

Cont. From Page 1

Iran Def Min, Revolutionary Guards commander killed

the capital. "When we are finished, take over your government. It will be yours to take. This will probably be your only chance for generations," Trump said in a video announcing "major combat operations" were underway. "For many years, you have asked for America's help, but you never got it."

Netanyahu echoed that sweeping goal. "Our joint operation will create the conditions for the brave Iranian people to take their fate into their own hands," he said.

The strikes opened a stunning new chapter in the US intervention in Iran and marked the second time in eight months that the Trump administration has used military force against the Islamic Republic. They came after tensions soared in recent weeks as American warships moved into the region, and Trump said he wanted a deal to constrain Iran's nuclear programme at a moment when the country is struggling at home with growing dissent following nationwide protests.

Iran responded to the attacks as it had been threatening to do for months, first launching a wave of missiles and drones targeting Israel. It followed with strikes targeting US military installations in Bahrain, Kuwait and Qatar. Shrapnel from an Iranian missile attack on the capital of the United Arab Emirates killed one person, state media said. The UAE and Iraq shut down their airspace.

Iran's Foreign Ministry issued a defiant statement, saying that the country "will not hesitate" in its response. In a statement posted on X, the ministry said: "The time has come to defend the homeland and confront the enemy's military assault."

Trump, in justifying the military action, claimed that Iran has continued to develop its nuclear programme and plans to develop missiles to reach the US.

He also acknowledged that there could be American casualties, saying "that often happens in war."

It was a notable call on Americans to brace themselves from a US leader who swept into office on an "America First" platform and vowed to keep out of "forever wars" that had bogged down his recent predecessors.

Trump's statement indicated the US was striking for reasons far beyond the nuclear programme, listing grievances stretching back to the beginning of the Islamic Republic following a revolution in 1979 that turned Iran from one of America's closest allies in the Middle East into a fierce foe.

The US president said he was aiming to "annihilate" the Iranian navy and destroy regional proxies supported by Tehran.

He also called on the Iranian Revolutionary Guard to lay down its arms, pledging that members would be given immunity, while warning they would face "certain death" if they didn't.

"They've rejected every opportunity to renounce their nuclear ambitions, and we can't take it anymore," Trump said.

Iran has said it hasn't enriched since June, but it has blocked international inspectors from visiting the sites America bombed during a 12-day war then. Satellite photos have shown new activity at two of those sites, suggesting Iran is trying to assess and potentially recover material there.

Iran currently has a self-imposed limit on its ballistic missile programme, limiting their range to 2,000 km (1,240 miles). That puts all the Middle East and some of Eastern Europe in their range. There is no public evidence of Iran seeking to have intercontinental ballistic missiles, though Washington has criticised its space programme as potentially allowing it to one day.

Iran had hoped to avert a war, but maintains it has the right to enrich uranium and does not want to discuss other issues, like its long-range missile programme or support for armed groups like Hamas and Hezbollah.

Iranian media reported strikes nationwide. Roads to Khamenei's compound in downtown Tehran had been shut down by authorities as other blasts rang out across the capital.

In Tehran, witnesses heard the first blast by Khamenei's office. Iranian state television later reported on the explosion, without offering a cause.

More explosions struck Iran's capital after Israel said it was attacking the country.

Targets in the Israeli campaign included Iran's military, symbols of government and intelligence targets, according to an official briefed on the operation, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss nonpublic information on the attack.

Hours after the strikes, Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard said it launched a "first wave" of drones and missiles targeting Israel, where a nationwide warning was issued as the military said it was working to intercept incoming Iranian missiles.

Meanwhile, Bahrain said that a missile attack targeted the US Navy's 5th Fleet headquarters in the island kingdom. Witnesses heard sirens and explosions in Kuwait, home to US Army Central. Explosions could also be heard in Qatar.

Iraq and the United Arab Emirates closed their airspace, and sirens sounded in Jordan.

The Iranian-backed Houthis in Yemen, meanwhile, vowed to resume attacks on Red Sea shipping routes and on Israel, according to two senior Houthi officials. They spoke on condition of anonymity because there was no official announcement from the Houthi leadership.

US embassies or consulates in Qatar, the United Arab Emirates and Israel posted on social media that they told staffers to shelter in place and recommended all Americans "do the same until further notice."

History created as J&K clinch maiden Ranji Trophy title

strength of a commanding 291-run first-innings lead. The team tightened its grip on the contest by piling up 342/4 in the second innings, stretching the overall advantage to 633 runs by the end of the fifth and final day at the KSCA Rajnagar Stadium in Hubbali.

Opener Qamran Iqbal led from the front with an unbeaten 160, his second century in first-class cricket, while Sahil Lotra struck a fluent maiden hundred (101 not out), ensuring J&K remained firmly in control.

With the ball, Auqib Nabi once again proved decisive. The pacer claimed a five-wicket haul for the seventh time this season, underlining his consistency and impact throughout the campaign.

Chief Minister Omar Abdullah, who was present at the stadium to witness the historic occasion, met the players after the match and congratulated them personally.

He applauded Qamran Iqbal and Sahil Lotra for their remarkable innings and commended Nabi for his match-winning spells, noting that his disciplined bowling was instrumental in steering the team to the title.

Omar was accompanied by his advisor Nasir Aslam Wani, Zadibal MLA Tanvir Sadiq and JKCA members.

Jammu and Kashmir made their debut in India's premier domestic competition 67 years ago. Despite reaching the quarterfinals in previous seasons, the elusive championship had remained out of reach until now.

J&K etched their name in the history books on the basis of a first-innings lead, after the final against Karnataka ended in a draw here.

Having secured a massive 291-run lead on Friday, J&K tightened their grip on the contest on the fifth and final day with another commanding batting display.

Resuming their second innings at 186 for four, Qamran, who was unbeaten on 94 overnight, and Sahil Lotra, who was on 16, completed well-crafted hundreds as J&K swelled their overall lead to 633 runs.

Iqbal and Lotra were batting on 160 and 101 respectively, with J&K at 342/4, when the two captains agreed to shake hands.

The side was 285 for four at lunch on day five.

Earlier, replying to J&K's imposing first-innings total of 584, Karnataka were bowled out for 293 in 93.3 overs, with pacer Auqib Nabi claiming five for 54 to put his side in total control.

J&K opted not to enforce the follow-on and instead batted Karnataka out of the contest.

The victory marks Jammu and Kashmir's first-ever Ranji Trophy title, a landmark achievement in the region's cricketing journey since it started playing the tournament 67 years ago.

Brief scores: Jammu and Kashmir 584 and 342/4 in 113 overs (Qamran Iqbal 160, Sahil Lotra 101; Prasad Krishna 2/42).

Karnataka 293 all out in 93.3 overs.

Calling it a defining moment for J&K cricket, the chief minister travelled to Hubbali to personally cheer the team. "I am in Hubbali to cheer the J&K cricket team as they seal a historic win. There hasn't been a single day in this five-day final when the team has not dominated the opposition," he remarked.

He arrived in Karnataka on Friday evening.

In a post on X, the PM lauded the team's remarkable grit, discipline and passion that led to their first-ever Ranji Trophy victory.

"The triumph reflects the growing sporting talent and enthusiasm in Jammu and Kashmir and described it as a proud moment for its people," he said and expressed hope that the historic feat would inspire young athletes across the region to dream big and actively pursue sports."

In a post on X, Amit Shah extended his heartfelt congratulations to the youth of Jammu and Kashmir, particularly Team J&K for scripting history with their maiden Ranji title win.

"The achievement fills every citizen with immense pride and reflects the transformation taking place in the Union Territory," he said.

Shah added that the changes witnessed in Jammu and Kashmir had shaped a new identity for its youth, driven by the principles of peace, progress and prosperity, which he described as the guiding force of the New Jammu and Kashmir.

1 killed, 2 injured in truck accident

others, officials said. The dead was identified as Maqsood Ahmad and the injured as Sajad Ahmad, son of Mohammad Afzal of Sarikhawaja, and Zahoor Ahmad, son of Mohammad Ashraf of Fatehpur.

The injured were undergoing treatment at the district hospital, Poonch. Police had taken cognizance of the incident.

INC has become Muslim League-Maoist Cong, tries to defame country: Modi

over Rs 16,600 crore.

"They created an entire drama to insult India before foreign dignitaries," the prime minister said, referring to the "shirless protest" by the Indian Youth Congress at the recently concluded India AI Impact Summit in Delhi.

While the country's people felt proud, the Congress tried to defame the country in front of foreign dignitaries, he said.

"The Congress has been continuously losing (elections) across the country, and due to its anger, it is taking revenge by tarnishing India's image.

Modi further said, "There was a time when the Congress was known as the INC - Indian National Congress. But today, that INC no longer remains... and it has become MMC - Muslim League-Maoist Congress." History bears witness to the Muslim League's hatred towards India, which is why the country was partitioned. Today, the Congress is acting in the same manner, he said.

"Maoists, too, resent India's prosperity, our Constitution, and our successful democracy. They carry out ambush attacks. Similarly, the Congress intrudes anywhere it can to malign the nation," he said.

The country will never forgive the Congress' misdeeds, he said, adding that defaming the nation and weakening its armed forces has long been the opposition party's habit.

"Our forces earned global recognition for their valour, but Congress leaders chose to amplify the false narratives of our adversaries. The Congress opposes whatever is good for the nation, whatever benefits the country and its citizens. This is why the country is teaching the Congress a lesson today," Modi said.

Arbitration framework matured considerably, but challenges remain: CJJ
tion in the hope of something better and faster than litigation.

He referred to Gujarat Chief Minister Bhupendra Pa-

tel's address at the same event, wherein the CM highlighted the growing importance of institutional arbitration within India's legal and jurisdictional framework, particularly for a state like Gujarat, which leads the nation in industrial development and technological advancement.

"I must acknowledge that India's arbitration framework has by now matured considerably. Legislative reforms to the Arbitration Act have emphasised minimal judicial intervention, time-bound proceedings, and neutrality in appointments. Parallely, judicial pronouncements have reinforced party autonomy and clarified doctrinal uncertainties," the CJJ said.

However, the CJJ noted that progress does not eliminate existing challenges. Institutional arbitration, he observed, still occupies a smaller space than it ought to, with a substantial volume of disputes continuing through ad hoc mechanisms. Moreover, many institutional arbitration disputes still prefer destinations outside India.

"The question we must confront is not whether arbitration is viable, the question is whether our institutional arbitration and our institutions meant for that inspire sufficient trust to become the most preferred choice and destination," he said, pointing to challenges including building trust, capacity and availability of trained professionals.

Addressing the first challenge - trust - CJJ Surya Kant said institutional arbitration fulfils its promise only when users genuinely trust it.

"Trust in the neutrality of arbitrator appointments, trust in procedural integrity, trust in the enforcement of awards - that trust is not built by rules on paper. It is built through consistent, transparent, and demonstrably fair practice over time," he said.

The CJJ added that we must ask honestly whether our institutions have earned that trust in full, and what more they must do to earn it.

The second challenge, he said, is capacity. "The number of institutional arbitrations in India remains disproportionately small relative to the volume of commercial disputes generated in the country. Too many parties still default to ad hoc arbitration or courts because institutions have not sufficiently demonstrated the value they add," the CJJ added.

Utilising institutional capacity in terms of infrastructure, internal panels of arbitrators, case management systems, and administrative competence "is not a question of prestige; it is a question of relevance," he said.

According to the CJJ, the third challenge is the "challenge of professionalisation", which appears to be the most challenging and consequential.

"Arbitration at its finest is a specialised discipline. It demands not only legal equity, but case management skills, sensitivity to commercial realities, and an understanding of what is genuinely in stakes for the parties.

"India must invest seriously in training arbitrators, and in developing a coherent pipeline of qualified arbitral professionals," he added.

Without that investment, growth in the number of institutions will outpace growth in the quality of the process, he said.

The CJJ said the way forward lies in institutional honesty - not in measuring ourselves against where we begin, but against where it needs to be: the standards of leading arbitral seats globally and the legitimate expectations of parties seeking an efficient alternative to litigation.

The state-of-the-art building of Gujarat High Court Arbitration Centre (GHAC) consists of 16 arbitration conference rooms, seven mediation rooms and an online dispute resolution system catering for the needs of international and domestic alternative dispute resolution.

The GHAC also organised a two-day conference on the theme: Institutional Arbitration at Crossroads: Challenges and the Way Forward, which brings together arbitrators, advocates, and all other stakeholders to deliberate on key aspects of institutional arbitration.

LG congratulates J&K cricket team on Ranji win

He hailed the achievement as a defining moment in the Union Territory's sporting history, praising players and coaching staff for their extraordinary performance, and ded-

PM's Israel visit 'ill-timed', creates perception of endorsement of military action: Cong

NEW DELHI, FEB 28: The Congress on Saturday termed Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Israel "shameful" and "ill-timed," saying it creates the perception of a political endorsement of military escalation which is deeply antithetical to India's historic commitment to a rules-based international order.

"Congress is deeply concerned at Modi's visit to Israel from February 25 to 26 at a moment of heightened tensions, a break-out of hostilities and the palpable risk of wider conflict in West Asia," Salman Khurshid, Chairman of the Congress Foreign Affairs Department, said in a statement.

US President Donald Trump on Saturday announced that his country has begun "major combat operations

in Iran" after Israel launched strikes.

The Congress said Modi's visit is "particularly ill-timed" because it creates a perception of partisan alignment and tacit endorsement of unprovoked aggression could have grave strategic consequences. It also said it risks conveying alignment with and endorsement of an incumbent government ahead of national elections.

"Prime Minister Modi's visit at this juncture creates the perception of a political endorsement of military escalation, which is deeply antithetical to India's historic commitment to a rules-based international order and the United Nations Charter-particularly the prohibition on the use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any State

(Article 2 [4]) and the peaceful settlement of disputes (Article 2 [3])," Khurshid said.

Congress general secretary, communications, Jairam Ramesh also said that two days after Modi "celebrated his visit to Israel", Israel and the US began their joint assault on Iran.

"This was fully expected given their military build-up in the last few months. Modi nevertheless chose to go to Israel, where he displayed the highest moral cowardice. He declared that India stood with Israel and got himself an award for saying so. This Israel visit was shameful and it is even more so in light of the war that has been launched by two of Mr. Modi's 'good friends'," Ramesh wrote on X.

West Bengal SIR: 63.66 lakh names deleted as ECI releases final voter list

NEW DELHI, FEB 28: With the removal of about 63.66 lakh absentee, shifted, dead and duplicate (ASDD) names, the Election Commission of India (ECI) on Saturday released the final voter list following the Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal ahead of assembly polls.

"More than 63 lakh voters have been deleted from the final voters' list in the state while another 60 lakh electors belong to the 'under adjudication' group and their

voting rights will be decided by judicial officers," Manoj Agarwal, West Bengal Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) Manoj Agarwal told a press conference here.

An EC official, however, said the exact number of deletions can be confirmed only after the complete rolls are published online. Even the final figures may not remain static, as additions through Form 6 applications and fresh deletions via Form 7 applications will continue to alter the tally.

As per the report, another

60.06 lakh names have been placed under the "under adjudication" category. These cases are currently being examined by judicial officers, and their inclusion or deletion will be decided in subsequent supplementary lists. Officials indicated that this adjudication process could further push up the total deletions in the final rolls.

At present, around 6.4 crore names have been approved as voters across the state. However, this figure is also expected to rise sig-

21 killed, 8 critically injured in cracker unit explosion

VETLAPALEM (ANDHRA PRADESH), FEB 28: As many as 21 people were killed and 8 others critically injured in the cracker unit blast here in Kakinada district on Saturday, Andhra Pradesh Minister Kandula Durgesh said.

"As far as I know, 21 bodies are seen here (at the site). Another eight persons are undergoing treatment in hospitals. Approximately there were 30 people in the unit," the minister told reporters.

"This is the biggest blast in the state. Full details are yet to come. There is no chance that anyone would survive. Some people are undergoing treatment, he said.

He further said officials are inquiring into the cause of the fire, which led to the blast. All workers belong to poor sections of society. The chief

minister will certainly make a decision on supporting the families.

"But we can not bring back lives. It has come to my knowledge that there is a lot of stock in the unit (at the time of the blast). So even a minor accident may turn into a major one as all are explosive in nature," he said.

The blast occurred around 2 pm.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he was pained by the explosion in the firecrackers manufacturing unit in Kakinada district that left 21 dead.

In a post on 'X', Modi announced Rs 2 lakh ex gratia from PMNRF to the next of kin of each deceased while the injured would be given Rs 50,000.

"Pained by the loss of lives in the explosion at a factory in Kakinada district of Andhra Pradesh. I extend my condolences to those who lost their

loved ones. May the injured recover soon," Modi said.

Union Home Minister Amit Shah also condoled the deaths.

"Deeply saddened by the tragic fire accident at a cracker factory in Andhra Pradesh. Rescue and relief operations are underway, and medical care is being provided to the injured. My heartfelt condolences to the bereaved families and prayers for the swift recovery of those affected," Shah said in a post on 'X'.

Chief Minister N Chandrababu Naidu expressed sadness over a large number of cracker manufacturing workers losing their lives at Surya Fireworks, said an official release.

"The explosion at a crackers manufacturing unit at Vetlapalem village in Kakinada district has really pained me. Multiple people losing their lives

Science cornerstone of self-reliant, developed India: Kavinder

CHANDIGARH, FEB 28: Asserting that women-led science would power Viksit Bharat, Ladakh LG Kavinder Gupta today said that 'science is the cornerstone of self-reliant & developed India'.

"Science is not merely an academic pursuit but the very cornerstone of a self-reliant, prosperous and developed India, he said while addressing National Science Day 2026 celebrations at the prestigious Council of Scientific & Industrial Research - Central Scientific Instruments Organisation (CSIR-CSIO), Chandigarh.

Gupta emphasised that true scientific temper lies in challenging assumptions and translating knowledge into solutions that touch the lives of ordinary citizens. Paying rich tributes to Nobel Laureate Sir C V Raman on the 98th anniversary of the landmark discovery of the Ra-

man Effect, he said that Raman's path-breaking discovery was not made with billion-dollar instruments but with a focused mind, a precise question and an unshakeable faith in science - a lesson equally relevant for today's generation of researchers.

Speaking on the topic "Women in Science: Catalysing Viksit Bharat," the LG said, "When women lead in science, nation scales new heights of progress."

He invoked the towering contributions of Dr Asima Chatterjee in medicinal chemistry, Dr Tessy Thomas in missile technology and the women scientists of ISRO whose collective brilliance scripted history with the successful landing of Chandrayaan-3 at the Moon's South Pole. "This was not merely a scientific triumph - it was a triumph of women power," he said.

Gupta made a firm pledge from the

podium that no talented daughter of Ladakh - irrespective of economic hardship, social pressure or lack of opportunity - would ever be denied a career in science. He urged the entire scientific community to mentor generously, create opportunities with an open heart and actively dismantle the invisible barriers that prevent women from realising their full potential. Expressing his deepest aspiration, he said, "I hope and pray that India's next Nobel Prize is won by a woman scientist." Highlighting Ladakh's extraordinary identity as a natural laboratory of global significance, the LG said that with over 300 days of sunshine annually, pristine skies and a unique high-altitude ecosystem, Ladakh holds immense potential for astronomy, solar energy, glacier studies, water conservation and cold desert agriculture.