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the conflict started. These include leaders from Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Kuwait, Jordan, France and Malaysia.

Meanwhile, Pezeshkian conveyed to Modi that India, as the current chair of BRICS, can leverage its "independent role" in halting the "aggressions" against Iran and safeguarding peace and stability in the region.

The Iranian president also proposed setting up a regional security framework comprising West Asian countries to bring peace and stability in the region "without foreign interference", according to a readout released by Tehran.

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

The president stressed that the 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 Pezeshkian 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 Pezeshkian 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, Pezeshkian 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.

Illegal war...

at Nowhatta in Srinagar for congregational prayers on Eid for the seventh consecutive year, the chief minister termed it unfortunate.

"There is a mismatch between the words and the deeds of those in charge of security. 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," Abdullah said.

Meanwhile, CM Abdullah has extended warm greetings to the people of Jammu and Kashmir, as well as to those celebrating across the globe, on the auspicious occasions of Eid-ul-Fitr and Nauroz.

In his message on these festive occasions, the CM underscored the spiritual significance of Eid as a divine celebration after a month of fasting, prayers and self-discipline during Ramadan.

He noted that the festival is an occasion to offer gratitude to the Almighty and to celebrate the values of compassion, generosity and unity nurtured during the holy month.

"Eid is a joyous occasion that brings people together to celebrate the blessings of Ramadan. It strengthens the bonds of community and reaffirms the values of mutual respect and brotherhood. It is a time to spread happiness, extend kindness and lend a helping hand to those in need," he said.

Earlier, J&K National Conference President Dr Farooq Abdullah and Chief Minister Omar Abdullah offered Eid-ul-Fitr prayers at Asar-e-Sharief, Dargah Hazratbal. They were accompanied on the occasion by Zamir Abdullah and Zahir Abdullah.

They also offered Fatiha at the Mazar-e-Anwar of Sher-e-Kashmir Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah and Madar-e-Meharban.

SMVD Yatra...

visited the holy town of Katra and offered prayers at the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi temple atop Trikuta hills in 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 Shri 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 Chandi 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.

West Asia...

has kept India from falling into a difficult situation," Singh said in Hindi.

The defence minister's remarks came against the backdrop of increasing global concerns over fresh attacks on West Asian gas hubs.

An Israeli attack on Iran's strategic South Pars gas fields on Wednesday resulted in an intense Iranian retaliation on key energy infrastructure in a number of Gulf nations including Qatar's LNG (liquefied natural gas) hub of Ras Laffan.

Qatar accounts for nearly 40 per cent of India's LNG requirement.

In his virtual address at a separate event at Ghorakhal, Singh said modern-day warfare transcends borders and underlined the need for a robust military supported by "prepared citizens" capable of standing shoulder-to-shoulder to protect the nation under any circumstances.

"Present-day warfare transcends borders, with national security encompassing economic, digital, energy, and even food security," he said.

While the government, under the leadership of PM Modi, is leaving no stone unturned to equip the defence forces with niche weapons and technologies, the citizens, especially the youth, need to develop mental toughness and intellectual clarity through disci-

pline and determination to help the nation tackle every situation, he said.

Singh was speaking at the diamond jubilee celebrations of Sainik School, Ghorakhal in Uttarakhand.

Highlighting the steps taken by the government to ensure that a larger number of youth imbibe the values essential for nation-building, Singh mentioned the decision to establish 100 new Sainik Schools across the country in the public-private partnership model.

Another initiative includes increasing the number of vacancies within the National Cadet Corps (NCC), he said.

"Earlier, the NCC had an intake capacity of 17 lakh cadets; this has now been expanded to 20 lakh," he said.

Meanwhile, Rajnath Singh today credited Prime Minister Narendra Modi's competence and foresight for "safeguarding" 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 Dhamsi-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 crisis," 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 Dhamsi for his "dhurandhar" (prodigious) performance over the last four years.

"After observing his work over the past four years, he should now be called 'Dhurandhar Dhamsi'. 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.

Dhamsi 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 Dhamsi 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 crackdown on such activities and the removal of 10,000 illegal encroachments.

Fisheries Project...

of fish farmers in the Union Territory," the LG said in his post. Officials said the fisheries development project is expected to strengthen aquaculture infrastructure, enhance fish production and generate employment opportunities in rural and remote areas. The initiative also aims to promote modern technologies and capacity building among fish farmers to ensure sustainable growth of the sector. The move is being seen as part of broader efforts to diversify livelihood avenues and boost the blue economy in Jammu and Kashmir.

Jammu marks...

and charity, and ushers in a festival of joy, togetherness and thanksgiving.

Hundreds of devotees offered prayers at different mosques and eidgahs across the region, with the main congregation held at the eidgah on Residency Road in Jammu, followed by gatherings at the Mecca Masjid in Bathindi and the Jamia Masjid in Talab Khatikan.

Religious scholars highlighted the significance of the day, emphasising compassion, sacrifice and gratitude, and prayed for peace across the world, particularly in the conflict-hit regions of West Asia.

The Shahi Imam of Jammu, Mufti Inayatullah Qasmi, said Eid is a day of joy and gratitude after a month of fasting and worship.

"We pray that Allah keeps everyone happy, prosperous and in good health, and that humanity lives in peace and harmony," Qasmi told reporters here.

Referring to global conflicts, the Shahi Imam said war is not a solution and urged nations to resolve differences through dialogue.

"We appeal to all countries to sit together and end this loss of human lives," he said.

National Conference provincial president Rattan Lal Gupta, who visited the eidgah on Residency Road with party leaders to greet people, said Jammu has a long tradition of communal harmony.

"Irrespective of religion, people in Jammu celebrate each other's festivals together. Today also, people of all communities have gathered to share the joy of Eid," Gupta said.

Expressing hope that prayers offered on Eid would bring peace, prosperity and employment opportunities to the region, he said, "We also pray for an end to conflicts around the world."

Extending Eid greetings, National Conference MLA Bashir Ahmad Veeri said global conflicts have led to rising prices and hardships for the people.

"We pray that wisdom prevails, the war ends, and people get relief from suffering. We also pray for peace and brotherhood in our country," Veeri said.

After offering prayers, people were seen exchanging greetings and sweets to embrace the festival in a spirit of unity and celebration.

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

Shah to...

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.

The court had highlighted that the Centre has taken the view that the presence of Indian Police Service officers in each of the CAPFs is vital for the maintenance of their character as a unique central armed force.

"This is a policy decision. Of course, individual officers belonging to the IPS or the association of IPS officers cannot have a say as to how much the deputation quota should be and how long the deputation should continue.

"They are there on deputation by virtue of the policy decision of the central government manifested through the service rules/recruitment rules of the CAPFs.

"Having said that, we cannot also be oblivious of the grievance expressed by officers of the CAPFs as highlighted supra," it had said.

The court had said they have a grievance that, because of lateral entry into the higher grades of the respective forces, they are unable to get timely promotion.

"Consequently, there is a great deal of stagnation. Such stagnation can adversely impact the morale of the forces. This also needs to be factored in while considering review of such policy decisions," it had said.

US eases...

said in a long post on X. The price of Brent crude has witnessed sharp swings from roughly USD 70 per barrel before the war began to as high as USD 119.50 this week.

"Today, the Department of the Treasury is issuing a narrowly tailored, short-term authorisation permitting the sale of Iranian oil currently stranded at sea," Bessent said.

The US official claimed that at present, sanctioned Iranian oil is being hoarded by China on the cheap.

By temporarily unlocking this existing supply for the world, the United States will quickly bring approximately 140 million barrels of oil to global markets, expanding the amount of worldwide energy and helping to relieve the temporary pressures on supply caused by Iran, he said.

"In essence, we will be using the Iranian barrels against Tehran to keep the price down as we continue Operation Epic Fury," Bessent said.

The pause on sanctions on Iranian oil loaded on vessels begins Friday and is set to end on April 19.

Petrol prices have increased from USD 3 a gallon in the US before the war began to USD 3.99 on Saturday.

"This temporary, short-term authorisation is strictly limited to oil that is already in transit and does not allow new purchases or production," Bessent said.

Further, Iran will have difficulty accessing any revenue generated, and the United States will continue to maintain maximum pressure on Iran and its ability to access the international financial system, he said.

So far, the Trump Administration has been working to bring around 440 million additional barrels of oil to the global market, undercutting Iran's ability to leverage its disruptions in the Strait of Hormuz, the US official said.

Earlier Friday, US President Donald Trump said that the United States was considering "winding down" military operations against Iran but was not seeking a ceasefire with the Islamic Republic.

"We are getting very close to meeting our objectives as we consider winding down our great Military efforts in the Middle East with the terrorist regime of Iran," Trump said in a post on Truth Social, giving the strongest indication that he may be prepared to soon end hostilities.

At the White House on Friday, Trump said he was not looking at a ceasefire with Iran.

"Well, look, we can have dialogue, but I don't want to do a ceasefire. You know, you don't do a ceasefire when you're literally obliterating the other side. We're not looking to do that," the US President said before leaving for Florida.

Equality must...

is not merely on paper. So equality has to be translated into lived experiences," the Chief Justice said.

He lauded the survey prepared by women lawyers, describing it as "a very remarkable and a very scientific survey" and an "eye opener" that also provides a roadmap to identify challenges and solutions.

Describing the survey as a guiding framework, he said, "This report is a guidebook. It should hold as a smaller constitution for us," 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.

Govt raises...

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.

Navy set...

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, Aatmanirbhar force, safeguarding the seas for a 'Viksit, Samridhha 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.