

# STAND-OFF intensifies after Trump's 'shoot & kill' order

DUBAI, Apr 24 (AP)

**TENSIONS** in the stand-off between the US and Iran over the Strait of Hormuz intensified on Friday after US President Donald Trump said he ordered the US military to "shoot and kill" Iranian small boats in the Strait, while Iran pushed back on Trump's claim there was a leadership rift in the Islamic Republic.

"In Iran, there are no hard-liners or moderates'. We are all Iranians and revolutionaries," Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian and Speaker of Parliament Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf wrote in almost identical social media statements.

Since the killing of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in the first strike of the war on February 28, it has been unclear who in Iran wields ultimate authority over its collection of civilian figures and powerful generals who appear to be in charge.

On Friday, two Pakistani officials told 'The Associated Press' that Iran's top diplomat is expected to travel to Pakistan by this weekend for talks.

*(Contd on page 5)*

## 'Israel-Hezbollah truce extended by 3 weeks'

WASHINGTON, Apr 24 (AP)

**PRESIDENT** Donald Trump said Israel and Lebanon have agreed to extend a ceasefire between Israel and the Hezbollah militant group by three weeks after talks at the White House on Thursday.



Trump said the meeting between the Israeli and Lebanese ambassadors to the United States, the second in the past week, went "very well," but during an Oval Office gathering he acknowledged that "they do have Hezbollah to think about." The Iranian-backed group has opposed the talks, and since the

*(Contd on page 5)*

# Not an inch lost to China during 2020 stand-off: Ex-Army chief Gen Naravane

■ By Aayush Sharma  
NEW DELHI, April 24 (ANI)

FORMER Chief of Army Staff General Manoj Mukund Naravane (Retd.) has broken his silence on the political controversy surrounding his unpublished memoir "Four Stars of Destiny", firmly defending his long-held position on the 2020 Indo-China border stand-off.

Speaking to ANI in an exclusive interview, General Naravane addressed a string of disputed issues from territorial claims along the Line of Actual Control to the civil-military chain of command in his most direct public remarks since the memoir row erupted in Parliament earlier this year. At the centre of the controversy is General Naravane's assertion that India lost no territory to China during the 2020 eastern Ladakh stand-off.



Congress leaders have repeatedly challenged that claim, citing excerpts from his memoir that, they argue, tell a different story. The former Army Chief was absolute in his response.

"At that time, I had also said that there is no loss of territory. I stand by that statement even today. That is where the matter stands," he said.

"However, if somebody doesn't want to believe it, that is his

choice. There is no amount of giving statements or producing evidence that will ever change somebody's mind who doesn't want to believe and has some different views altogether. We have tried our best, but if somebody still doesn't want to accept that that is the truth, then so be it."

General Naravane also addressed the question of political direction during the stand-off, clarifying how decisions flow within the civil-military framework without naming any individual or party.

"Political leadership doesn't interfere directly in military affairs. Whatever decisions are taken are taken by the Cabinet Committee on Security. That Committee is headed by the PM," he said. "Whatever decisions are taken in the Army are always on the orders of the Chief. But you don't keep saying 'Chief ne ye

kaha hai, isliye aisa karo.' It is understood that when something is being done, it has been done by the orders or by the instruction of whoever is empowered to pass such a kind of order or instruction."

Perhaps his most pointed remarks came on the question of the military being drawn into political discourse.

"The Armed Forces should be kept as far away from politics as possible. The Indian Armed Forces pride themselves on being a very apolitical Army, Navy, Air Force," he said. "If you see what is happening in the country's periphery, it is a strength that we have never even sought to get involved in political matters and that's what makes our country strong. That's what makes our democracy strong, we are one of the pillars of governance, along with the judiciary and the press."

# Consumption sustaining growth; predictable support essential for GDP expansion: FM

PUNE, Apr 24 (PTI)

DOMESTIC consumption is sustaining the growth momentum in the economy, and predictable policy support is essential to ensure that the pace of GDP expansion continues, Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman said on Friday.

Speaking at an event organised by SBI here, Sitharaman also said that a committee of bankers is looking into the issue of whether to allow exclusive distribution tie-ups for selling third-party products by banks or adopt an open architecture approach.

She also urged banks to focus on the physical contact with customers as they go global and digital. The Minister further said that the disinvestment process



of IDBI Bank will continue going ahead. "...Consumption emerging out of its domestic market itself is able to sustain our growth, which is the fastest even now in the world," she said.

The finance minister said that while it is necessary for the consumption for the growth process to continue, it is also pertinent to have predictable policies.

"Unless our domestic manufacturing, agricultural growth, tourism, IT and related services sector are given that constant support, predictable support, India's growth story will be difficult to keep up," she added.

Stating that exports are also important, Sitharaman appreciated the work of exporters in the last few months amid the set-

backs like the US tariffs, wherein they have found newer markets while facing troubles from one.

Replying to a question on policy support to the affected sectors because of the current Middle East crisis, she said the Government will see what it can best do and added that things are very dynamic at present, with talks between the US and Iran being on. She also reminded that the Government has responded with a targeted package for the US tariff-impacted entities.

To a question on the asset quality impact at banks because of the Middle East crisis, Sitharaman suggested that there is no need to be concerned, as the non-performing assets are at a multi-decade low.

# El Nino likely to develop in May, says WMO

GENEVA, Apr 24 (ANI)

THE World Meteorological Organisation (WMO) on Friday said that El Nino weather conditions are likely to develop from as early as May 2026, potentially affecting global temperatures and rainfall patterns.

El Nino is a periodic warming of sea surface temperatures in the central and eastern Pacific Ocean, which typically lasts from nine to 12 months, according to the WMO. "After a period of neutral conditions at the start of the year, climate models are now strongly aligned, and there is high confidence in the onset of El Nino, followed by further intensification in the months that follow," said Wilfran Moufouma Okia, Chief of Climate Prediction at WMO. El Nino and La Nina are opposite phases of the El Nino-Southern Oscillation (ENSO) and one of the most powerful climate



patterns on Earth. These events reshape global weather, influencing rainfall, drought, and extreme events across regions.

El Nino is characterised by a warming of ocean surface temperatures in the central and eastern Equatorial Pacific. It typically occurs every two to seven years and lasts around nine to twelve months. For the May-June-July season, land surface temperatures are expected to be above-normal nearly everywhere, the WMO said.

# Army chief inducted into International Hall of Fame at US Army War College

WASHINGTON, Apr 24 (PTI)

INDIA'S Army chief General Upendra Dwivedi was inducted into the International Hall of Fame of the US Army War College in Pennsylvania, becoming the third Indian head of the Army to receive such honour.

General Dwivedi, a distinguished fellow of the US Army War College, is the third Indian Chief of Armed Forces to be inducted in the International Hall of Fame after General V K Singh and General Bikram Singh.

An alumnus of the prestigious college, General Dwivedi toured key facilities and participated in academic engagements, including panel discussions, reviewing advanced study projects of the scholars programme and interacting with distinguished members of the institution.

Earlier this week, the Army



chief began his US visit in Hawaii, where he was accorded a Guard of Honour at Fort Shafter, the headquarters of the US Army Pacific. He held discussions with General Ronald P Clark,

Commanding General US Army Pacific, and others, focusing on strengthening India-US ties and advancing a shared vision for peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific, the Indian Army said.