

NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

Ambassador Preeti Saran re-elected to key UN body for new 3-Year term

NEW YORK, APR 10: Veteran diplomat Preeti Saran has been re-elected to the prestigious UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) for a fresh three-year tenure starting 2027, in recognition of her expertise in steering the body through complex global socio-economic challenges.

Ambassador Saran is currently serving as the chair of the CESCR, the UN body responsible for monitoring how member nations implement international covenants on economic and social rights.

The CESCR operates under the administrative control of the UN Human Rights Commission.

During her distinguished 36-year career in the Indian Foreign Service, Ambassador Saran served in various high-level positions in India and in Indian Missions in Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas.

"I feel honoured to be re-elected member of the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, which



administers the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights," she said.

She noted that the committee comprises 18 independent international experts who monitor the implementation of the covenant by state parties.

"As the largest democracy in the world, the Indian growth story, particularly in the last 15 years, is exemplary in fulfillment of these basic

human rights for its people to have a full, free, safe, secure and healthy life," Saran said.

"In fact, my election as Chair of this Committee last year, the first Indian to hold this position, was a recognition of India's contribution and leadership in promoting and protecting these human rights globally," she said.

In February last year, Ambassador Saran was elected as chair of CESCR for a two-

year term.

Ambassador Saran superannuated from service after serving as the secretary (east) in the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) from March 2016 to September 2018.

As the secretary (east), she was responsible for policy formulation and implementation of India's relations with countries in East Asia, Southeast Asia, Canada, Latin America and the Caribbean region.

Ambassador Saran was the Indian Sherpa and leader of the senior official meetings (SOM) at several multilateral events and summits, including the BRICS, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), ASEAN-India annual summits and the East Asia summit.

She was also India's Ambassador to Vietnam and Consul General in Toronto. Her other notable overseas assignments include her stints at the Indian missions in Moscow, Dhaka, Cairo and Geneva. (PTI)

Kuwait claims attack by Iran, its proxies; Saudi Arabia says vital pipeline recently damaged

DUBAI, APR 10: Kuwait has accused Iran and its proxies of launching drone attacks targeting it on Thursday despite the two-week ceasefire in the Iran war, as Saudi Arabia said recent attacks damaged a key pipeline in the kingdom.

The statement from Kuwait's foreign ministry, carried by the state-run KUNA news agency, put new pressure on the ceasefire ahead of planned talks on Saturday between the United States and Iran in Islamabad.

Kuwait's foreign ministry said the drone attacks "targeted some vital Kuwaiti facilities" Thursday night.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia's state-run Saudi Press Agency, quoting an anonymous official, acknowledged a recent attack in the war that damaged its crucial East-West pipeline.

That pipeline carries oil out to the Red Sea and avoids the Strait of Hormuz, which Iran maintains a chokehold on despite the pause in the fighting.

Earlier in a potential boost to Middle East ceasefire efforts, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Thursday that he authorised direct negotiations with Lebanon "as soon as possible" aimed at disarming Iranian-backed Hezbollah militants and establishing relations between the neighbours.

Israel and Lebanon have technically been at war since Israel was established in 1948, and Netanyahu later stressed that there was no ceasefire between them. In a video statement, he said Israel will keep striking Hezbollah until security is restored in northern Israel.

There was no immediate response from Lebanon.

But Israel-Lebanon negotiations were expected to begin next week at the State Department in Washington, according to a US official, who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The prospect of talks appeared to bolster the tentative ceasefire in the Iran war



that has staggered under the weight of Israel's bombardment of Beirut, Tehran's continued chokehold on the Strait of Hormuz and uncertainty over whether talks can find common ground.

However later Thursday, US President Donald Trump appeared to cast doubt on the effectiveness of the ceasefire, writing on his social media platform: "Iran is doing a very poor job, dishonorable some would say, of allowing Oil to go through the Strait of Hormuz."

"That is not the agreement we have!" Trump wrote.

Netanyahu's authorisation of negotiations with Lebanon came amid disagreement over whether the ceasefire deal included a pause in fighting between Israel and Hezbollah, and a day after Israel pounded Beirut with airstrikes, the deadliest day in Lebanon since the war began February 28.

Israel has fought multiple wars and launched several major invasions of Lebanon over the years, most recently sending in troops last month in response to Hezbollah fire on Israel's northern border communities.

The launch of direct peace talks is a significant achievement, though reaching an agreement will be difficult after decades of hostilities, Hezbollah's continued presence and longstanding disagreements over the countries' shared land border.

The talks in Washington are expected to be handled

on the American side by the US ambassador to Lebanon, Michel Issa, and on the Israeli side by the Israeli ambassador to the US, Yechiel Leiter, according to the person familiar with the planning.

It was not immediately clear who would represent Lebanon. The timing and location of the talks was first reported by Axios.

After declaring victory with the ceasefire announcement, both Iran and the US have appeared to apply pressure on each other. Semiofficial news agencies in Iran suggested forces have mined the Strait of Hormuz, a crucial waterway for oil that Tehran has closed.

Trump warned that US forces would hit Iran harder than before if it did not fulfil the agreement.

Trump expressed concern again Thursday over reports that Iran's military was charging tolls on tankers seeking to pass through the strait.

"They better not be and, if they are, they better stop now!" he wrote on social media.

Questions also remained over what will happen to Iran's stockpile of enriched uranium at the heart of tensions, how and when normal traffic will resume through the strait, and what happens to Iran's ability to launch future missile attacks and support armed proxies in the region.

Iranian President Masoud

Pezeshkian said in a message on Telegram that Iran's decision to accept a ceasefire "is not a sign of weakness but a way to solidify Iran's proud victories".

Despite disputes over the ceasefire, it appears to have halted weeks of missile and drone attacks by Iran on its Gulf Arab neighbors and Israel, with no new launches reported Thursday.

There were no reports of strikes by the US or Israel targeting Iran.

Trump said on Thursday that he has asked Netanyahu to dial back the strikes in Lebanon.

Lebanon's health ministry said more than 300 people were killed and more than 1,100 wounded Wednesday by Israeli strikes on central Beirut and other areas of Lebanon that Israel said targeted Hezbollah, which joined the war in support of Tehran.

Israel said Thursday it killed an aide to Hezbollah leader Naim Kassem, Ali Yusuf Harshi. Hezbollah did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

A New York-based think tank warned the ceasefire "hovers on the verge of collapse" following Israel's strikes Wednesday.

Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported that an Israeli strike overnight killed at least seven people in southern Lebanon. The Israeli military did not immediately acknowledge the strike. (AP)

Pakistan West Asia Talks: No official word on arrival of US, Iran delegates

ISLAMABAD, APR 10: Uncertainty shrouded the US-Iran dialogue, as there was no official word about the arrival of delegates on Friday, the day set for the start of talks between the two warring sides, even as Pakistan waived visa requirements for journalists and officials attending talks.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif, while announcing a two-week ceasefire on Wednesday, had stated that the two countries would hold talks in Islamabad on April 10. He had tagged presidents of the United States and Iran and other officials in his statement on X.

Iran's ambassador to Pakistan, Reza Amir Moghadam in a statement confirmed that a 10-member Iran delegation would arrive in Islamabad.

"Despite skepticism of Iranian public opinion due to repeated ceasefire violations by the Israeli regime to sabotage the diplomatic initiative, invited by Hon PM Shehbaz Sharif, Iranian delegation arrives tonight in Islamabad for serious talks based on 10 points proposed by Iran," he said on X on Thursday.

Hours later, he deleted the statement amidst the deteriorating situation in Lebanon, which was subjected to aerial



attacks by Israel, calling it a violation of the ceasefire agreement.

Iran's president also, in a tweet, cast doubts over the process of talks if Israel continued its policy of attacks on Lebanon.

Officials have not provided any timeline for the arrival of delegates due to security reasons, adding to the mystery as the day of the dialogue has arrived, but not the parties involved in the conflict. Â Â

Despite uncertainty, Pakistan was geared up to host the two sides.

Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, on Friday, announced "Visa on Arrival" for dele-

gates and journalists travelling to Pakistan for talks.

"Pakistan welcomes all delegates including journalists from participating nations, traveling in relation to Islamabad Talks 2026. To this end, all airlines are requested to permit boarding to all such individuals without Visa. Immigration authorities in Pakistan will issue them Visa on Arrival." Dar posted on social media Friday morning.

A thick security blanket covered the capital, Islamabad, which was on 'red alert' ahead of talks.

Officials said that more than 10,000 police and security personnel have been de-

ployed to ensure multi-layered security for the visiting delegates. Police and paramilitary Rangers personnel were deployed and are being helped by the army.

The Red Zone housing key buildings are being protected by the army and the Rangers, which was open at one place through the Margalla Road, and only authorised officials and residents would be allowed to go through it.

The upcoming negotiations are being closely watched globally, as their success or failure could have far-reaching implications for West Asia's security, global energy markets, and international diplomacy.

Chinese President Xi meets Taiwan's opposition leader Cheng; Says peace common wish

BEIJING, APR 10: Chinese President Xi Jinping on Friday said peace is the common wish of the people of both sides as he met Taiwan's opposition leader Cheng Li-wun in Beijing ahead of US President Donald Trump's visit to China next month.

Cheng is the first Kuomintang (KMT) chairperson to visit China in a decade amid Beijing's efforts to ramp up military and diplomatic pressure on Taiwan to reintegrate with the mainland.

China claims Taiwan as part of it and pledges to reunite it with the mainland.

Meeting Cheng in Beijing, Xi said, "compatriots on both sides are both Chinese, and we need peace, we need development, we need communication, and we need cooperation. This is a common wish."

He expressed full confidence that people across the Taiwan Strait would ultimately get closer and get together.

"The historical trend that compatriots of both sides of the strait will get closer and get together will not change, this is a certainty of history, and we are fully confident," Xi said in the beginning of his meeting with Cheng, the Hong Kong-based South China Morning Post reported.

Â Â Their meeting marked the first time a sitting KMT



chairperson had met with the Communist Party leadership since November 2016, when then-KMT chairwoman Hung Hsiu-chu visited the mainland.

Her meeting with Xi is being closely watched around the world as the Chinese leader stepped up efforts to reunify Taiwan, strictly enforcing its One-China policy since he took over in 2012, giving high military and diplomatic priority to it.

Cheng's visit is also regarded as significant as it comes ahead of US President Donald Trump's trip to Beijing on May 14-15, during which Taiwan is expected to figure prominently in his talks with Xi, considering Washington's plans to sell a USD 11 billion arms sales package, the biggest so far by the US to Taipei.Â

China calls Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party (DPP) separatists and tacitly backs the pro-Beijing KMT as it advocates close

ties with the mainland.

DPP firmly opposes China's attempts to reunify Taiwan with the mainland and advocates for the breakaway island to retain its identity.

In her meeting with Xi, Cheng said that both sides "should transcend political confrontation and jointly plan and build a win-win, mutually beneficial community of shared future across the Taiwan Strait".

"And we should seek a systemic solution to prevent and avoid war, making the Taiwan Strait a model for peaceful conflict resolution worldwide," she added.

"Both sides should further plan and build a systemic and sustainable dialogue and cooperation mechanism to make the peace of cross-strait relations irreversible and fundamentally eliminate all causes of conflict", she said.

Trump's plans to sell a USD 11 billion arms sales

package, the biggest so far by the US to Taipei.

The deal includes HIMARS rocket systems, anti-tank missiles, anti-armor missiles, loitering suicide drones, howitzers, military software and parts for other equipment.

China said it firmly opposes and strongly condemns the US arms sales package.

But the Taiwanese government struggled to get this year's defence budget passed by the parliament to avail the US package, as it was stalled by the opposition-dominated parliament.

Last week, a bipartisan US delegation visited Taipei to urge parliament to pass a USD 40 billion special defence spending budget.

Cheng has described her six-day trip, which began on Tuesday in Shanghai, as a "journey of peace". During her visits to Shanghai and Nanjing, she repeatedly emphasised cross-strait peace.

Her visit comes at a time of heightened tensions across the Taiwan Strait, with the People's Liberation Army manoeuvring around the island almost daily, aimed at deterring the ruling independence-leaning DPP.Â Â

Ahead of her visit, Cheng told the media in Taipei earlier that her visit is in line with the mainstream public opinion in Taiwan. "We have a choice," she said.

Irish fuel protests enter fourth day as government seeks to head off shortages

LONDON, APR 10: Protests over high fuel prices in Ireland entered a fourth day on Friday, sparking concerns about fuel shortages and emergency services as demonstrators clogged roads and blocked access to refining and distribution sites around the country.

The Irish government is set to meet with farmers, truckers and agricultural contractors on Friday to discuss the crisis, triggered by rising gasoline and diesel costs as the conflict in the Middle East restricts oil exports from the region. While organisers have said they will call off the coordinated protests if the government agrees to talk with them, it is unclear whether they will be included in the talks.

Protests began on Tuesday as slow-moving convoys restricted access to some of the busiest streets in Dublin, the



capital, and blocked fuel depots that supply half the country. Some protesters slept in their vehicles overnight, demanding that the government speak with them. Over 100 service stations have now run out of fuel and the number could be five times as many by Friday evening if fuel supplies remain disrupted, national broadcaster RTE reported,

citing the industry organisation Fuels for Ireland.

The government on Thursday asked the army to remove vehicles from blocked roads amid concern that the protests could impede police, firefighters and ambulances responding to emergencies.

The disruption grew out of separate protests around Ireland's major cities over de-

mands for further cuts to soaring fuel costs.

The government previously approved a range of measures to cut fuel prices, including a temporary reduction in excise taxes on motor fuels, expansion of a rebate for truckers and bus operators that use diesel fuel, and extension of a program that helps low-income people with their heating costs.