World needs peace and predictability, says Modi

Quad leaders issue joint statement opposing economic, maritime 'coercion' in Indo-Pacific; Modi proposes seafarers' safety initiative at East Asia Summit, and attends meeting with ASEAN leaders

Suhasini Haidar
NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday called for "peace, stability, and predictability" in the world as he attended three back-to-back summits, including the Quad Leaders' Summit, in Manila, the Philippines. He made a number of proposals aimed at maritime security, protecting critical minerals supply chains, and enhancing trade.

The Quad meet, which was being held for the first time in a non-member country, was hosted by U.S. President Donald Trump and was attended by Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese and Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi, apart from Mr. Modi. The leaders issued a joint statement opposing economic and maritime "coercion" in the Indo-Pacific, and Mr. Modi announced that India would host the first Quad Business Forum in Mumbai in 2027.



Strategic group: Prime Minister Narendra Modi with leaders of other Quad nations in Manila, the Philippines, on Tuesday. REUTERS

The events started with Mr. Modi's meeting with the leaders of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) for the ASEAN-India Summit, where he said the world now needed peace, stability, and predictability more than ever. "Together, India and ASEAN represent nearly one-fourth of the world's population. That is why it is essential to ensure that our future is shaped not by competition, but by cooperation," Mr. Modi told ASEAN leaders. He also promised that India would give e-visas free of charge to ASEAN tourists. Myanmar's junta leader, President Min Aung Laing, was not invited, and the country was represented by an official.

Following this, Mr. Modi took part in the East Asia Summit, attended by the leaders of India, China, Russia, the U.S., Japan, South Korea, and the ASEAN countries, and proposed a seafarers' safety initiative. He said that "whether it is the conflict in Ukraine or West Asia, India will continue to support every effort towards peace".

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SHAURYA SSR (8368104529)

World needs peace and predictability, says Modi



Prime Minister Narendra Modi with ASEAN leaders at the 23rd India-ASEAN Summit in Manila on Tuesday. ANI

The East Asia Summit members also issued a joint declaration on tackling cybercrime, given the number of online fraud cases originating from Southeast Asian countries. India will host a summit on the issue at the National Forensic Sciences University in Gandhinagar and an East Asia Summit University Heads Conclave at Nalanda. The ASEAN engagements were important as Mr. Modi had skipped the summits in Malaysia last year.

Quad leaders meet

Shortly before he left Manila, the Prime Minister met the leaders of the U.S., Australia, and Japan for the Quad Summit, which was last held in 2024. This was the first time that all the Quad leaders have met since the U.S.-Israel attacks on Iran and the blockade in the Strait of Hormuz began more than nine months ago - in a war where at least 23 Indians, mainly seafarers, have been killed.

In remarks pointed toward China, the Quad countries opposed "destabilizing or unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo, including by force or coercion, which escalate tensions and undermine regional peace and stability", as well as "economic coercion, including through arbitrary export restrictions". China has recently put new restrictions on the export of critical minerals and heavy equipment like tunnel boring machines that affect Indian development activity.

The Quad leaders also announced the launch of the Quad Business Forum, which will be held in Mumbai, to bring industry leaders from the U.S., India, Australia, and Japan together.

Impromptu interaction

Just before the Quad Summit, Mr. Trump unexpectedly spoke to the media and answered several questions, even as Mr. Modi, Mr. Albanese, and Ms. Takaichi stood silently next to him.

The U.S. President said he expected to have a "very good meeting" with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping on his next stop in Shenzhen for the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit, scheduled for Thursday. He said he would push for Mr. Xi and Mr. Putin to also "get involved" to end the Russia-Ukraine and Iran conflicts.

The first three-way summit of global powers, dubbed the "G-3", will be closely watched, with Trump, Xi, and Putin expected to discuss nuclear arms control, artificial intelligence governance, and ending conflicts.

SHAURYA SSB TRG (8368104529)

LEADERS MEET IN MANILA, FIRST TIME IN TWO YEARS

Quad unveils security, business, AI plans; Trump offers open line

Modi a very tough man: US President; PM says Mumbai to host grouping's first business forum next year

Shubhajit Roy
New Delhi, November 17

SIGNALLING THE close ties between Quad member countries ahead of his trilateral meeting Thursday with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin, US President Donald Trump said Tuesday his "phone is always open, and the Oval Office is always open" to the leaders of India, Japan and Australia.

Meeting in Manila on the sidelines of the East Asia Summit, President Trump, Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced a slew of initiatives: the inaugural Quad Business Leaders' Forum in Mumbai in early 2027, the Indo-Pacific maritime surveillance collaboration in 2027 in which patrol aircraft will fly in a maritime exercise for the first time in the Quad context, a new Quad AI accelerator, enhanced Quad Cybersecurity Cooperation,

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



PM Narendra Modi with US President Donald Trump, Japan PM Sanae Takaichi and Australian PM Anthony Albanese in Manila, Tuesday. PTI

EXPLAINED

Message to Beijing

The Quad summit, ahead of Trump's trilateral meeting with Xi and Putin, presents a united front, countering China's assertions in the Indo-Pacific. Plans for joint maritime patrols, securing critical mineral supply chains and building AI ecosystems signal the grouping's intent to contain China's territorial ambitions and trade leverage in the region.

East Asia meet: Modi announces safety initiative for seafarers, flags cyber fraud

Shubhajit Roy
New Delhi, November 17

UNDERLINING THE need to ensure maritime security and freedom of navigation, Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Tuesday announced the launch of a "seafarers' safety initiative" among East Asia Summit (EAS) members to "enhance cooperation in joint training and emergency response".

Addressing the 21st meeting of the ASEAN-led EAS in Manila, Modi said: "Our seas are the lifelines of our shared prosperity. Ensuring their security and freedom of navigation is the responsibility of us all. In this direction, we are launching a seafarers' safety initiative, under which we will enhance cooperation in joint training and emergency response."

While the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) is a regional grouping comprising 11 countries — Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Brunei, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar, Cambodia and Timor-Leste —

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

NATION PAGE 7

TANKER ATTACKED IN HORMUZ, INDIAN SAILOR MISSING

SHREYA SSB IRO (1830104521)

Quad unveils security, AI plans

strengthening of counterterrorism cooperation and condemnation of cross-border terrorism.

Responding to questions at the first meeting of the Quad leaders since 2024, Trump said, "We have a great relationship with these people and these countries... They are phenomenal people and they are friends of mine."

"By the way, Modi is a very tough man, just in case. And Sanae Takaichi may be even tougher. Albanese and me are okay," he said.

Recalling that Quad was first started in 2007 and again revived in 2017 in Manila, Modi said, "The Quad is a constructive and trusted partnership, from maritime security to trusted supply chains, new technologies to disaster response. It has been our endeavour that the Quad provides trusted solutions for the entire Indo-Pacific, I express my heartfelt appreciation to all my fellow leaders for their leadership, their continued support, and their personal contribution to advance the Quad."

Trump said, "The Quad Leaders Summit is something that has become very important and very special, and it's an honour to be involved. When I first came into office in 2017, I brought back the Quad between the United States, Australia, India and Japan, which we announced on the sidelines of the ASEAN meeting right here in Manila that same year... Our cooperation has only grown, and our friendship has grown much deeper. We are all friends. It's a lot easier that way."

"These nations represent some of the most important partnerships in the entire world. They are the most successful among the most successful nations in the world, and in certain ways among the most powerful nations in the world. Our countries are the four corners of a free, open, stable and prosperous Indo-Pacific. We have outstanding relationships and coordinate closely on matters of regional security, economic security, and diplomacy. And we talk quite often. The three countries that we deal with, we talk a lot when they have a problem, when they have difficulty, when they want to tell me something. My phone is always open, and the Oval Office is always open to you, and you know that," he said, alluding to China's assertion in the Indo-Pacific region.

Making a pitch for enhanced defence cooperation in the Quad context, Trump said, "Together, we also have strong relationships with many friends and partners here in Southeast Asia. Some great people, we know them all. As part of a cooperation, the navies of the Quad nations recently conducted the 30th annual Malabar Joint Naval Exercises near Japan, where our sailors completed anti-submarine and anti-surface warfare drills. Today, anti-submarine is very important, and we have been doing anti-surface warfare for a long time... We make the greatest submarines anywhere in the world, and we are working with Australia and others on that. But our submarines are very advanced. Today we are also announcing that the Quad will conduct an exercise featuring our maritime patrol aircraft as we continue to protect peace through strength."

On Artificial intelligence, he said, "We are also working together to advance superintelligence (SI), the greatest opportunity for economic growth since the Industrial Revolution, and we want to be careful with it... The Quad nations have partnered to launch a new Quad SI accelerator, and we are also spending more than 85 million dollars to expand access to trusted SI ecosystems across the Indo-Pacific, and it's working out amazingly well."

"The nations gathered in this room are very advanced on SI and on just about everything else. This is not a situation where they need lots of help, but they do need certain guidance, and we guide each other together. We want to ensure that the future of this critical technology is dominated by nations that share our values and our common interests."

On the Quad business forum, Trump said, "We will convene the first ever Quad Business Leaders Forum to bring our economic cooperation to entirely new heights." On critical minerals, he said, "We have also made several important, new critical mineral deals to secure our supply chains and ensure that none of our nations is vulnerable to coercion by any single foreign supplier. These will make our countries much stronger and, at the same time, guarantee safety... And we are working very closely on minerals, rare earths, and everything else, and we have a lot of things happening over the next 12 months that will very much surprise people. We were talking inside, and the things that we are doing are very unprecedented. We were very late, all of us as countries, and now we are very early. We are moving at a pace that nobody believes possible."

Calling Modi a "great friend of mine", he said, "He's a great leader, great leader, highly respected by everybody all over the world. I respect, by the way, all three of these leaders. These are highly respected people."

Japan's Takaichi said, "The Quad will shape the future of the Indo-Pacific together with our regional partners. We would like to realise a free and open Indo-Pacific by strengthening the resilience of countries in the region and promoting their freedom to decide for themselves across a wide range of areas, including maritime security, economic security, energy, and critical and emerging technologies. We will deliver results through cooperation that benefits the region."

Australia's Albanese said, Pacific of peace, security, stability and prosperity, then the world will be a safer and more secure place, and the Quad has a critical role in achieving that."

Randhir Jaiswal, spokesperson for the Ministry of External Affairs, said Modi reaffirmed "India's commitment to a constructive and reliable Quad partnership, advancing peace, prosperity and resilience in the Indo-Pacific through cooperation in maritime security, economic security, critical technologies and disaster response".

"PM announced that Mumbai will host the inaugural Quad Business Leaders Forum in 2027," Jaiswal said.

A joint statement by the Quad leaders said, "Together, we have shown that the Quad is a force for good and a partnership of action, committed to peace, stability, and prosperity. We strongly oppose any destabilising or unilateral actions that seek to change the status quo, including by force or coercion, which escalate tensions and undermine regional peace and stability. We express grave concerns about economic coercion, including through arbitrary export restrictions. We are securing critical supply chains, protecting freedom of navigation and overflight, driving growth through technologies of the future including investments and deployment of trusted Artificial Intelligence (AI), and responding to disasters with life-saving assistance. We commit to work together to ensure open, safe, and resilient maritime transit corridors in the Indo-Pacific."

Scheduled to be held in early 2027, the statement said it will be "bringing together business leaders, government officials, and policy experts from Quad countries to foster greater business ties across our private sectors, including the promotion of commercial deals and partnerships critical to the prosperity of the Indo-Pacific".

Affirming the importance of the AI Accelerator, it said the accelerator is intended to "coordinate and fund efforts to support trusted AI access, deployment, and technical assistance across the Indo-Pacific."

"We are proud to welcome the Indo-Pacific Maritime Surveillance Collaboration, a new initiative to enhance information sharing and maritime domain awareness. In 2027, our respective P-8 and P-3C patrol aircraft are scheduled to fly in a maritime exercise for the first time in a Quad context, making our seas safer," the statement said.

"We acknowledge the rapid increase in the number and scale of cyber incidents in the region and announce enhanced Quad Cybersecurity Cooperation, through which we plan to work together to achieve an open and secure cyberspace," it said.

The joint statement said, "We unequivocally condemn terrorism and violent extremism in all its forms and manifestations, including cross-border terrorism, and commit to strengthening the Quad's ongoing cooperation on counterterrorism." This is important from Delhi's perspective given Pakistan's active promotion of cross-border terrorism.

SHARE ARCHIVE 2026

REVAMPED AGNIPATH SCHEME

On talks table: Multi-skilling, tech proficiency for 6-year Agniveers

Presently under deliberation: HQ IDS on eligibility criteria for absorption of 75% Agniveers offered 2-year extension



Over 2,700 Agniveers, including 142 women, completed their training at INS Chilka in Odisha last week. PTI

SHAURYA 99B TRG (8368104529)

Amrita Nayak Dutta
New Delhi, November 17

WITH THE Union Cabinet clearing a path for all Agniveers undergoing training in the three services to join the Armed Forces as regular soldiers, the spotlight is now on the 75 per cent who will be offered a two-year extension at the end of a four-year tenure under the revamped Agnipath scheme.

The Indian Express has learnt that a fairly stringent selection criteria is being discussed for those willing to join the services after serving this extension period.

Agniveers who are multi-skilled and proficient in technology and weapons will be given preference, given the new technologies and weapon systems being inducted into the Armed Forces.

According to people aware of the discussions, the objective selection criteria being considered at the end of six years include not selecting Low Medical Category (LMC) candidates and those with cases of

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Multi-skilling for 6-yr Agniveers

indiscipline, including alcohol dependency.

Responding to queries from *The Indian Express* on the selection criteria, the apex level tri-service organisation HQ IDS said these are "presently under deliberation".

The revamped Agnipath scheme will have two stages. In the first stage, 25 per cent of Agniveers will be selected on merit for absorption into the services after completing their four-year tenure, as part of the original scheme.

The remaining 75 per cent, who would have otherwise exited the services with a contributory scheme package, will now be offered an additional two-year engagement. Thereafter, they will have the opportunity to join the Armed Forces as regular soldiers, provided they are willing and meet the military's objective selection criteria.

An official said the selection criteria are being considered after actively monitoring both regular troops and Agniveers over the years. "There have been a substantial number of cases of LMC reported among regular troops in recent years, primarily due to lifestyle diseases," the official said.

The eligibility criteria under discussion include the yardstick that Agniveers who seek a two-year extension in the hope to become regular soldiers must be graded excellent in the Combined Physical Tests and should have a minimum first-class shot in firing — the standards of firing are classified, in order, as marksman, first-shot and standard shot.

The LMC too has three categories: battle casualty, injuries or disabilities attributable or aggravated by military service, neither attributable nor aggravated by military service.

While the selection criteria are still evolving, there is increased discussion on not retaining any LMC candidate after six years. There could still be some dispensation for those who are battle casualties or LMC attributable to military service. But these are at a preliminary stage.

When it comes to disciplinary cases, there are two types of punishment: red ink entries and black ink entries, depending on the offence and circumstances. There are discussions on whether an Agniveer on extension should be retained even in the event of a single minor disciplinary infringement.

In addition, an Agniveer cadre towards the end of two years at unit levels, which will comprise a written exam and physical and firing tests, is also being considered, along with the other points, to prepare the final merit list.

Under the revamped scheme, a new certificate will be issued to Agniveers, carrying four options: induction into the regular cadre; those willing to get inducted into the regular cadre but, if not selected among 25 per cent, then willing for extension; willing specifically for extension; and unwilling to continue for further service.

HARYA SOFTECH (8210452971

Bilkis Bano to fight SC order for bail to gang-rape convicts

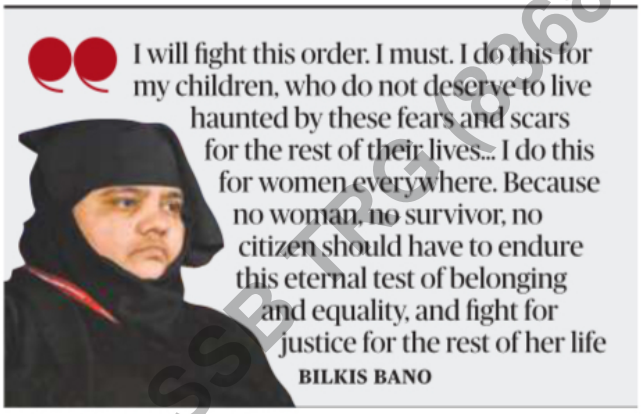
She expresses pain, disbelief over decision to give bail to two men convicted of gang rape, murder; says she was neither informed nor heard by the court before the order was passed on October 28

The Hindu Bureau
NEW DELHI

Bilkis Bano, who survived gang rape and the murder of her family during the 2002 Gujarat riots, has issued a statement conveying her "pain, shock and disbelief" at the Supreme Court's decision to grant bail and suspend the life imprisonment of two men convicted of the crimes that changed her life forever.

Ms. Bano, through her counsel, senior advocate Shobha Gupta, stated she was neither informed nor heard before the order was passed on October 28.

"I still cannot believe that once again, for the second time, an order has been passed by the Supreme Court without calling me up and without hearing me. I learnt of this through press reports," her statement read.



Suspended life sentences

A Bench of Justices M.M. Sundresh and Prasanna B. Varale had suspended the life sentences of Bipinchand Kanaiyalal Joshi and Pradip Ramanlal Modhiya, who were two of the 11 men convicted of gang-raping the then 19-year-old Ms. Bano and murdering 14 members of her family, including her infant daughter, in 2002.

The short order, published recently on the court website, had reasoned that the two men had already undergone more than 17 years in prison and one of them suffered a severe handicap.

"How could the Honourable Supreme Court simply suspend the sentence of the men who did this to me? How could they not even inform me? How could they not even make sure my voice was heard in their courtroom?" Ms. Bano asked.

In her statement on Tuesday, Ms. Bano said she had "rebuilt from the rubble of my life... learned to smile", but the October 28 order has made her scared, once again.

Ms. Bano stated she would fight the order. "I must. I do this for my children, who do not deserve to live haunted by these fears and scars for the rest of their lives... I do this for women everywhere. Because no woman, no survivor, no citizen should have to endure this eternal test of belonging and equality, and fight for justice for the rest of her life," she said.

SAURYA SSB TPG (8968104523)

INS Sahyadri participates in naval exercise JAIMEX 2026

INS Sahyadri participated in the bilateral maritime exercise JAIMEX 2026 with the Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) on November 13 and 14, strengthening operational cooperation and interoperability, while providing an opportunity to exchange professional experiences. According to the Indian Navy, during the exercise, *INS Sahyadri* operated alongside JMSDF ship *JS Ise*, undertaking a series of coordinated maritime engagements, including tactical manoeuvres, communication drills, and cross-deck landings. It reaffirmed the commitment of both navies to maintain peace, security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

SHAURYA SSB TRG (8809104529)



Rajnath Singh to visit Japan today for Ministerial dialogue

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh will visit Japan on November 18 and 19 to participate in the fourth edition of the India-Japan Foreign and Defence Ministers' Dialogue (2+2) and hold bilateral discussions with his Japanese counterpart, with a focus on strengthening defence cooperation, maritime security and defence industrial partnerships. The 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue, scheduled to be held in Tokyo, will be co-chaired by Mr. Singh and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar, along with Japan's Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi and Foreign Minister Toshimitsu Motegi. The meeting between Mr. Singh and Mr. Koizumi will be their third this year.

SHAURYA SEB RG (6381104529)

Gen Z is the torchbearer for global change: Prince William

At the 2026 Earthshot Prize ceremony, Britain's prince reflects on achievements of the finalists and the global movement behind environmental innovation; Bhutan, Mahindra Last Mile Mobility were among the five winners of this year's awards

Vinaya Deshpande Pandit
Yohaan Varghese
MUMBAI

Young people from around the world are not waiting for someone else to find the solution, they are the torchbearers of the global movement for change, Britain's Prince William said here on Tuesday.

He was speaking at the 2026 Earthshot Prize awards ceremony, which was held in India for the first time.

Winners of the Earthshot Prize were declared under five categories in a glittering ceremony. The awardees include the Himalayan Kingdom of Bhutan and Mahindra Last Mile Mobility.



Prince Williams and Princess Catherine with the winners of the 2026 Earthshot Prize in Mumbai on Tuesday. EMMANUAL YOGINI

'Shaping the future'

"They (Gen Z) are bringing fresh ideas and showing what is possible when optimism is matched with action. Their ideas, their energy, and their determination are helping to shape the future," he said.

"India is a nation of extraordinary innovation, ambition, facing immense environmental pressures, yet moving ahead with determination. Not because the challenge is simple, not because the path is easy. But because millions of people have decided that progress simply cannot wait," he said.

During his address, Prince William reflected on the achievements of this year's finalists and the growing global movement behind environmental innovation.

The ceremony was attended by environmental innovators, philanthropists, business leaders, government representatives and global figures from sport, entertainment and culture.

Mahindra Last Mile Mobility won the Earthshot Prize in the 'Clean Our Air' category. Accepting the award, the company's CEO, Suman Mishra, said it showed how urgent optimism worked. The company has won £1 million for its efforts, which have resulted in more electric three-wheelers plying on India's roads.

In the 'Revive Our Oceans' category, Niue Ocean Wide Trust was chosen for protecting the oceans, especially the vast Pacific region.

Coral Pasisi, vice chair and co-architect of Ocean Conservation Commitments, expressed gratitude for indigenous, people-led sustainability efforts being honoured.

"It is collective responsibility in action. We want to protect the oceans that protect us all," she said while accepting the award.

The Earthshot Prize to Protect and Restore Nature was awarded to Bhutan for the country's work in protecting the Himalayan forests, which help the water systems that sustain 1.6 billion people downstream across South Asia.

While accepting the award, Bhutan's Princess Chimi Yangzom Wangchuck said: "Long before environmentalism become a global priority, Bhutan made a national commitment. 60% of our land must remain under forest cover at all times. A duty enshrined in our Constitution. Deeply honoured to accept this prize."

The Earthshot Prize in the 'Build a Waste-free World' category was declared for PFAS - Free France. The initiative is a national, cross-party movement to ban toxic forever chemicals in consumer products and to make polluters pay for the clean-up.

"This victory belongs to all those who stood by us and said, 'We will not be poisoned in silence'. Thank you," said Nicolas Thierry, French politician and lead spokesperson of the firm, while accepting the award.

Orsed was declared the winner in the 'Fix Our Climate' category for transforming its business from coal-intensive utilities to renewable energy.

The ceremony was hosted by director Karan Johar. Among the celebrities who took to stage were British actress and musician Simone Ashley, actor and previous Earthshot Awards presenter Rami Malek, Indian cinema stars Alia Bhatt and Sonam Kapoor, and cricket legend Sachin Tendulkar.

CHAIRMAN SSB (8551025)

Include as example in Lect on CYBER SECURITY

Rs 41 crore gone in 96 transactions: Hackers from Hong Kong target NBFC

Mahender Singh Manral
New Delhi, November 17

One of the biggest such frauds recently reported in Delhi, according to officers.

A SOUTH Delhi-based non-banking financial company (NBFC) was targeted by cyber fraudsters, allegedly based in Hong Kong, who siphoned off Rs 41.27 crore through around 96 transactions after hacking into its system on Monday afternoon, police said. This is one of the biggest such frauds recently reported in the Capital.

The Delhi Police's Special Cell registered an FIR after receiving a complaint from the legal team of the firm based in Qutab Institutional Area, Katwaria Sarai, and began an investigation. The complainant told police they noticed suspicious and unauthorised payments to at least 96 accounts while examining the company's accounts on Monday evening. "After scanning all account transactions, it came to light that the fraud took place between 1:30 pm and 3 pm. The accused made transactions to at least 96 different accounts from the company's accounts," an officer said.

After registering the FIR, police began investigating and found that multiple IP addresses used in the fraud were traced to Hong Kong.

Over the past three months, cyber fraudsters based in China, Hong Kong and Pakistan have targeted NBFCs in Delhi-NCR, resulting in losses of over Rs 65 crore, *The Indian Express* reported on Monday. Police said the fraudsters exploited gaps in the companies' software, and that at least one NBFC account was breached using an AI-powered hacking tool.

"After examining all the NBFC cases, we found that these small companies had not upgraded their cybersecurity systems. Cyber fraudsters identified and exploited the loopholes to target them," an officer explained.

FIRs filed by 12 NBFCs in Delhi-NCR are part of over 150 complaints lodged by NBFCs across India during the same period, in which more than Rs 300 crore was allegedly stolen.

Citing a senior police officer, *The Indian Express* reported that investigators had detected a new pattern of fraud. Instead of tricking customers into "digital arrests", the fraudsters allegedly hacked into NBFC systems to identify loans that had been approved but were yet to be disbursed, and then diverted the loan amounts to mule accounts.

"They send the payout command from a cloud server that the NBFC's firewall already trusts, so the request goes through as if it were routine. Many of the targeted firms are small and have gaps in their software. Fraudsters are now using AI tools to carry out such fraud faster...," a senior police officer said.

TPC/18868/104521
SHAURYA SBI

• ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

The growing backlash to data centres powering AI

The AI boom needs data centres and countries are racing to build them. The question among local communities: Who pays the cost, who gets the benefit



RISHIKA SINGH

TWO INTERLINKED events this month in the US indicate rising scepticism about the growth of data centres, facilities central to the artificial intelligence (AI) boom.

First came the midterm drubbing for the Republican Party, reflecting, among other factors, a rejection of data-centre expansion. A $2.5-trillion wipeout in tech and AI stocks was triggered amid expectations that Democrats would not be as pro-AI.

The disapproval is not just an American phenomenon. Closer home, Adani Enterprises and Google announced plans last October to develop India's largest AI data centre campus in Visakhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, for $15 billion. Several pleas have been filed in courts, challenging the project on grounds including the environmental clearance process and land allocation.

VS Krishna, Coordination Committee Member at Human Rights Forum, a group challenging the project, told *The Indian Express* that the manner of approval was of "deep concern", with limited gains for the locals. Similar projects in locations ranging from Finland to Kenya have been opposed.

What is an AI data centre?

Accessing the internet is seamless. But the vast amount of information and data being exchanged still needs to be contained and managed at a physical location.

A data centre is a facility that houses the infrastructure needed to store, process and manage data, and provide the computing services that underpin much of the internet. It can include servers, computers, hard drives and cooling systems to manage the heat generated by electrical systems.

Shane Greenstein, professor of business administration at Harvard Business School, told *The Indian Express* that there are multiple types of data centres. "India already has many data centres within its borders... They serve as cloud providers for India's massive IT industry, offering computing, storage and related software services."

"Typically, they need to be nearby to deliver services without delays (what is termed "latency"). An Indian business could access such services in Europe or the US, but users would notice delays from the distance the electronic signals travel, or from congestion along the way," he said.

Data centres for training Large Language Models like ChatGPT initially did not need to be located nearby. However, the growing use of these models has increased demand for computing power. Newer-generation data centres typically use Nvidia's graphics processing units (GPUs), which can carry out complex calculations and support applications and programmes.

AI data centres thus tend to be larger and consume much more electricity. Adarsh Ranjan, research analyst at Carnegie India, said the scale has risen substantially. "Data centres are sometimes measured in terms of power, say a 10-megawatt data centre, referring to what it needs to run," he told *The Indian Express*. But now, he said, companies are treating bigger facilities as the baseline. The International Energy Agency says: "A typical AI-focused data centre consumes as much electricity as 100,000 households, but the largest ones under construction today will consume 20 times as much."

The other argument for expanding data centres concerns data sovereignty, Ranjan said. "The country in which the data centre is located will essentially determine the laws governing it — including how secure it is and who gets to access it. Imagine the data centre is located in a country that you don't have friendly ties with; that would lead to worries, especially if it's critical and sensitive data, like on health." Currently, the US leads globally, housing nearly half of all data centres.

Why are communities opposed?

Companies driving AI's growth have painted this pace as inevitable. An Adani-Google data centre media release says that its development "will create a powerful engine for economic growth in Visakhapatnam... and thereafter the entire nation by driving digital inclusivity and creating tens of thousands of jobs in technology, construction and clean energy." An associated energy project is planned not only to "support the data centre's operations but also enhance... India's electricity grid."

But for all their promised benefits, data centres have increasingly acquired a negative reputation, seen as guzzlers of water and electricity, with questionable benefits.

India's 2025-26 Economic Survey, for instance, stated that "Despite generating nearly 20 per cent of the world's data, India hosts only about 3 per cent of global data centres." It described the facilities as "double-edged swords". It quoted Mark P Mills, senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute, from a Congressional testimony: "In moonshot terms: the amount of energy used to launch a rocket is consumed every day by just one AI-infused datacenter."

Water is used in data centres primarily to remove the heat generated by servers and processors. Traditional cooling systems often use evaporative cooling, in which water is evaporated to dissipate heat. Newer approaches, including direct-to-chip cooling, circulate coolant through cold plates attached to processors. "People are generally wary of potable water being used, and how this could impact local community access to water," Ranjan said.

Data centres also require vast and reliable electricity supplies. While companies do procure renewable energy, electricity may also come from grids that rely heavily on fossil fuels. The additional load could ultimately be passed on to other consumers.

And there are cost and job issues (*see box*). VS Krishna of HRF said the green clearance process in Visakhapatnam was not based on informed public debate. An HRF press release flagged "serious consequences" of permitting the project in an area linked to a reservoir catchment and a wildlife sanctuary.

How are data centres regulated?

Ranjan said that globally, the conversation is focused on two areas. "Countries recognise the need to bring in investment and establish facilities to support their domestic ecosystem. The second part is to ensure that the environmental fallout does not impact local communities."

The Economic Survey suggests that since investment in AI infrastructure competes directly with other sources of demand, such as households and industries, a stronger case can be made for "smaller, task-specific (AI) models that can run on limited hardware and decentralised compute networks."

National data centre-specific policies have generally been lacking, although states have formulated their own, including in India and the US. "Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, and Telangana have their own policies, but these largely look at attracting investments," he said. In the absence of a national policy, states could engage in a kind of race to the bottom to offer the most cost-cutting alternatives to companies.

Experts say better resource utilisation is achievable, including with more green technology and energy-efficient methods. Ranjan said whether companies and governments move towards mandating them is more a question of political will.

But there is also a fundamental question at the heart of the opposition. Krishna said, "It has been billed as a game changer, but it's also indirect. It's a rudimentary example, but say, a hospital was being built instead. People will have direct use for it; it will result in lodging and food facilities coming up nearby, but that's not the case here."

Greenstein said data centres face an "inescapable issue": "The benefits go to users and businesses, who are distant and dispersed, while many of the costs are conspicuously local. That also creates opportunities for NIMBY (not in my backyard) opposition. Locals have no reason to care."

FULL VERSION ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM/EXPLAINED

Chart 1: **Data centre capacity in India**

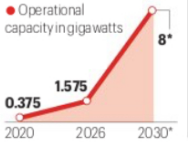


Chart 2: **City-wise operational capacity (MW)**

Mumbai/Navi Mumbai	790
Chennai	305
Bengaluru	182
Hyderabad	152
Delhi-NCR	76
Others (Pune, Kolkata)	15

*Projected; MW refers to megawatts; Source: Ministry of Electronics and IT

Counting costs of building frontier AI

Part of the criticism of data centres stems from costs associated with frontier AI (the most advanced models), said Shane Greenstein, professor at Harvard Business School. The following are his estimates:

$2-$4 billion: The estimated cost of constructing the shell of a 150MW facility, a scale that marked the AI frontier last year. This includes land, connectivity, cooling, electricity, racks.

$3 billion or more: Filling the shell with servers and associated hardware. Frontier chips can drive expenses several times higher.

Billions more: Recurring bill for hardware replacement

$500 million annually: Operating cost, depending on location and weather.



"Such a build creates many jobs during construction, with thousands working on it for a year. After construction, the number of newly created jobs is modest, maybe just a bit more than 100 employees," GREENSTEIN TOLD THE INDIAN EXPRESS.

What is a data centre

A data centre houses the infra needed to store, process and manage data.

•

It provides the services that underpin much of the internet.

EXAMINATION PURPOSE ONLY (2059)

U.S. blocks remote access to AI chips; China slams restrictions

Ananth Krishnan
BEIJING

The United States has announced new regulations aimed at curbing Chinese firms' remote access to advanced AI chips through data centres in third-party countries, coming amid the scandal surrounding chipmaker Nvidia. Beijing on Tuesday slammed the new restrictions, accusing Washington of "abusing export control measures".

Nvidia's provision of chips to companies running data centres in Southeast Asia has come under the spotlight amid questions surrounding founder Jensen Huang's relationship with Alice Huang, the CEO of one such Singapore-based company, Megaspeed. With Nvidia barred from selling its most advanced chips in China, many Chinese companies instead sought access to its technology through data centres in countries such as Malaysia.

Tech tussle

Nvidia's provision of chips to Southeast Asian firms is under the spotlight over a scandal involving its founder Jensen Huang

- The new U.S. rule imposes an additional license on 5 countries presenting a 'higher-than-normal risk of diversion'
- U.S. says curbs designed to ensure that restrictions on access to sensitive technology cannot be circumvented through remote arrangements



- China calls it yet another case of the U.S. 'overstretching the concept of national security' to 'go after' its high-tech industry

The U.S. Commerce Department's Bureau of Industry and Security (BIS) announced an interim final rule (IFR) "to address remote access" to advanced AI chips and servers, saying it was "designed to ensure that existing restrictions on access to sensitive American technology cannot be circumvented through remote computing arrangements involving data centres in third countries."

The rule states that in addition to the current licence requirements for advanced semiconductors, a licence will be required "to export, re-export, or transfer (in-country) advanced semiconductors to Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, or Brazil", which it named as "countries which present a higher-than-normal risk of diversion."

The new rule was announced days before U.S. President Donald Trump's arrival in Shenzhen for the APEC Summit.

CONTINUED ON
» PAGE 12

SHAURYA SSB TRG (8[illegible]04529)

China's remote access to AI chips blocked by U.S.

The APEC summit will see meetings between the Presidents of the U.S. and China on its sidelines along with a rare trilateral leaders' summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

China hit out at the moves, calling it "yet another case of the U.S. overstretching the concept of national security, and abusing export control measures to interfere in normal trade and tech cooperation between China and other countries and go after China's high-tech industry."

'Economic coercion'

"Such typical economic coercion and long-arm jurisdiction run counter to the common understandings between the two countries, harm the legitimate rights and interests of Chinese companies, and disrupt global supply chains," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Guo Jiakun said. "China will do what is necessary to firmly safeguard its legitimate and lawful rights and interests."

China's Ministry of Commerce in a statement said the new rule would affect the stability of the global semiconductor industry, adding that the U.S. was "misusing export controls to interfere indiscriminately in normal trade cooperation between Chinese enterprises and companies from other countries." "The U.S. approach runs counter to the important consensus reached by the two heads of state, undermines market rules and the international economic and trade order, and affects the stability of the global semiconductor industry and supply chain," the statement said.

SHAURYA SSB TRG (8360104520)

Indian sailor missing, two injured after tanker attacked in Hormuz

Express News Service
New Delhi, November 17

INDIA ON Tuesday expressed concern over an attack on the Panama-flagged LPG tanker MT Tara Gas in the Strait of Hormuz the previous day, which left one Indian crew member missing, two injured, and prompted the safe evacuation of 21 other Indian nationals ashore at Khasab.

The Ministry of External Affairs said on Tuesday said, "We condemn the attack on the Panama-flagged LPG tanker MT TARA GAS in the Strait of Hormuz on 16 November 2026. Of the 24 Indian nationals on board, 21 have been safely evacuated ashore at Khasab, two injured Indian crew members have been admitted to hospital, while one Indian national remains missing."

The MEA said that Indian diplomatic missions are actively engaged in relief operations, stating "our Embassy in Oman is closely monitoring the ongoing search and rescue operations in coordination with the Omani authorities".

Expressing gratitude to regional authorities, the MEA added: "We appreciate the timely assistance and support extended by the Government of Oman in the rescue efforts."

"The continuing incidents of attacks on shipping in the region are deeply worrisome and pose a serious threat to the safety of civilian seafarers," it said.

"The targeting of commercial shipping and civilian infrastructure must end, and free and unimpeded navigation and commerce through international waterways, in keeping with international law, must be restored at the earliest," it said.

In a post on X, Union Minister of Ports, Shipping and Waterways Sarbananda Sonowal said on Tuesday that authorities were continuously monitoring the situation and were in close contact with the ship management company to ensure the safety and well-being of the seafarers.

SHAURYA SSB IRG (8368104523)

At Shenzhen, Putin seeks a table for three with Washington and Beijing



RAJA MANDALA

BY C RAJA MOHAN

WHY IS Vladimir Putin invested in bringing Donald Trump and Xi Jinping together in Shenzhen this week? Why is Russia, which promoted a "strategic triangle" between Moscow, Beijing and Delhi in the 1990s, now backing a potentially more consequential triangle involving Russia, China and America?

For the Indian strategic community convinced that Russia will forever remain an adversary of America, Moscow's enthusiasm for the trilateral summit deserves reflection. This, in turn, demands a better appreciation of Russian strategic traditions and Moscow's contemporary geopolitical compulsions. In Delhi's discourse, Russia has been reduced to a simple sum of bilateral considerations — oil, weapons, nuclear energy and propulsion, and past vetoes in India's favour at the UN Security Council. In Delhi, which takes Russia for granted as the "best friend forever", there is little political empathy for Moscow's structural challenges.

Why is Moscow, which helped create the Russia-India-China (RIC) forum, BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), now seeking a table for three with Washington and Beijing? The apparent contradiction erodes once we separate Russia's opposition to American primacy in Eurasia from its interest in accommodation with American power. Although Russian and Chinese think tanks reportedly discussed a trilateral summit for some time, the Russian initiative came to light at the SCO summit in September. Putin's top aide, Yuri Ushakov, told the press that the proposal had been discussed with Xi. Putin subsequently pursued it with Trump.

The simplest explanation for Putin's initiative is about restoring Moscow's standing as a great-power peer of America and China. Russia's economic weight cannot sustain that claim. But its nuclear arsenal, military capabilities, natural resources and geography give it strategic significance beyond its economic size. A G3 would translate these assets into political status. Russia would sit alongside the two leading powers and participate in the joint management of global challenges.

The second consideration is Ukraine. Although Moscow has long sought to push America out of Eurasia, it knows that a favourable settlement in Ukraine is difficult without Washington's support or acquiescence. Putin also sees opportunities in the growing differences between Trump and Europe on transatlantic security.

The third consideration is China. Beijing has helped Russia withstand Western sanctions and diplomatic isolation. But the partnership has become increasingly unequal. Russia has no interest in exchanging American domination for Chinese domination. A strategy of triangulation widens Moscow's options.

The fourth consideration is economic. Putin has floated cooperation with American companies in energy and the Arctic. His investment envoy, Kirill Dmitriev, has promoted commercial opportunities. Sanctions relief, investment and technology could ease Russia's economic constraints. These proposals appeal to Trump's transactional instincts. For Moscow, economic engagement with America would strengthen its freedom of manoeuvre.

> Russia has no interest in exchanging American domination for Chinese domination. A strategy of triangulation widens Moscow's options

These calculations are rooted in a deep historical tension within Russia's geopolitics. In Russia's national emblem, the double-headed eagle, one head looks west and the other east. Russia has long struggled to reconcile its European inheritance with its Eurasian geography and ambitions.

Peter the Great sought to Europeanise Russia as part of its modernisation. That inevitably produced a backlash from the so-called "Slavophiles", who opposed westernisation and demanded that Russia follow its own distinctive path.

In 1881, Fyodor Dostoevsky captured a powerful current in Slavophile thinking: "In Europe we are followers", he wrote, "whereas we shall go to Asia as masters". He also noted the paradox: "In Europe we are Asiatics, whereas in Asia we, too, are Europeans." Dostoevsky gave a remarkable expression to the impulse to compensate for marginalisation in Europe with imperial expansion in Asia.

The 1917 Bolshevik Revolution saw Moscow embrace the radical Western ideology of communism and become the fount of a new global political trend. But the capitalist backlash deepened Soviet Russia's separation from the West. Meanwhile, Russia's anti-communist émigré intellectuals who left the Soviet Union developed the idea of Eurasianism. Russia, they argued, was neither European nor Asian but a separate civilisation. The idea re-emerged after the Soviet collapse and gained political traction under Putin. Moscow's 2023 foreign policy concept describes Russia as a "unique country-civilisation" and a Eurasian power.

Yet the Russian eagle never stopped looking West. The Soviet Union allied with America and Britain against Nazi Germany in World War II. The détente of the 1970s with America combined rivalry with arms control and economic engagement. After the Cold War, Moscow sought integration into the Western-centred order.

Mikhail Gorbachev imagined a "common European home". Addressing the German Bundestag in September 2001, largely in German, Putin waxed lyrical about the possibilities of Europe becoming stronger by combining its capabilities with Russia's resources. He visualised a free trade pact, joint development of natural resources, and visa-free travel. Putin's early pursuit of a "harmonious economic community from Lisbon to Vladivostok" reflected the complementarities between Russian resources and European capital, technology and markets.

NATO's expansion and Western reluctance to address Moscow's security concerns saw the collapse of this vision. Putin's angry Munich speech in 2007 marked a turning point. The invasion of Ukraine and subsequent Western sanctions have since shattered much of Russia's economic relationship with Europe.

But resentment does not eliminate the strategic importance of the West in the Russian calculus. Delhi should take note, not offence. India's warm Cold War memories should not mask Russia's natural preoccupation with America, Europe and China. Nor should Delhi mistake the anti-Western rhetoric from Moscow for the pursuit of a permanent confrontation with Washington. A Russia with greater room for manoeuvre in Asia and at peace with Europe and America would serve Indian interests.

The writer is consulting editor on international affairs for The Indian Express. *He is also professor and director, Motwani Jadeja Institute of American Studies, O P Jindal Global University. His new book,* India Pivots to Europe: In Search of a Eurasian Balance, *is published this month*

SAMPLE COPY TRG 104239

COP31: India seeks to strengthen climate engagement with small island nations

Amitabh Sinha
New Delhi, November 17

SEEKING TO enhance its engagement with the small island countries on climate-related matters, India on Tuesday offered its scientific and technological expertise in issues like renewable energy deployment and disaster management to help these countries strengthen their resilience in the fight against climate change.

Addressing the first-of-its-kind roundtable with these countries on the sidelines of the COP31 climate conference in the Turkish city of Antalya, Environment Minister Bhupender Yadav said there was a lot India could also learn from the island nations, particularly their traditional knowledge of the oceans and experiences in living and adapting to changing oceans.

"Healthy oceans and resilient coastlines are fundamental to economic security, ecological stability and the well being of people. Today, these shared resources are facing growing pressures from sea-level rise, coastal erosion, ocean warming, coral bleaching, stronger storms and marine pollution," Yadav said, adding that India's experience in managing more than 11,000 km of coastline could offer useful lessons for these small island countries.

> **"Our approach recognises that conservation is more sustainable when local communities are partners in planning, implementation and benefit sharing"**
>
> **BHUPENDER YADAV**
> ENVIRONMENT MINISTER

"India's coastal regions support millions of livelihoods, and are central to our economic and ecological security. We are strengthening coastal resilience through scientific assessment, ecosystem conservation, sea shoreline management and disaster preparedness... Our approach recognises that conservation is more sustainable when local communities are partners in planning, implementation and benefit sharing," he said.

The round-table, organised by Delhi-based The Energy and Resources Institute, was a follow-up on the earlier initiatives that India has started with these countries. The Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation has been active since 2014, where climate change is an important part of the discussions. In 2021, on the sidelines of COP21 in Glasgow, UK, India had announced the Infrastructure for Resilient Island States (IRIS) programme. IRIS is a special work programme under the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) that India had launched two years ago.

As part of the IRIS programme, India had offered to provide, among other things, satellite data to these countries to help them build capacities on early warning systems. As of now, 23 different projects covering 25 small island countries are currently active. The round table was meant to review the progress on these projects and facilitate discussions on deepening these partnerships.

Yadav said there was ample scope for broadening partnerships on renewable energy, disaster preparedness, resilient infrastructure and locally-appropriate climate adaptation solutions.

"SIDS (Small Island Developing States) are custodians of extraordinary marine biodiversity and traditional knowledge, and their experience in living with and adapting to changing oceans, have much to offer to the world," he said.

Yadav said India was looking forward to enhanced cooperation in at least four major areas: coastal risk assessment and monitoring and setting up of early warning systems, ecosystem protection measures like mangrove conservation, technological partnerships in energy and related fields, and institutional tie-ups to facilitate exchange of scientific information and capacity building.

SURYA-SCB TRC(18TBC04529)

Jensen Huang says willing to return as Nvidia CEO: 'I own up my mistakes'

Agrees to appear before several US House committees on December 1



Nvidia's ex-CEO Jensen Huang

Jaspreet Singh
November 17

NVIDIA'S FORMER CEO Jensen Huang, who resigned from the chipmaker last week under a cloud of scandal, said on Tuesday he "would be honoured" to come back as CEO if the board decided his return would be in the best interest of shareholders and employees.

"Since my departure, I've seen an outpouring of calls from NVIDIA's employees, investors, business partners, and customers for me to return as CEO," Huang said in his first public statement since he resigned on November 12 over revelations of extramarital affairs that intensified scrutiny of the chip firm's China business. "I created problems for the Board that I deeply regret. I own my mistakes completely, and I am committed to cooperating with the Board's independent probe," he said.

Nvidia did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Huang's statement. Nvidia shares pared some declines and were last down 1%.

Earlier in the day Nvidia created a board-level committee to oversee national security and export controls, its first major governance move since Huang left.

Huang's relationships have raised questions about whether Nvidia's oversight kept pace with its rapid growth and increasing importance to US national security.

Huang has also agreed to appear for transcribed interviews with several US House committees on December 1, the House Foreign Affairs Committee said.

The interviews will take place before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, and the House Intelligence Committee, the statement said. Nvidia's General Counsel Tim Teter will appear before the same committees on December 2. "We look forward to hearing from Jensen Huang and Tim Teter on their roles in a potential breach of our national security," Republican chairmen of the panels, Brian Mast, John Moolenaar and Rick Crawford, said. REUTERS

SHAURYA SB TRG (9568104527)

Iran attacks US radar system in Bahrain; US hits Qeshm Island

Reuters

Dubai, November 17

IRAN FIRED drones at a US military radar system in Bahrain on Tuesday and the crew of a tanker was reported missing in the Strait of Hormuz, despite talks between Iran and mediators Oman and Qatar.

Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps said the radar system at Bahrain's Sheikh Isa base had been targeted, and warned Bahrain over its alliance with the US and stance towards Shi'ite clergy. Bahrain, which is home to the headquarters of the US Fifth Fleet, said it had intercepted the attack and there were no reports of casualties or damage.

Later on Tuesday, Iranian media reported an explosion on Iran's Qeshm Island in the Strait of Hormuz, and cited an Iranian official as saying the US had carried out an attack there without causing damage to infrastructure.

Asked for comment, the US military's Central Command said it had no updates. Washington carried out limited strikes on Qeshm earlier this month.

Qatari and Iranian officials were meeting on Tuesday, Qatar said, as part of efforts to mediate an end to nearly nine months of war that has destabilised the Middle East and pushed up global energy prices.

The talks are aimed at "bridging perspectives and narrowing the gap between proposals presented on the ground," Qatari spokesperson Majed Al Ansari said.

SHAURYA GSB TRG (8668104129)

Bangladesh on edge: Blasts near Dhaka airport leave 3 injured; workers' stir widens

Press Trust of India
Dhaka, November 17

TWO CRUDE bombs exploded near the Dhaka international airport, injuring three pedestrians, amid violence over ousted PM Sheikh Hasina's planned return and the ongoing protests by garment workers.

While one bomb exploded near the outer gate of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, the other detonated in the Jasimuddin area near the facility and flyover connectors, it said, quoting police.

The blasts come amid renewed tensions in Bangladesh over ousted prime minister Sheikh Hasina's planned return next month. Hasina has been staying in India since fleeing the country in August 2024 following a student-led uprising that toppled her government.

However, it is not known whether the explosions have any connection with Hasina.

According to Kamrul Islam Talukdar, officer-in-charge of the Airport Police Station, miscreants detonated the two bombs, causing minor injuries to three pedestrians.



Protesters run as smoke billows from a tear gas shell following a clash with police in Gazipur, Dhaka, on Tuesday. REUTERS

The bombs were thrown from a flyover and security measures have since been strengthened, he said.

Meanwhile, security agencies on Tuesday deployed more than 1,000 paramilitary personnel as garment workers staged demonstrations and clashed with police in the industrial belt around Dhaka, demanding higher wages and blocking three major highways.

Ukraine drones attack bridge that links Crimea and Russia

Reuters
Kyiv, Moscow, November 17

UKRAINIAN DRONES and missiles destroyed the central road section of the bridge linking Russia and Crimea on Tuesday, inflicting a military and symbolic blow on President Vladimir Putin two days before he is due to meet the leaders of China and the US.

Videos and images posted on X by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and verified by Reuters showed the bridge's main road arch had crumbled into the sea, leaving a yawning gap. "Russia strikes our infrastructure every day, including bridges," Zelenskyy said. "We are ... reminding Russia that war will always return to where it began."

The 19-km (12-mile) bridge is a flagship project inaugurated by Putin in 2018 and a symbol of Russia's attachment to the peninsula it captured and annexed from Ukraine in 2014.

The timing was awkward for the Kremlin leader ahead of his meeting in Shenzhen on Thursday with US President Donald Trump and China's Xi Jinping, where the three are expected to discuss the Ukraine war among other topics. Zelenskyy said the strike followed an unprecedented operation that methodically destroyed Russian air defences, radar systems and electronic warfare capabilities.



A drone view of a damaged Crimea bridge. REUTERS

Sergei Aksyonov, Crimea's Russian-installed governor, said two people were killed and road traffic had been suspended. Rail traffic partially resumed after a pause. Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov said a repair plan would be prepared, making the bridge "even better than before".

But Russian military bloggers said repairs would be exceptionally challenging given Ukraine's capacity for further attacks. Finnish military analyst Emil Kastehelmi posted on X: "The road bridge won't be repaired during this war ... Ukraine has achieved a victory with both concrete and symbolic implications."

The bridge was once a key supply route for Russian forces in Ukraine, but the military now relies more heavily on a land corridor running through parts of eastern and southern Ukraine that Russia has captured since launching a full-scale war with its neighbour in 2022.

SHASTRA SSC (8368 45 93)

Israel set to select new Speaker in Parliament

Agence France-Presse
JERUSALEM

Israel's Parliament is set on Tuesday to select a new Speaker opposed to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, a first step in rolling back the legacy of the country's divisive veteran leader even though he is still trying to stay in office.

Gadi Eisenkot, a former military chief who has until next month to form a government to replace Mr. Netanyahu, has put forward his ally Matan Kahana to be the next Speaker.

Mr. Netanyahu's Likud party is expected to try to draw out debate to scuttle Mr. Kahana's election in Parliament, known as the Knesset.

Likud in a statement demanded that lawmakers hold off on "severe, unilateral measures" and on "replacing the Knesset Speaker at a time that negotiations are ongoing to form a national-unity government".



Matan Kahana

Likud has said it will put forward Ofir Katz as its own candidate for Knesset Speaker, but Mr. Kahana is the favourite ahead of the vote.

The Parliament Speaker is an important office given that it sets the timetable for parliamentary business and can therefore speed up or delay debates or votes on proposed laws.

Neither Mr. Eisenkot nor Mr. Netanyahu won a majority in the 120-member Knesset in October 27 elections.

But Mr. Kahana can easily reach the 61-vote threshold in Tuesday's vote thanks to votes by the Arab-Israeli parties, which made historic gains in the election on the back of anger over Mr. Netanyahu's hard-right government.

Mr. Netanyahu's and Mr. Eisenkot's parties met on Sunday on the possibility of joining a unity government but the meeting appeared to be largely a formality, with both men saying they should be Prime Minister.

SHAURYA ASSB TRG (8368104829)