DAYS BEFORE ACT WAS TO TAKE EFFECT

Trump waives sanctions, tariffs linked to Russia, cites national interest

Law gave Trump power to slap 100% tariffs on countries buying Russian oil; India, China had raised concerns

Alan Rappeport

Washington, October 17

PRESIDENT DONALD Trump signed an executive order Friday night exempting Russia from a new sanctions measure that Congress passed last month, offering another economic lifeline to Russian President Vladimir Putin as the United States turns to Russia for help in lowering gas prices.

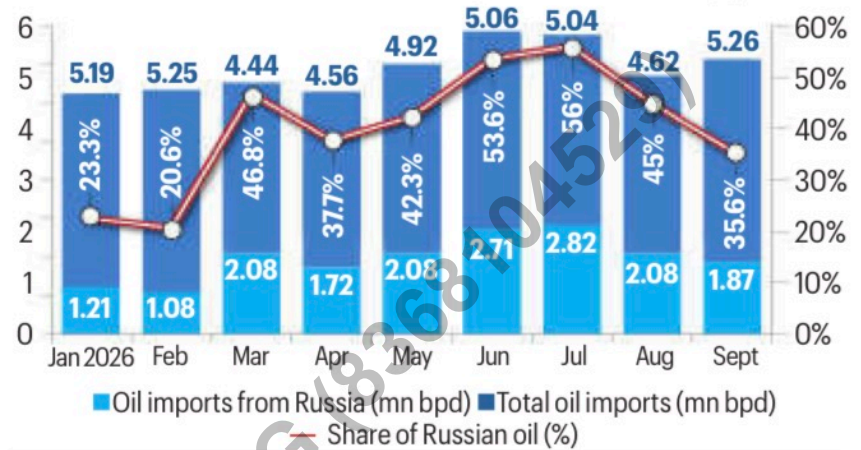
The sanctions were intended to target Russian officials, oligarchs and financial institutions, and were part of a law that was named after Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., who died in July after spending more than a year building support for the measure.

The law, which is designed to squeeze the financial lifelines sustaining Russia's war against Ukraine, also provided Trump with additional tariff authority that he could use to punish countries that continue to trade with Russia.

The White House has broad authority to issue sanctions

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

• Russia remains India's top crude oil supplier



Eases duty threat; penalising India hard to defend for US now

Ravi Dutta Mishra & Sukalp Sharma

New Delhi, October 17

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump's decision to pause the Russian sanction legislation assumes significance in New Delhi since India is the world's third-largest consumer of crude oil and depends on imports to meet over 88% of its crude oil needs, and Russia is its largest supplier.

In September, India imported 1.9 million barrels per day (bpd) of Russian crude and it accounted for over 35% of the country's total oil imports for

the month, according to tanker data from commodity market analytics firm Kpler. In the preceding months, import volumes from Russia were even higher, with an all-time-high of 2.8 million bpd in July.

Trump had earlier threatened to curb the US diesel exports, effectively strong-arming G7 countries into releasing 100 million barrels of their emergency petroleum product reserves and, in a shock move, Trump last week announced a diesel deal with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Trump

exemptions or waivers, and the new law requires Trump to notify Congress only if he opts against imposing the economic restrictions on Russia. Two days before the law was set to take effect, Trump exercised that power.

"I am hereby waiving the application of such sanctions, restrictions and duties provided for in the Graham Act," Trump said in the order. "I have submitted to the Congress a certification that the issuance of such a waiver at this time is in the national interests of the United States."

The order does not explain why waiving the sanctions is in the interests of the United States or what rationale Trump is providing to Congress for the waivers.

The decision comes as Trump has in recent weeks embraced Russia and turned against Ukraine amid frustration that Ukraine's attacks on Russian refineries are pushing up oil prices around the world. Elevated oil prices are making gasoline more expensive in the United States, fueling inflation weeks ahead of midterm elections that could cost Republicans control of Congress.

Trump announced last week that he had reached a deal with Putin, and that the United States would begin importing Russian diesel fuel. The Treasury Depart-

ment temporarily lifted sanctions on Russian diesel exports "to allow the supply of Russian diesel to the global market," and gave Russian energy producers a general license to sell diesel fuel until April.

That decision angered President Volodymyr Zelenskyy of Ukraine, and drew backlash from European officials. This week, a bipartisan group of senators urged Trump to reverse the sanctions waiver on diesel fuel.

The move to waive the sanctions that were enacted in the new law drew a swift rebuke from critics in Congress, who had predicted that Trump would not impose them.

"Trump's latest surrender to Putin again betrays our Ukrainian partners and defies clear congressional intent of legislation designed to punish Russia for its illegal war of aggression," said Rep. Don Beyer, D-Va.

Sen. Elizabeth Warren, D-Mass., the ranking member on the Banking Committee, called Trump's move an "abject failure" of leadership. "By waiving these sanctions, Trump is thumbing his nose at Congress' direction that he ratchet up pressure on the Kremlin, and enabling Vladimir Putin to continue his war of aggression," Warren said.

The sanctions law was the brainchild of Graham, a Russia hawk and close ally of Trump's. The legislation, which was set to take effect on October 18, won bipartisan support despite concern that the President would not heed the sanctions require-

ments, and that he would potentially misuse the tariff authority.

The law gave Trump the power to target countries importing Russian oil and gas with up to 100% tariffs, subject all Russian imports to the United States to up to 500% tariffs, and take greater aim at Russia's "shadow fleet" of oil tankers and banking system.

(Reuters adds: Countries such as China and India, which are among the biggest buyers of Russian oil, had raised concerns. Beijing had said it "consistently opposed long-arm jurisdiction that lacks a basis in international law" while India warned Washington that new tariffs could impact bilateral ties.)

In the executive order, Trump said that the United States would "monitor" the purchases of Russian oil by other countries and that his advisers would recommend whether to take further action on tariffs.

It is not clear if waiving some of the sanctions means that Russia will be welcomed back into the Western financial system after years of being an outcast.

"The underlying sanctions architecture remains in place, and no one wants to be caught holding the risk when the waiver is pulled," said Daniel Tannebaum, a partner at Oliver Wyman, a consulting firm that advises banks on anti-money laundering and sanctions matters. "I'm not sure what positive impact to the American economy will be derived in reality."

NYT

Militarisation persists in Sri Lanka's Tamil areas, says rights commission

Meera Srinivasan

COLOMBO

Militarisation of Sri Lanka's Tamil-majority north and east persists 17 years after the civil war, despite many state assurances to reduce the military footprint in the former conflict zone, the Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka has said. In a recent report titled

'The Human Rights Situation of the Northern and Eastern Provinces of Sri Lanka', the Commission pointed to a "sustained pattern of land appropriation, denial of access to traditional livelihoods, and intimidation of local populations" by the military in the districts across the region.

"Seventeen years after the end of the armed conflict, militarisation remains a persistent feature of governance and land use in the Northern and Eastern Provinces," the report said, pointing to "repeated assurances" by the state to reduce its military footprint and return occupied lands to their rightful owners.

The Commission urged the government to expedite the return of military-occupied lands to the people and ensure full restoration of property rights and livelihoods. Further, it emphasised that the government refrain from invoking national security "as a blanket justification for land acquisition", particularly where such actions disproportionately affect minority communities or facilitate religious encroachment, and "take concrete steps" to withdraw military involvement from civilian economic sectors, especially agriculture and education.



The Human Rights Commission urged the government to expedite the return of military-occupied lands to the people. REUTERS

Militarisation is one of the prominent post-war concerns highlighted in the Commission's report, which looks at wide-ranging issues such as enforced disappearances, mass graves, memorialisation, state surveillance and intimidation, land contestations, resettlement of northern Muslims expelled by the LTTE in 1990, freedom of religion, development projects, and livelihoods.

Residents of the north and east have consistently cited military presence and engagement as an impediment to post-war reconciliation and economic revival. Families have been demanding the return of lands, where their homes once stood, or they once farmed.

Election promise

Return of people's lands was among the chief promises made by President Anura Kumara Disanayake to the Tamil people, ahead of the November 2024 general elections. His National People's Power emerged winner in all but one of the five electoral districts in the north and east. In August this year, Mr. Disanayake, who is also the Minister of Defence,

instructed the security forces to expedite the release and return of land taken over during the war and no longer required for security purposes. However, despite his directives to the military, Tamil-speaking people living in the north and east are concerned about the slow pace of action.

When contacted, Ministry spokesman Brig. Franklin Joseph claimed "over 90%" of the lands held previously by the military have been returned to the people. "There are many cases where the owners are not known or there is no proof confirming their ownership. Those are being looked into."

However, Thurairasa Ravikaran, MP from the opposition Ilankai Tamil Arasu Kadchi (ITAK) representing the northern Mullaitivu district, contended that it was unfair to expect families who fled the district at the height of the war to produce documents. "Our people ran for their lives... in that sort of life and death situation, you cannot expect them to carry all their documents in files," he told *The Hindu*.

"I can tell you that huge swathes of people's land remain under military con-

trol even today. Not just the military, but also other state agencies like the Archeology and Wildlife departments have been resorting to blatant land grabs. That is our reality," he said, highlighting an enduring struggle for people of Mullaitivu, the district that witnessed the final battle between the armed forces and the LTTE. It was also where the army is accused of killing tens and thousands of civilians, including in areas declared no fire zones. The military and successive governments in Colombo have denied the allegations.

"When I say military, it is the army, navy, air force, civil defence force, all of them who control land," added the legislator.

The report pointed to military involvement in economic activities, such as agriculture and pre-school teaching, predominantly executed through the Civil Security Department. Military officials are "directly involved in the administration of teachers in pre-schools," it noted. In Mullaitivu district, it is not uncommon to see armed military men in uniform, running shops or manning traffic at junctions.

Observing that Sri Lanka "currently lacks a comprehensive national security sector reform plan" that includes strategies to reduce military presence in the North and East and restore civilian administration in the region, the Commission noted that "continued presence of the military in multiple aspects of civilian life singles this region out from the rest of the country and inhibits progress on post-war reconciliation".

Trump waives sanction over Russian oil; India gets relief

The waiver assures Indian refiners of greater flexibility to continue purchasing oil from Moscow; the move comes just ahead of U.S. Secretary of State Rubio's visit to India during Oct. 20 to 22

Saptaparno Ghosh
Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

U.S. President Donald Trump on Saturday waived key provisions of a new law that authorised punitive tariffs on countries purchasing Russian oil, offering relief to India.

The 'Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026' (SRIA Act), ratified on September 18, authorised increasing tariffs on countries continuing to buy Russian oil by as much as 100% as Washington sought to tighten Moscow's oil revenues.

The waiver announced on Saturday assures Indian



Radical shift: Donald Trump arrives to speak at a campaign rally in Highland Heights in Kentucky, U.S., on Saturday. AP

refiners of greater flexibility to continue purchasing oil from Moscow, with supplies from West Asia affected because of the resurgence of conflict.

The decision by Mr.

Trump that comes just ahead of the October 18 deadline set by the Congress for a determination on sanctions is also expected to ease the discussions during U.S. Secretary of

State Marco Rubio's visit to Mumbai and Jamnagar from October 20 to 22, when he will meet External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar.

Days after the legislation was signed into law, Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman had also said that India could not stop buying Russian oil, as doing so could raise global oil prices and alternative sources were limited amid the conflict in the Gulf.

The availability of Russian oil – now without any threat of sanctions – could ease the supply situation in the global oil market, which has been facing a crunch because of the renewed West Asia conflict.

Oil tankers on fire after hitting mines in Hormuz: Iran Guards

Agence France-Presse
TEHRAN

Iran's Revolutionary Guards on Saturday said two oil tankers were on fire in the Strait of Hormuz after hitting mines in the waterway at the heart of the West Asia war.

"A supertanker in violation of regulations, carrying more than two million barrels of crude oil and attempting to pass illegally through the Strait of Hormuz, struck a mine, triggering an explosion and a fierce fire," the Revolutionary Guards said.

Iran's Revolutionary Guards say each tanker carries more than two million barrels of crude oil

The statement did not specify the exact location of the incident.

Later on Saturday, the Guards said "a second off-fending supertanker was engulfed in a massive blaze after hitting a naval mine," adding it also carried "more than two million barrels of crude oil" and was attempting to pass the

Strait. The origins of the load and the tanker's flag were not immediately disclosed.

"The tanker attempted to cross the strait with U.S. support... by deactivating all its tracking systems," the Guards added.

On Thursday and Friday, Iran's Army said two tankers had caught fire in what Tehran calls its "prohibited zone" in the Gulf of Oman.

Also on Friday, maritime monitoring agencies reported that two tankers had been struck in Gulf waters of Saudi Arabia's coast.

Trump could lift more sanctions, says Zelenskyy

Agence France-Presse
KYIV

Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on Saturday that he feared the United States would lift more sanctions on Russia and that President Donald Trump's action only "rewards" Kremlin leader Vladimir Putin.

Mr. Zelenskyy added that he still "personally" hoped that Mr. Trump will do "everything in his power" to make Mr. Putin end the war.

IMF members urge more support amid war shocks, 'advanced intelligence' risks

David Lawder

Bangkok, October 17

INTERNATIONAL MONETARY Fund member countries called for increasing support to countries that are facing short-term financing challenges caused by negative spillovers from wars and high energy prices, and said economic risks remain tilted to the downside.

And while there has been a boost to investment and trade from "advanced intelligence technologies", they also carried risks, the chair of the International Monetary and Financial Committee said in a statement after a meeting in Bangkok.

"Escalating conflicts and trade tensions could further disrupt critical trade routes, exacerbate commodity price pressures, including in refined energy products, and worsen energy and food security," said the statement issued by Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan, the chair of the IMFC.

The IMFC is the main steering committee for the 191-member crisis lender.

Al-Jadaan told Reuters that the language of the statement

was agreed by all members.

Earlier this week, the United States was pressing fellow IMF members to rename artificial intelligence as "super intelligence" in the statement, in line with US President Donald Trump's preferred name for the technology, a senior US Treasury official told Reuters.

The final version of the chair's statement contained no reference to artificial intelligence.

It said the uncertain impact of "advanced intelligence technologies", along with rising bond yields in major economies that spill over to highly indebted economies, "could amplify macro-financial vulnerabilities."

"Rapid technological change, demographic shifts, more frequent extreme weather events and natural disasters, and geoeconomic fragmentation are compounding policy tradeoffs," the statement said.

The member economies agreed to support countries that undertake reforms and address debt vulnerabilities, with specific attention to low-income and vulnerable middle-income countries and conflict-affected states.

REUTERS

EGYPT

Sisi's presidency will end in 2030, constitution won't be amended



Egyptian President
Abdel Fattah al-Sisi

EGYPTIAN PRESIDENT Abdel Fattah al-Sisi said on Saturday that his presidential term would end in 2030 and that the question of his departure from office was settled, reaffirming that Egypt's constitution would not be amended. "I said that the Egyptian constitution would not be touched," he said.

"This is an entirely settled matter and will not be discussed," he added, referring to the end of his current term. Sisi, 71, is serving a six-year term after winning re-election in December 2023. Constitu-

tional amendments approved in a 2019 referendum extended presidential terms to six years from four and allowed Sisi to seek a third term, clearing the way for him to remain in office until 2030. REUTERS

How does the U.S.-Russia diesel deal impact India?

What does the U.S.'s diesel deal with Russia entail and what is President Trump's reasoning behind it? Why are some Republicans and Democrats unhappy with the deal? How does the deal impact India and its trade deal with the U.S.? Is there an 'energy ceasefire' between Russia and Ukraine?

T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan

The story so far:

Less than a month after signing into law an Act that would impose tariffs of up to 100% on countries importing large amounts of Russian oil and gas, U.S. President Donald Trump announced a deal with Russia on October 10, 2026, that would allow it to sell diesel to the U.S. and the global market. The next day, Mr. Trump also announced an 'energy ceasefire' between Russia and Ukraine. This has implications for India, its energy sector, and its trade.

What is the deal with Russia on diesel?

On October 10, Mr. Trump took to Truth Social to say he has concluded "a highly successful discussion" with Russian President Vladimir Putin in which they agreed that Russia would "immediately" supply over 3,00,000 tonnes of diesel to the U.S. and to the global market, another 5,00,000 tonnes in November, and 1 million tonnes "immediately thereafter".

Further, based on the condition of Russia's diesel refineries, he said the country would deliver another 3 million tonnes of diesel "within a short period of time" following this schedule.

Mr. Trump's reasoning for this move was that it would bring down fuel prices for the U.S. and the world. In fact, in response to criticism on the deal, he again took to Truth Social to say that he

The latest U.S. deal with Russia on diesel is expected to further complicate matters since the U.S. is indulging in the very actions it is looking to penalise India for.

had "made the right choice for the American People – ALWAYS, AMERICA FIRST!".

What are the complications with the deal?

On September 18, Mr. Trump signed into law the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act of 2026. This Act received remarkable bipartisan support from Democrats and Republicans in both the Senate and the House of Representatives. It aims to clamp down on Russia's funding for its war in Ukraine through sanctions on its leadership and companies, and tariffs on its major fuel trade partners.

Now, leaders on both sides of the political spectrum are saying that the President's latest diesel agreement with Russia undermines the very foundation of the law. "Through the Lindsey O. Graham Sanctioning Russia and Iran Act, we gave the president significant authorities [sic] and leverage against China and Russia to bring Putin's war to an end with a negotiated settlement," House of Representatives member and Republican Michael McCaul of Texas said in an X post. "Unfortunately, while I understand the desire to bring down diesel prices, I am concerned the lifting of sanctions on Russian oil will only fund the Kremlin's war machine – emboldening more violence and destruction, as we have seen in recent days."

A further complication is that the Act threatens tariffs of up to 100% on the largest importers of Russian oil and gas. China and India are by far the biggest importers of Russian energy. However, Mr. Trump on Saturday announced that he has waived the tariffs associated with the Russia Sanctions Act. The waiver is not permanent, meaning these tariffs could be imposed in the future.

What are the implications for India?

India has been trying to conclude a trade deal with the U.S. since February 2025. However, each time progress is made, the U.S. makes a change to its tariff or trade policies that scuppers discussions. This time will be no different.

While talks were gathering steam in June last year over a 'mini deal' on tariffs, the escalation of U.S. tariffs on India to 50% in August 2025 stalled those talks. The reason for that escalation was India's imports of Russian oil.

Talks resumed in October 2025. By February 2026, the leaders of the two countries issued a joint statement saying they had agreed to a

framework for an interim agreement on trade. The deadline for this deal was unofficially set as March-April 2026.

However, in March, the U.S. launched investigations into India and several other countries to determine whether they had done enough to prevent imports of goods made using forced labour and whether they were using structural excess capacity to harm the U.S. economy. While the forced labour investigation resulted in 10% tariffs on India in July, the investigation into excess capacity is yet to be completed. Once again, the deal talks slowed down, a situation exacerbated by the passage of the Russia Sanctions Act in September.

The latest U.S. deal with Russia on diesel is expected to further complicate matters since the U.S. is indulging in the very actions it is looking to penalise India for. While historical data show that India has largely toed the line on Western sanctions and prohibitive tariffs imposed on Russia, the situation this time could be different. Even if the U.S. rescinds its tariff waiver in the near future, fuel supply constraints arising from the conflict in West Asia could mean that India is unwilling to turn away from Russian oil.

What are the implications of the 'energy ceasefire'?

Mr. Trump did not reveal any details about the ceasefire, its timeline, duration, or extent. In fact, in response to his announcement, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said that the ceasefire was "news for me", implying he was not aware of the discussions. However, he later said that he was willing to cooperate.

Ukraine has been attacking Russian refineries to the extent that Russia has been forced to import refined fuel from its partners despite itself having vast amounts of crude oil.

Russia imported a record 1,72,000 tonnes of oil products in August, according to a report by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air. The report added that India accounted for 70% of these imports by Russia.

Should an energy ceasefire come into effect, and depending on its duration, Russia will likely be able to repair its refineries and begin its own supplies of fuel. This would mean it would no longer require fuel from India.

However, that ceasefire may remain just a statement. Days after the announcement, Mr. Zelenskyy took to social media to say that "last night, we did not attack any energy facilities on the territory of Russia... while Russia attacked our gas stations, energy infrastructure, and other facilities". He added: "The message from Russia was very clear – they don't know anything about the energy ceasefire."



U.S. President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin during a press conference in Anchorage, Alaska, U.S., in August 2025. REUTERS