

Cont. From Page 1

UN calls for de-escalation, says Iran war risking to get out of control

store stability in the Middle East. France calls for the immediate implementation of a moratorium on strikes targeting civilian infrastructure, whether related to water or to energy. Freedom and security of navigation must be restored.

As the region enters a period of religious celebrations and renewal, tempers must cool and hostilities must cease, in order to give a real chance to the prospect of a negotiated and sustainable solution," Macron added, highlighting the urgency of diplomatic efforts during sensitive periods of social and religious observance.

Meanwhile, British Prime Minister Keir Starmer condemned the overnight Iranian strike on a Qatari gas facility. "I condemn in the strongest terms the overnight Iranian strike on a Qatari gas facility. We are working towards a swift resolution to the situation in the Middle East, in the best interests of the British people, because there is no question that ending the war is the quickest way to reduce the cost of living," Starmer said.

Global leaders' statements signal a concerted call for restraint, restoration of navigation freedoms, and urgent diplomatic engagement to prevent the conflict from escalating further and creating wider humanitarian and economic crises.

2 UAPA accused granted bail; 2 'ISIS-JK operatives' acquitted

ment, the court noted that the appellants were allegedly part of social media groups where anti-national messages propagating terrorism were being shared, but there was no allegation of their being the creators of the groups or of sharing any objectionable material.

Although the material found on the digital devices of the appellants may be propagating anti-national activities, it cannot justify the continuation of their prolonged detention at the stage of trial, the bench said.

The court cited a Supreme Court ruling to emphasise the difference between "ideological alignment" and "operational participation" while deciding matters of bail in UAPA cases.

According to that ruling, the court said, sympathy for a cause, or even the possession of literature and digital content associated with a banned outfit, does not by itself constitute membership of such outfit or active participation in its terrorist activities.

The court also took into account that Langoo suffered from cervical spondylosis, which deteriorated during the period of his incarceration, and stated that an undertrial prisoner's health is a relevant consideration when assessing rights under Article 21 of the Constitution.

Prolonged pre-trial detention of a person whose alleged role is predominantly digital and non-violent in nature, and who is additionally suffering from an ailment, further tilts the balance in favour of conditional release, it said.

The court said the case and evidence against the appellants have to be tested in the trial.

It said the bail was subject to certain conditions, which had been "calibrated" to protect the legitimate interests of national security and the integrity of the trial process.

At the same time, it must also be ensured that the appellants were "not subjected to pre-trial detention that has effectively become punitive given the projected duration of trial and the limited role attributed to them in the charge sheet," the court said.

Besides ordering the surrender of their passports, the court also directed the appellants to neither join any WhatsApp group, nor any other social media platforms where anti-national material was uploaded, circulated, or propagated, nor share such content on any platform.

It also asked them to fully cooperate with the trial, periodically report to the local police station, furnish their residential address and not leave the country without permission.

In the instant matter, the FIR was registered by the NIA on October 10, 2021, under the Indian Penal Code and the Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act [UAPA].

The FIR was filed at the instance of the central government to the agency to take up investigation allegedly after it was "reliably learnt that cadres of proscribed terrorist organizations are all active in Jammu and Kashmir and are being orchestrated from Pakistan and are conspiring both physically and in cyberspace and planning to undertake violent terrorist acts in J & K and major cities in India, including New Delhi." In their appeals, Langoo and Bhat, both in their 20s, said they worked as part-time delivery agents at a local restaurant in Srinagar, and no incriminating material was recovered from them to suggest they were part of any of the proscribed outfits or were actively propagating their ideology.

The prosecution alleged that Bhat was a highly radicalised individual who actively propagated videos, images, and audio material related to the Islamic State and Islamic State Jammu and Kashmir among his contacts to motivate and radicalise them to join jihad.

Langoo, it was alleged, was closely associated with Bhat and other accused, and acted as a facilitator for the dissemination of radical content through digital platforms.

The petitions said the FIR in the present case was vague and did not name the appellants, and the lower court order of March 3, 2023, refusing to grant them bail should be set aside.

In April 2022, the NIA filed a chargesheet in the case under sections 120B, 121A, 122, 123 of the IPC and sections 18, 18A, 18B, 20, 38 and 39 of the UAPA, which included the offences of waging war against the country, conspiracy, and terrorist activities.

Meanwhile, flagging gaps in the probe, a Delhi court acquitted two valley residents accused of pledging allegiance to banned terrorist organisation ISIS, besides procuring arms and ammunition from Uttar Pradesh for the Islamic State Jammu & Kashmir (ISIS-JK) cadres for executing terrorist acts.

Underlining that the prosecution had failed to prove its case beyond a reasonable doubt, Additional Sessions Judge Amit Bansal acquitted Jamsheed Zahoor and Parvaiz

Rashid Lone, both residents of Shopian in Kashmir. They were arrested in 2018.

The special cell of Delhi police had registered a case against them under sections 18 (punishment for conspiracy) and 20 (punishment for being members of terrorist gang or organisation) of Unlawful Activities (Prevention) Act (UAPA) and under the Arms Act provisions.

Police claimed that they had received a tip-off that Zahoor and Lone had pledged allegiance to ISIS and were in Delhi to procure weapons for terrorist activities on September 6, 2018.

The special cell alleged that the duo were apprehended at the Jama Masjid bus stop on Netaji Subhash Marg, near Red Fort, with two 7.65mm pistols and ten live cartridges.

In a 79-page order, the court said, "It is held that the prosecution has failed to prove its case beyond reasonable doubt against both the accused persons. Both the accused persons are thus acquitted in this case."

Highlighting the failure to follow rules regarding the handling of digital evidence, the court said four mobile phones seized from the accused were kept unsealed in the custody of the investigating officer (IO) for nearly two months before being sent for forensic analysis.

"It raises a strong doubt of tampering with the said mobile phones as without any plausible or satisfactory explanation the prolonged custody of the said devices remained with the IOs and that too in an unsealed condition," the court said.

The court also rejected screenshots of alleged chats with their terror handlers, saying it failed to meet the mandatory requirement regarding the admissibility of electronic evidence.

While the prosecution claimed the duo was in touch with ISIS-JK handlers via the BBM (BlackBerry Messenger) app, the court found no evidence to establish such a nexus.

"The prosecution has also failed to prove that the accused persons used to communicate with their handlers, namely, Umarbin Nazir and Adil Thokar on BBM App," the court said.

Another major lacuna, the court flagged, was the lack of independent witnesses. Despite the arrest taking place at 10:45 PM in a busy area near a metro station and bus stand, no public witnesses were made part of the investigation.

"The failure to join independent witnesses, especially when the public witnesses were available raises a strong doubt on the prosecution version regarding the recovery of the said arms and ammunition from the accused persons," the court said.

Concluding the verdict, Judge Bansal said that the prosecution failed to prove that on September 9, 2018, both accused persons were members of ISIS and had conspired with two other co-accused, Asif Nazir Dar alias Um-mar Ibn Nazir, who later died, and Adil Vani alias Adil Thokar, who is still absconding, to commit terrorist act or any activity linked to the commission of a terrorist act at different places within the country.

He said it was also not proved that the duo, in pursuance of the said conspiracy, purchased or collected weapons for committing terrorist acts and also had chats with their handlers and co-accused through BBM and WhatsApp.

"The prosecution has also failed to prove that during the said period prior to September 6, 2018, both the accused persons were found to be members of ISIS which is a banned terrorist organisation and is involved in committing terrorist acts," the judge said.

LG, CM greet people on Eid-ul-Fitr

month of Ramzan, is an occasion of profound spiritual and social significance. The sacred festival embodies the noble spirit of sacrifice and the joy of sharing. On this day, let us recommit to humanity's service, and uplifting the lives of the poor & needy," he said.

"May Eid usher in peace, prosperity and happiness for all," Sinha added.

Meanwhile, Omar also 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, he 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.

"The festival reflects the rich ethos of communal harmony, shared heritage and cultural inclusivity that defines J&K, reinforcing the spirit of unity and peace," he added.

On this occasion, he prayed for lasting peace, sustained progress and prosperity for the people of Jammu and Kashmir, and conveyed his best wishes to all those celebrating Eid-ul-Fitr worldwide.

He also extended warm greetings to the people on the occasion of Nauroz.

"Nauroz marks the arrival of spring and the beginning of Persian New Year & symbolizes renewal, hope and harmony," he said.

He said the festival, celebrated with great enthusiasm in various parts of the region, reflects a rich cultural heritage and the spirit of togetherness.

He prayed for sustained peace, development, and prosperity in Jammu & Kashmir and hoped that the festival would bring joy and positivity to every household.

Panel to review AI use in ACB probes

in this regard. JaKeGA CEO would be the chairman of the committee

which would have four members and a member secretary. AIG (administration), ACB Hqrs, J&K, would be the Single Point of Contact for the committee which would submit its report to information technology department within a period of 45 days from the date of issuance of the order.

The member secretary shall coordinate with all the committee members for timely convening of meeting(s) and ensure timely appraisal/vetting of document (s), says the order.

Jaishankar, Wong share assessments as hostilities enter 21st day

rael's operations against what he described as the "Iranian terror regime," highlighting Tehran's acts of "naval terrorism" in the Strait of Hormuz.

The Israeli Foreign Minister addressed the Iranian regime's aggression toward other countries in the Middle East, the Caucasus, and Europe, describing its behaviour as "acting madly."

Saar also shared details of the conversation on X, stating, "Spoke with my friend, India's Minister of External Affairs S Jaishankar, and briefed him on developments in our operation against the Iranian terror regime."

Further highlighting the global impact of the crisis, Saar noted, "I said that the regime is carrying out naval terrorism in the Strait of Hormuz. This is not an American or Israeli issue; it's a fundamental problem affecting world order and the global economy. If this grave phenomenon is not addressed now, it could spread worldwide." He reiterated that Israel values its partnership with India, "the world's largest democracy."

Acknowledging the exchange, EAM Jaishankar stated in a post on X, "Had a telecon with FM Gidon Saar of Israel this evening. Exchanged views on the ongoing West Asia conflict and its many repercussions."

The development comes amid the escalating conflict that began on February 28 with the killing of 86-year-old Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in joint military strikes by the US and Israel. Following his death, Mojtaba Khamenei, son of the former leader, was appointed as the new Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic.

In the ensuing retaliation, Iran targeted Israeli and US assets in several Gulf countries and Israel, causing major disruption in the waterway. Due to the ongoing conflict, Iran has virtually closed the Strait of Hormuz, a critical transit route for the global energy supply, severely affecting international energy markets and global economic stability.

Rules notified for simplified Income Tax law

come into force on the April 1, 2026," a gazette notification said.

Parliament on August 12, 2025 passed a new Income Tax Bill to replace the six-decade-old Income Tax Act, 1961. It does not impose any new tax rate and only simplified the language, which was required for understanding the complex Income Tax laws.

The Act has removed redundant provisions and archaic language and reduces the number of Sections from 819 in the Income Tax Act of 1961 to 536 and the number of chapters from 47 to 23.

The number of words had been reduced from 5.12 lakh to 2.6 lakh in the new Income Tax Bill, and for the first time, introduces 39 new tables and 40 new formulas, replacing the dense text of the 1961 law to enhance clarity.

New rules create stricter regulations around capital gains, stock exchange dealings and non-resident taxation while simplifying other disclosure mechanisms.

The notification, introduces more than 150 official forms - numbered from Form 33 onwards - covering a wide range of tax-related activities.

Income tax rules retain the proposed framework for house rent allowance (HRA) exemptions applicable to salaried taxpayers.

Under the new rules, eight cities - Mumbai, Kolkata, Delhi, Chennai, Hyderabad, Pune, Ahmedabad, and Bengaluru - will qualify for a higher exemption limit of 50 per cent of salary, while all other locations will continue at 40 per cent.

At present, salaried employees in Mumbai, Delhi, Kolkata, and Chennai are allowed to claim HRA exemption of up to 50 per cent of their salary, while those living in other locations are eligible for a lower limit of 40 per cent.

The new rules notified seek disclosure of tenant-landlord relationship for claiming I-T deductions and increased responsibility of auditors and companies for tax credit claims on foreign income.

It also entrusts auditors with greater responsibility for checking PAN duplication and tax liability arising out of adverse audit observation.

It also clarifies how the holding period of assets will be calculated in specific cases to determine whether gains are short-term or long-term.

For converted securities such as shares or debentures, the holding period will include the time for which the original instrument - like bonds, debentures, or deposit certificates - was held before conversion.

Normal petrol, diesel prices remain unchanged

Alongside, bulk or industrial diesel prices were hiked from Rs 87.67 per litre to Rs 109.59 in Delhi.

International oil prices touched USD 119 per barrel on Thursday on intensifying Iran war, before pulling back to around USD 108 a barrel.

A litre of normal petrol in Delhi continues to cost Rs 94.77 while the same grade diesel comes for Rs 87.67 a litre.

Normal petrol typically has an octane rating of 91-92 and is suitable for standard engines, offering adequate performance for everyday driving. Premium petrol, on the other hand, has a higher-octane rating of 95-98, making it ideal for high-performance or high-compression engines.

At a media briefing, Sujata Sharma, Joint Secretary, Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, said there was no increase in prices of normal petrol and diesel.

"Some increase is reported in the premium category which hardly makes up for 2-4 per cent of the entire petrol (sold in the country)," she said. "There is no increase in price

for the common man.

Pricing decisions, she said, are taken by oil companies independently as petrol and diesel pricing was deregulated in 2010 and 2014 respectively. "It (pricing) is decided by oil marketing companies. Government does not regulate petrol and diesel prices," she added.

The government is closely monitoring global oil markets, but there is no immediate plan to raise retail fuel prices. Oil marketing companies are expected to absorb the current cost pressure for the time being.

"Our priority is to make energy available to all consumers, which we have been doing all through the crisis. Till now we have not increased the prices," she added.

Retail petrol and diesel prices have been frozen since April 2022, with fuel retailers like Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) absorbing losses when crude prices are high and making profits when rates are low.

This meant that when global fuel prices went up in response to elevated crude prices, prices were stable in India. And when softening of crude prices pushed down fuel rates globally, rates in India remained unchanged.

The government wants to continue to shield consumers, and the same policy will continue unless there is a huge spike in crude prices.

India imports 88 per cent of its crude oil needs and roughly half of its natural gas requirement. These mostly come via the Strait of Hormuz. Following the US and Israeli attacks on Iranian government, military and nuclear facilities, Iran warned shipping away from the strait, and insurers withdrew coverage, effectively halting tanker movements.

Prices had risen to USD 119 per barrel in June 2022 in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. That year, oil companies had nominal profits, but in FY24, they posted record Rs 81,000 crore profit, helping make up for past dent in margins.

This year, the three companies have posted Rs 23,743 crore profit in the December quarter alone.

Woman missing for 11 yrs reunited with family

formation, officials said. Police worked on whatever information they had and ultimately succeeded in tracing her family and establishing contact with them, the officials added.

Police in Uttar Pradesh were contacted and they cooperated in facilitating the reunion. As a result, the woman was successfully reunited with her family, officials said.

Her family members visited Surankote, where after completing legal formalities, she was handed over to them, officials said.

The good work done by police was widely appreciated by locals and senior police officers.

J&K to host Travel Mart on Apr 14-15

UT of J&K.

"J&K tourism department is set to host the Kashmir Travel Mart-2026 on April 14-15, bringing together around 250 stakeholders from over 20 states across the country," Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said in a post on his official X handle.

"The event will highlight the region's immense tourism potential through craft safaris, curated destination tours, and B2B engagements, offering stakeholders a rich and immersive experience of Kashmir's culture, heritage, and warm hospitality," he said.

The chief minister termed it as a significant initiative aimed at strengthening tourism linkages and further positioning Kashmir as a premier global travel destination.

Trump calls allies 'cowards' over lack of support in Iran conflict

REMEMBER!"

Germany, Britain, France, Italy, the Netherlands, Japan and Canada pledged in a joint statement to join "appropriate efforts to ensure safe passage through the Strait." But German Chancellor Friedrich Merz made clear that this presupposed an end to combat.

French President Emmanuel Macron said after a European Union summit in Brussels that defending international law and promoting de-escalation was "the best we can do," adding: "I have not heard anyone here express a willingness to enter this conflict" quite the opposite."

6 Indians killed, 1 missing amid West Asia conflict

remains of the deceased Indian nationals to India," he said.

Mahajan added that the travel situation from the Gulf region was gradually improving, with a significant number of passengers already returning to India. "The situation continues to improve with additional flights operating from the region. Since February 28, around 300,000 passengers have returned from the region to India," the MEA official said.

According to Mahajan, airlines from the United Arab Emirates are continuing to operate limited non-scheduled flights depending on operational and safety considerations. "From the UAE, airlines continue to operate limited non-scheduled flights based on operational and safety considerations. Today, again, around 90 flights are expected to operate from various airports in the UAE to India," he added.

Flights are also continuing from Oman and Saudi Arabia, while the partial reopening of airspace in Qatar has allowed some commercial movement. "With the Qatar airspace partially open, Qatar Airways is expected to operate 10 non-scheduled commercial flights to India today," Mahajan said.

However, airspace in Kuwait and Bahrain remains closed. To assist stranded passengers, Kuwait Airways will begin special non-scheduled commercial flights from Al Qaisumah International Airport in Saudi Arabia to India, with the first flight scheduled to depart for Kochi on Friday. "This will facilitate the travel of Indian nationals from Kuwait to India," Mahajan said. Similarly, Gulf Air of Bahrain continues to operate special non-scheduled commercial flights from King Fahd International Airport in Saudi Arabia to India amid ongoing airspace restrictions.

Teen daughter of North Korean leader Kim drives a tank while observing drill with her father

SEOUL, Mar 20: The teenage daughter of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un has driven a tank during army training supervised by her father, the pair's latest joint public appearance fueling outside speculation that the girl is groomed as Kim's heir.

The official Korean Central News Agency reported Friday that Kim oversaw an offensive tactical drill involving tank units and in-

fantry troops a day earlier and called for completing war preparations. Newsletters

Video and images released by state media showed Kim's daughter sticking her head out of the driver's hatch of a moving, olive green tank while her smiling father sat on top with three soldiers.

Observers say the girl's position clearly showed she was driving the armored vehicle, her first such ac-

tivity. But they note modern tanks are not technically complicated to pilot, especially while moving slowly for a brief time.

"She only drove straight at a low speed. It's also easy to drive modern tanks, and I think it was easier for her to drive as she was on a flat ground," said Lee Illwoo, an expert with the Korea Defense Network in South Korea.

The girl, reportedly named Kim

Ju Ae and aged about 13, has accompanied her father to a number of high-profile military and other events since late 2022. North Korean state media has called her Kim Jong Un's "most beloved" or "respected" child and published footage and photos indicating the two's closeness.

They recently fired pistols during a visit to a light munitions factory and watched a live-fire test of

multiple rocket launch systems. In September, the girl went to Beijing with her father. During New Year's Day celebrations she kissed him on the cheek.

South Korea's spy agency assessed last month Kim Jong Un was close to designating her as his heir. Some experts disagree with that assessment, citing Kim Jong Un's relatively young age and the extremely male-dominated nature

of North Korea's power hierarchy.

The North Korean training, meanwhile, came as the U.S. and South Korea were engaged in their annual military exercises that North Korea views as an invasion rehearsal. The U.S. and South Korea wrapped up their 11-day computer-simulated command post exercise on Thursday, but they are still continuing field training. (AP)