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current BRICS chair, to leverage its "independent role" to halt the US-Israel hostilities against Iran.

According to the readout, the president rejected Washington's claims that the US launched the military offensive against Iran to prevent it from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Pezshkian also stressed that late supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei "firmly opposed" nuclear weapons and had issued both administrative and religious directives prohibiting any move toward their development, it said.

Separately, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar spoke to his Iranian counterpart Seyed Abbas Araghchi and discussed the conflict in West Asia and its implications for the larger region.

In a post on X, Modi said he conveyed Eid and Nowruz greetings to Pezshkian and expressed hope that the festive season brings peace, stability and prosperity to West Asia.

"Condemned attacks on critical infrastructure in the region, which threaten regional stability and disrupt global supply chains. Reiterated the importance of safeguarding freedom of navigation and ensuring that shipping lanes remain open and secure," the prime minister said.

"Appreciated Iran's continued support for the safety and security of Indian nationals in Iran," he said.

It is the second phone conversation between Modi and Pezshkian in the last 10 days.

The talks between the two leaders came against the backdrop of increasing global concerns over fresh attacks on West Asian gas hubs.

The president reiterated Iran's consistent readiness to engage in dialogues with world leaders, including on the sidelines of the United Nations, for "verification and oversight" of Tehran's peaceful nuclear activities, Tehran said in the readout.

He described the "actions" of the US and Israel against Iran as "profoundly inhumane and unethical, and strongly condemned them", it said.

"The president also proposed the establishment of a regional security framework composed of countries of West Asia, aimed at ensuring peace and stability in the region through regional cooperation without foreign interference," it said.

"He further underscored that a prerequisite for ending the war and conflict in the region is the immediate cessation of aggressions by the US and Israel," it said.

Referring to India's presidency of BRICS, Pezshkian called for the group to play an independent role in halting aggressions against Iran and in safeguarding regional and international peace and stability, the readout said.

The Iranian readout said PM Modi emphasised the importance of ensuring the security of the Strait of Hormuz and the freedom of navigation in the Persian Gulf.

"In this context, referring to his consultations and discussions with various world leaders, PM Modi emphasised that choosing the path of war is in no one's interest; therefore, all parties should move toward peace as soon as possible," it said.

Global oil and gas prices have surged after Iran virtually blocked the Strait of Hormuz, a narrow shipping lane between the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman, that handles roughly 20 per cent of global oil and LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas).

West Asia has been a major source of India's energy procurement.

The Iranian readout said Pezshkian also dismissed the US's allegations portraying Iran as a "source of instability" in the region, asserting that "it is Israel that carries out attacks and assassinations in Lebanon, Gaza, Iran, Iraq, Qatar", justifying such actions "under the pretext of maintaining security and peace".

"President Pezshkian further stated that the US targeted the school in Minab from bases located in neighbouring countries hosting US military installations, leading to the tragic martyrdom of 168 innocent schoolchildren," it noted.

As concerns mounted over the escalating situation in West Asia, PM Modi spoke to a number of leaders in the last couple of days, including Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, the Jordanian King, French President Emmanuel Macron and Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim.

SC concerned over...

The present issue may require broader consideration extending beyond the immediate question raised in the petition, he said.

Justice Bagchi told Sankaranarayanan, "We understand that police briefings to the media must be responsible and reasonable, and must not be exposed to bias, because in a criminal justice system, the investigating agency is neither pro-victim nor pro-accused."

Sankaranarayanan pointed out that the issue of "media trial" was first addressed by the Supreme Court in the Sahara versus SEBI decision of 2012.

Justice Bagchi said the concern is of police authorities getting carried away during media briefings and the emerging risks of media trials in pending criminal cases.

"It is the duty of the investigating agency to conduct an independent investigation to unravel the truth. To ensure that a balance is maintained, the manual is a very positive step. The manual will restrain the police from making over-enthusiastic statements which may be inferable with regard to matters that are subject to adjudication in a forensic and dispassionate manner.

"However, what happens when such an exercise, though restraining the police, is not able to remove the cloud or the vitiated atmosphere created through third-party indulgence, where sections of the media go on spinning narratives either way, resulting in a media trial that completely subverts the rule of law," he said.

Solicitor General Tushar Mehta said there are tabloids on social media which act like "blackmailers."

"There are some platforms which exist only virtually, which are blackmailers. Blackmailing is an understatement," he said. Justice Bagchi said, "The problem is the atomised social media."

CJI Kant said, "It is akin to or a different facet of digital arrest. There is a tendency in towns and cities away from the national capital where people flaunt their credentials as media persons and boldly display it on their vehicles for ulterior designs." Sankaranarayanan told the bench he knew a few advocates who sport 'Supreme Court Advocate' stickers on their cars to avoid paying tolls on highways.

The bench suggested that since the issue of fair trial required a comprehensive approach, it would be better if the petition is withdrawn and refiled with an enlarged scope after April, when the guidelines or SOP for police would have been implemented. Taking the court's suggestion, Sankaranarayanan agreed to withdraw the matter.

Vaishno Devi Yatra...

across the country during this period. "The yatra has been suspended temporarily due to heavy rush at Bhawan," a shrine board official said.

Police vehicles announced the suspension of the yatra, with fresh registration to resume at 4 am on Sunday, he said.

"The pilgrims are asked to go back to their hotels as the yatra has been suspended," the announcement said.

On Saturday, more than 39,000 pilgrims visited the holy town of Katra and offered prayers at the Mata Vaishno Devi temple atop Trikuta hills in Jammu and Kashmir's Reasi district, officials said.

Due to the heavy rush, the yatra was suspended at 4 pm on Saturday, they said.

More than 10,000 pilgrims are also en route to the cave shrine after registration, the officials added.

Hundreds of devotees, chanting 'Jai Mata Di', were seen trekking along the pathway to the Mata Vaishno Devi temple on the third day of Navratri to seek the deity's blessings.

Authorities have put in place multi-tier security arrangements at the Katra base camp and en route to the shrine to ensure a safe and secure yatra.

The sacred Shat Chandhi Maha Yagya has commenced at the shrine on Thursday, heralding the auspicious beginning of Chaitra Navratri 2026, officials said.

The divine vibrations of Vedic chants and rituals at the holy cave are invoking blessings of peace, prosperity, and well-being for all humanity, they said.

In view of the expected large influx of pilgrims, the shrine board has put in place comprehensive pilgrim-centric arrangements to ensure a smooth and spiritually enriching yatra experience, they added.

Modi's competence, foresight...

ing" India from the ripple effects of global instability, asserting that the country has remained secure despite the escalating conflict in West Asia.

Speaking at an event here on the completion of four years of the Pushkar Singh Dhami-led government's second term in Uttarakhand, the defence minister backed the prime minister's stance that "war is not a solution" and called for a resolution through dialogue and diplomacy.

"The world is passing through a period of crisis. The continuous attacks in West Asia are a matter of concern for the global community. Our prime minister has clearly stated that a resolution will only emerge through dialogue and diplomacy," Singh said in a post on X in Hindi.

"When the world is at war, no country can remain unaffected. India may also be impacted during such times, but our prime minister, through his competence, capability and foresight, has ensured that the country does not get trapped in these cri-

sis," he said.

Singh noted that the ongoing attacks in West Asia are a matter of concern for the global community. "The efforts being made by Modi ji at a global level to resolve this crisis deserve full support," he added.

While addressing the event, Singh lauded the Uttarakhand government for becoming the first in the country to implement the Uniform Civil Code (UCC). He maintained that the UCC was a provision envisioned by the makers of the Constitution, but was long delayed due to the "politics of appeasement" by parties like the Congress.

"While other parties play politics to form governments, the BJP does so for nation-building," Singh remarked, praising Dhami for his "dhuvandhar" (prodigious) performance over the last four years.

"After observing his work over the past four years, he should now be called 'Dhurandhar Dhami'. He has worked at a frantic pace. I could never have imagined that a government in a small state like Uttarakhand could function with such speed. In several sectors, the state has secured the top position in the country," the defence minister said.

Dhami first took charge of Uttarakhand in July 2021 and began his second consecutive term after the BJP returned to power in 2022. The defence minister noted that Dhami has served as chief minister for five consecutive years, while the BJP has governed the state for nine years, marking a significant chapter in the state's political history. He hailed the government for rapid progress in infrastructure, tourism, youth employment and women empowerment.

"Under the guidance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the state is playing a vital role in national development through a blend of spirituality and modernity," Singh added.

Highlighting major connectivity projects, the defence minister mentioned that work worth over Rs 2 lakh crore is currently underway, including the Chardham All-Weather Road, the Rishikesh-Karnaprayag rail line and the Delhi-Dehradun Expressway.

Singh asserted that the "double-engine government" -- referring to the BJP being in power at both the Centre and the state -- has set Uttarakhand on an unstoppable path toward becoming a developed state.

He also praised the government's focus on veterans, noting that Uttarakhand is the only state to have tripled the ex-gratia for Param Vir Chakra recipients from Rs 50 lakh to Rs 1.5 crore. He further cited the construction of the 'Sainya Dham' as a tribute to fallen soldiers.

Speaking about internal security and cultural integrity, Singh stated there is no room for illegal infiltration in the state. He commended the chief minister's crack-down on such activities and the removal of 10,000 illegal encroachments.

Navy set to...

they said.

As the fourth potent platform of the Project 17A class, 'Taragiri' is not merely a ship; it is a 6,670-tonne embodiment of the 'Make in India' spirit and the sophisticated engineering capabilities of our indigenous shipyards, a Navy spokesperson said.

The fourth ship of Nilgiri-class (Project 17A) and the third one built by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilding Ltd (MDL), 'Taragiri' (Yard 12653), was delivered to the Navy on November 28 last year at MDL, Mumbai, marking a major milestone in achieving self-reliance in warship design and construction.

This state-of-the-art frigate reflects a "quantum leap" in naval design, stealth, firepower, automation and survivability, and is a symbol of 'aatmanirbharta' in warship building, the Navy had then said.

"In a ceremony that will mark a defining moment for India's maritime sovereignty, the Navy is preparing to commission its latest stealth frigate, 'Taragiri' (F41), on April 3," the spokesperson said.

Driven by a Combined Diesel or Gas (CODOG) propulsion plant, 'Taragiri' is designed for "high speed, high endurance versatility and multi-dimensional maritime operations," the Navy said.

"The ship's weapon suite is world-class, featuring supersonic surface-to-surface missiles, medium range surface-to-air missiles, and a specialised anti-submarine warfare suite," the spokesperson added.

These systems are seamlessly integrated through a state-of-the-art Combat Management System, ensuring that the crew can "respond to threats with split-second precision," the official said.

Built by MDL, Mumbai, this frigate represents a "generational leap" over earlier designs, offering a sleeker form and a significantly reduced radar cross-section that allows it to operate with lethal stealth, the Navy said.

With indigenous content exceeding 75 per cent, the ship highlights the maturity of a domestic industrial ecosystem that now spans over 200 Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), and contributing to the government's Aatmanirbharta initiative, supports thousands of Indian jobs, the officials said.

Beyond its role as a "premier hunter of the seas", 'Taragiri' is built for the complexities of modern diplomacy and humanitarian crises.

Its "flexible mission profile" makes it ideal for everything from high-intensity combat to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR), the Navy said.

"The Indian Navy continues to grow as a combat-ready, cohesive, credible, Aatmanirbhara force, safeguarding the seas for a 'Viksit, Samridha Bharat' guarded by ships designed by Indians, built by Indians and operated by Indians. 'Taragiri' stands ready for a promising future as a beacon of rising maritime power and an ironclad guardian of our blue frontiers," it said.

Equality must translate...

expressing confidence that sustained efforts would help eliminate gender discrimination and realise the constitutional promise of equality.

Pointing to encouraging trends, the Chief Justice noted that women now constitute over 50 per cent of students in law schools and a significant proportion of new entrants to the Bar. However, he flagged concerns about attrition. "The problem starts after that. Are we able to maintain that equality at the subsequent stages of progression in life, progress in professional life," he asked.

Emphasising the need to address structural barriers, he said stakeholders must identify impediments that prevent women from continuing in the profession. "Let us identify the issues, the challenges, the impediments, the roadblocks, which are eventually denying equality to women," he said.

Suggesting concrete measures, the Chief Justice called for enhanced representation of women in government panels and legal aid. "Let's not go by 30 per cent -- at least 50 per cent women lawyers should be empanelled as government counsel," he said, adding that similar representation should be ensured in legal aid panels.

He said such steps would provide women lawyers with a platform and stability in their early years. "This is how you get a platform, an opportunity to show your work, the talent never hangs," he observed.

Highlighting progress in the judiciary, he noted that nearly 45-50 per cent of judicial officers in the country are women, with some states reporting up to 60 per cent representation at the entry level, which would eventually be reflected in higher judicial positions.

The Chief Justice also stressed the need for systemic support mechanisms, including maternity protection, safe working conditions, childcare facilities, and financial assistance. "There must be a child care centre in every judicial court complex," he said, adding that such infrastructure is essential for retention.

Calling for reforms in bar bodies, he emphasised the importance of transparency and representation, noting that institutional efforts have already begun in this direction.

J&K celebrates Eid...

spirit of unity and celebration.

Eid was also celebrated with traditional fervour across Doda, Kishtwar, Ramban, Poonch, Rajouri and Udhampur.

In Srinagar, the largest gathering assembled at the Hazratbal shrine on the banks of Dal Lake.

However, the authorities did not allow Eid prayers at the historic Jama Masjid at Nowhatta in the Old City area of Srinagar for the seventh year in a row.

Terming the development "unfortunate", Chief Minister Abdullah, who offered prayers at Hazratbal along with his father Farooq Abdullah, said, "On one hand, they claim that everything is normal, and on the other, they close the historic mosque. What kind of normalcy is this? I hope such decisions will be changed in future."

In Doda district, a large congregation assembled at Eidgah Doda, where prayers were led by the Imam of Jamia Masjid. Deputy Commissioner Krishan Lal and Senior Superintendent of Police Sandeep Kumar Mehta, along with senior citizens and officials, were present on the occasion. The district administration had made elaborate arrangements, including security and traffic management, ensuring smooth celebrations. The officials extended warm Eid greetings, emphasizing the festival's message of peace, brotherhood and harmony.

Similar celebration was witnessed in Gandoh subdivision, where devotees gathered at Eidgah to offer prayers peacefully. Sub Divisional Magistrate Arun Kumar Bhutyal reviewed the arrangements and conveyed greetings, expressing hope that the festival would strengthen unity and communal bonds in the region.

In Baderwah, large numbers of worshippers assembled at Eidgah to mark the

culmination of the holy month of Ramadan. Additional Deputy Commissioner Sunil Kumar Butyal, along with civil and police officers, visited the site and interacted with the public, extending wishes for peace, prosperity and harmony. Authorities ensured adequate arrangements for security and essential services.

Meanwhile, in Poonch district, Eid was celebrated with exceptional zeal, with thousands offering prayers at the main Eidgah. Deputy Commissioner Ashok Kumar Sharma and SSP Shafiqat Hussain Bhat joined the celebrations and extended greetings, highlighting the values of charity, devotion and sharing associated with the festival. People from different communities participated, exchanging greetings and sweets, reflecting unity in diversity.

Officials across districts appreciated public cooperation in maintaining law and order, while reiterating their commitment to communal harmony and peaceful co-existence.

Govt hikes commercial...

Later, a fifth of their supplies were restored, and the government offered an additional 10 per cent, subject to states expediting piped gas projects.

On Saturday, the government announced a 20 per cent enhanced allocation to key sectors such as restaurants, hotels, industrial canteens, food processing units, community kitchens and subsidised food outlets, while also supporting migrant workers through targeted distribution.

The additional allocation will be subject to commercial establishments registering with oil companies and applying for a piped natural gas connection, according to a letter written by the oil secretary to states.

An official statement said domestic LPG supply remains stable, with no reported shortages at distributorships and normal delivery operations continuing.

Panic bookings have declined, and citizens have been advised to avoid crowding and rely on home delivery.

To ease supply pressures, the government is also promoting a shift towards piped natural gas (PNG), particularly for commercial establishments, and has urged states to expedite approvals for city gas distribution networks. In parallel, all refineries are operating at high capacity with adequate crude inventories, ensuring sufficient availability of petrol and diesel.

No fuel shortages have been reported at retail outlets, and the public has been advised against panic buying, it said.

Natural gas supplies to priority segments, including domestic PNG and CNG transport, are being fully maintained, while industrial consumers are receiving about 80 per cent of their usual supply.

Additional steps include increased domestic LPG production, extended booking intervals, and allocation of extra kerosene supplies to states to provide alternative fuel options.

States and Union Territories have been directed to maintain strict vigilance against hoarding and black marketing, it said, adding more than 3,500 raids have been conducted nationwide, leading to the seizure of around 1,400 LPG cylinders.

Most states have also set up control rooms and district-level monitoring committees to oversee supply and distribution.

In the maritime sector, the government said 22 Indian-flagged vessels with 611 seafarers remain in the western Persian Gulf region, with no reported incidents in the past 24 hours.

Shah to introduce bill for 'umbrella' law on CAPFs; proposes 50 pc posts for IPS at IG level

■ STATE TIMES NEWS

NEW DELHI: Union Home Minister Amit Shah will introduce in the Rajya Sabha on Monday an "umbrella law" for central armed police forces (CAPFs) to regulate recruitment, deputation, promotion and other conditions of services of their officers, according to the List of Business issued by the House.

All the CAPFs -- CRPF, BSF, ITBP and SSB -- are governed by their respective Acts. The rules under these Acts govern the recruitment and conditions of service of Group A General Duty Officers and other officers and members in the CAPFs.

The Central Armed Police Forces (General Administration) Bill, 2026, provides that for the purposes of appointment of officers from the Indian Police Service in CAPFs, 50 per cent of the posts will be filled by deputation in the rank of Inspector General and a minimum of 67 per cent of the posts will be filled by deputation in the rank of Additional Director General.

The posts in the ranks of Special Director General and Director General shall be filled by deputation only, it proposes.

The proposed legislation comes after the Supreme Court, in October last year, dismissed the Centre's plea seeking a review of its 2025 verdict that directed that IPS officers' deputation in the CAPFs be reduced and asked for a cadre review to be carried out in six months.

"In view of expanding functional and operational requirements, the distinct organisational structure of these Forces have evolved over a period of time. In recent years, due to the absence of an umbrella law, regulatory provisions have evolved in a fragmented manner, resulting in several litigations on service-related matters, leading to some functional and administrative difficulties," the objectives of the bill state.

The bill seeks to regulate the recruitment, deputation, promotion and other conditions of services of Group A General Duty Officers and other officers appointed in these Central Armed Police Forces, the Objectives of the bill circulated among Rajya Sabha members said.

A group of retired CAPF officers have gone to the Supreme Court with a contempt plea against Home Secretary Govind Mohan for not implementing the Supreme Court's October order in this regard.

The proposed CAPF Regulation Bill, 2026, assumes considerable importance. Any legislative intervention affecting the command structure, service conditions and leadership opportunities within CAPFs inevitably carries implications not only for institutional morale but also for the operational effectiveness of forces responsible for protecting India's internal stability and border security," the group said in a press statement on Friday.

The proposed law states that under Article 312 of the Constitution, the Indian Police Service is an All India Service and the officers of the Service are posted in the Union and the States. "Historically, Indian Police Service officers are an integral and important part of the Central Armed Police Forces, who have been serving on deputation along with officers and members of these Forces," the Objectives of the Bill state. The CAPFs perform functions relating to national security and anti-insurgency in close coordination with the State authorities, it said.

"Therefore, in the interest of maintaining Centre-State relations by ensuring close coordination between the Union and the States for effective operational functioning, it is essential to maintain the existing system of deputation of the Indian Police Service Officers in the Central Armed Police Forces," the document said.

The listed objectives of the proposed law said that the CAPFs are governed by the respective Acts of Parliament.

It said that, considering the nature and purposes of the CAPFs and to avoid unnecessary litigations, there is a need to lay down an umbrella law to regulate the recruitment, deputation, promotion and other conditions of services of Group A General Duty Officers and other officers appointed in these Central Armed Police Forces and other rules regarding these Forces.

This is needed to ensure legislative clarity, preserving their distinct operational and functional requirements and harmonising judicial directions with administrative and federal requirements.

According to the proposed law, "Notwithstanding anything contained in any other law for the time being in force, or in any judgment, decree or order of any court; or any order issued from time to time, the central government may, by notification, make rules to provide for the method, manner and mode of recruitment including promotion and deputation and the conditions of service of officers in the Central Armed Police Force." A bench of Justices Surya Kant and Ujjal Bhuyan had in October rejected the Centre's plea seeking the review of the May 23, 2025, verdict of the apex court. In the May 23, 2025, order, the court directed the Centre to conduct a cadre review, which was due in 2021, in all the CAPFs, including the ITBP, BSF, CRPF, CISF and SSB, within six months.

A bench of Justices Abhay S Oka (since retired) and Ujjal Bhuyan directed the Department of Personnel and Training (DoPT) to take an appropriate decision within three months of receiving the action-taken report from the Ministry of Home Affairs regarding the cadre review and a review of the existing service rules or recruitment rules. "Keeping in mind the twin objectives of service mobility of the cadre officers of CAPF ... removing stagnation on the one hand and the operational/functional requirement of the forces on the other hand, we are of the view that the number of posts earmarked for deputation in the cadres of the CAPFs up to the level of senior administrative grade (SAG) should be progressively reduced over a period of time, say within an outer limit of two years," the top court had said. It had said this step would bring in a sense of participation of the cadre officers belonging to the CAPFs in the decision-making process within the forces' administrative framework, thereby removing their long-standing grievances.

The court had lauded the role of the CAPFs and said they are crucial for maintaining security at the country's borders as well as for discharging internal-security duties.