

# Iran proposes to reopen Strait of Hormuz without nuclear agreement

Iran also wants the US to end its blockade of the country as part of its proposal. The new proposal most likely won't be supported by US President Trump

CAIRO, Apr 27 (AP)

IRAN is offering to end its chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz without addressing its nuclear programme, two regional officials with knowledge of the proposal said on Monday, as the country's Foreign Minister made a visit to Russia, which he said was an opportunity to consult



with Moscow regarding the war against Israel and the United States.

Iran also wants the US to end its blockade of the country as part

of its proposal, said the two officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the closed-door negotiations. The new proposal, passed to the United States

by Pakistan, likely won't be supported by US President Donald Trump, who wants to end Iran's atomic programme as part of an overall deal to reopen the Strait of Hormuz and make the ceasefire permanent. "We have all the cards. If they want to talk, they can come to us, or they can call us," Trump said Sunday to Fox News' Channel.

With a fragile ceasefire in place, the US and Iran are locked in a stand-off over the strait, through which a fifth of the world's traded oil and gas passes in peacetime. The US blockade is designed to prevent Iran from selling its oil, depriving it of

(Contd on page 5)

## US stops 38 ships in Iranian waters

FLORIDA, Apr 27 (ANI)

THE United States Central Command (CENTCOM) has announced that American forces are maintaining a strict maritime restrictive operation in the region, continuing to enforce a blockade against Iranian ports. The enforcement

comes as the military closely monitors maritime traffic to ensure compliance with the ongoing restrictions. Highlighting the scale of the operation, a post on X confirmed that "American forces have directed 38 ships to turn around or return to port."

(Contd on page 5)

## Putin meets Araghchi, says Russia ready to help bring peace to West Asia

MOSCOW, Apr 27 (ANI)

# Putin meets Araghchi, says Russia ready to help bring peace to West Asia

MOSCOW, Apr 27 (PTI)

**IRAN'S** Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on Monday met Russian President Vladimir Putin, who hailed the Iranian people for fighting bravely and heroically for their sovereignty and said Moscow is ready to do its best to help bring peace to West Asia as soon as possible.

Araghchi, who held talks with Omani and Pakistani leadership before arriving in Russia, met Putin in St. Petersburg and thanked him for supporting Iran, state-owned TASS news agency reported.

"Russia is ready to do everything in its power to ensure that peace in the Middle East is achieved as soon as possible," Putin said during his meeting



with Araghchi, which was also attended by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

Revealing that he received a message from Iranian Supreme Leader Mojtaba Khamenei last week, Putin asked Araghchi to convey his "gratitude for this message and best wishes for his health and well-being."

He praised the Iranian people for fighting "bravely and heroically" for their sovereignty, Iran's state-run PRESS TV reported.

## 'Pakistan lacks credibility to mediate between Tehran and Washington'

TEHRAN, Apr 27 (ANI)

**AS DIPLOMATIC** efforts to secure a breakthrough between the United States and Iran continue, a senior Iranian lawmaker has raised significant concerns regarding Pakistan's role as a neutral intermediary.

Ebrahim Rezaei, the spokesperson for Iran's national security and foreign policy commission, suggested that Islamabad may be too aligned with Washington to serve as an effective

go-between.

In a statement shared on X, the Dashtestan representative argued that "Pakistan is a good friend and neighbour of ours, but it is not a suitable mediator for negotiations and lacks the necessary credibility." He further alleged that Pakistani officials "always take Trump's interests into account and do not speak against the Americans' wishes," citing a perceived reluctance to challenge US diplomatic reversals.

# Ladakh gets 5 new districts

LEH/JAMMU, Apr 27 (PTI)

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**LADAKH** Lieutenant Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena on Monday approved the creation of five new districts in the Union Territory, fulfilling the aspirations and long-pending demand of the people of the region.

Saxena said that with the creation of five new districts -- Nubra, Sham, Changthang, Zaskar and Drass -- Ladakh will now have seven districts, taking the total number of districts in the Union Territory to seven.

# Rajnath Singh to attend SCO meet

NEW DELHI, Apr 27 (IANS)

**UNION** Defence Minister Rajnath Singh is set to participate in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) Defence Ministers' Meeting in Kyrgyzstan's



Bishkek on Tuesday.

In a social media post, he stated that he will highlight India's

commitment towards global peace amidst the security challenges prevailing in the world.

“Leaving for Bishkek in Kyrgyzstan. Looking forward to attend the SCO Defence Ministers' Meeting scheduled to be held on Tuesday. Shall highlight India's commitment towards global peace, amidst the security challenges prevailing in the world, apart from conveying India's consistent stance on Zero Tolerance for Terrorism and Extremism. Will also be interacting bilaterally with the counterparts of other SCO Member states and with the Indian Community at Bishkek,” the Defence Minister wrote in a post on X.

# Differences at recent BRICS meet in Delhi were on account of West Asia conflict: MEA

NEW DELHI, Apr 27 (PTI)

INDIA recently chaired a meeting of BRICS Deputy Foreign Ministers and Special Envoys on the Middle East and North Africa (BRICS MENA) in New Delhi, with the Ministry of External Affairs on Monday saying that a consensus could not be reached as there were differences on account of the ongoing conflict in West Asia.

The current conflict in West Asia began on February 28 when the US-Israeli combine launched military strikes on Iran, and Tehran retaliated by attacking Gulf states hosting US bases.

At an inter-ministerial briefing here on the West Asia situa-

tion, MEA spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal was asked what India's position is on the Palestine issue, given some reports claiming that New Delhi apparently 'diluted' its long-standing position on Palestine during the BRICS meeting held last week, which may have led to a lack of consensus.

"Let me clarify the issue for you... We have seen some speculative and inaccurate reporting on the recent BRICS officials' meeting," Jaiswal told reporters.

The MEA spokesperson urged reporters to refer to the joint statement released on the occasion of the India Arab League Foreign Ministers meeting earlier this year. "This meeting happened in Delhi. This outcome

was endorsed by all present, including Palestine," he added.

It may be noted that many BRICS members also attended the Sharm el-Sheikh Summit, supported the Gaza Peace plan and UN Security Council Resolution 2803, Jaiswal said.

The Sharm el-Sheikh summit in October last paved the way for ending the Israeli military offensive in Gaza. The summit culminated in the conclusion of a ceasefire agreement in Gaza.

Jaiswal added that "differences at the recent BRICS meeting were on account of the ongoing conflict in West Asia". A "chair summary" was issued after the meeting, as a joint statement "could not be reached", Jaiswal said.

# High-octane campaign for WB polls ends

KOLKATA, Apr 27 (PTI)

CAMPAIGNING for the second and final phase of West Bengal Assembly polls ended on Monday amid a fierce political battle dominated by exchanges over SIR, infiltration, corruption and unemployment, with both the BJP and the TMC making a slew of promises to voters across 142 constituencies.

During the high-octane campaign, the BJP leadership accused the ruling TMC of turning West Bengal into a haven for infiltrators, while Mamata Banerjee alleged that the saffron party was indulging in divisive politics, attempting to bifurcate the State and discouraging consumption of fish and eggs.

A total of 3,21,73,837 electors -- 1,64,35,627 men, 1,57,37,418 women and 792 third-gender voters -- are eligible to vote in this phase of the elections scheduled for April 29. Polling will be held at 41,001 stations, with web-casting covering all polling stations. The EC has put in place extensive security arrangements, deploying 2,321 companies of central forces across seven districts. A total of 142 general observers, 95 police observers and 100 expenditure observers have been deployed. Officials said drones fitted with cameras



BJP candidate from Nandigram and Bhabanipur Suwendu Adhikari on last day of campaigning for the West Bengal Assembly elections, in Kolkata on Monday. (R) West Bengal Chief Minister and Trinamool Congress supremo Mamata Banerjee rides pillion on a scooter during a roadshow in Kolkata. (PTI)



are also being used to monitor the poll process. Kolkata has the highest deployment with 273 companies of central forces.

Among the constituencies going to the polls in this phase, Bhangar has the highest number of candidates at 19, while Goghat has the lowest with five, reflecting a varied electoral contest across districts.

Key candidates in this phase include Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, who is seeking re-election from Bhabanipur. She is pitted against BJP heavyweight Suwendu Adhikari in one of the most high-profile contests of the phase. Other important seats include Bhatpara, Jagatdal and Barrackpur, Bangaon, Dum Dum, Sandeshkhali, Hingalganj, Ranaghat Uttar and Dakshin, Rashbehari, Jadavpur and Ballygunge.

Several BJP leaders, including Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Union Home Minister Amit Shah, Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and Chief Ministers of Uttarakhand and Assam campaigned in the State.

In one of her rallies after the first phase of polls on April 23, TMC supremo Mamata Banerjee claimed that her party had crossed the 100-seat mark and expressed confidence of retaining power.

## Cash, liquor, freebies worth Rs 510 crore seized in WB so far

NEW DELHI, Apr 27 (IANS)

ELECTION Commission's flying squads and security agencies have so far seized cash, liquor and other freebies worth Rs 510.10 crore in West Bengal, where the second and final phase of voting for Assembly elections is scheduled on April 29, an official said on Monday.

The seizure of freebies and other inducement articles till

Monday in the State has already surpassed the Rs 339 crore mark of such inducement items recovered by the election department and security agencies during the 2021 Assembly elections, said an official statement.

Since the announcement of elections on March 15, including the first phase of voting that took place in West Bengal on April 23, the EC's seizures include Rs 30 crore in cash, liquor worth

Rs 126.85 crore, drugs valued at Rs 110.12 crore, precious metal worth Rs 58.28 crore and other freebies worth Rs 184.85 crore.

To ensure inducement-free elections, over 2,728 Flying Squad Teams have been deployed to ensure that the inducement-related complaints are attended to within 100 minutes, said the statement.

Besides the flying squads, over 3,142 Static Surveillance Teams

(SSTs) have also been deployed to set up surprise pickets at different locations.

Special drives are being conducted against the manufacture, storage and distribution of illicit liquor, said the statement.

The ECI activated the Election Seizure Management System on February 26 to ensure inducement-free polling and strict compliance with the Model Code of Conduct (MCC).