

# NATIONAL/INTERNATIONAL

## Centre's Conspiracy To Change Federal Structure Defeated: Priyanka Gandhi On Women's Quota Row

**NEW DELHI, APR 18:** Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Saturday accused the Centre of conspiring to change the federal structure of the country in the garb of women's reservation and asserted that the defeat of the bill to amend the women's quota law in the Lok Sabha was a victory of democracy and opposition unity.

Addressing a press conference here, the Congress general secretary underlined that the opposition was not against reservation for women and would support the Women's Reservation Act, 2023, if the government sought to implement it on the current strength of the Lok Sabha.

The sole aim of the government behind bringing the Constitution amendment bill was to remain in power permanently, Priyanka Gandhi charged, adding that the people of the country could see through its intentions.

She claimed that the government wanted to use the bill for its benefit in the 2029 elections. This was not about the women's reservation but was related to delimitation, she said.

"What happened yesterday was a very significant victory for democracy. The government's conspiracy to alter the federal structure and weaken democracy was defeated and stopped."



"It was a victory for the Constitution, the country and the unity of the opposition. This was clearly visible on the faces of leaders from the ruling side," the Congress general secretary told reporters at the press conference.

She said it was a "black day" for the government, which saw a bill defeated in Parliament for the first time, and demanded that it implement the 2023 women's reservation law.

"The Modi government has received its first jolt and, therefore, it is calling it a 'Black Day'. This jolt was very necessary," she asserted.

"When Home Minister Amit Shah was speaking in the Lok Sabha on Friday, he said the Congress will not be able to sit in the treasury benches for years, which shows their mindset... The whole conspiracy was to permanently stay in power."

Claiming the BJP has a history when it comes to women's issues, Gandhi alleged that the ruling party wanted to avoid delimitation post the caste census. "This

was being done by using women's rights as an excuse. The government would have done delimitation according to its wishes," she claimed.

She said the Prime Minister and Home Minister have been claiming that if the opposition does not agree, it will never be able to win elections or come to power.

"These statements alone make it clear what the government's intention was," she said, alleging it was a "conspiracy" hatched by the government.

"They thought that if the bill passes, it would be their victory, and if the bill does not pass, they would label the opposition as anti-women."

"The BJP wanted to do this to prove itself as the messiah of women. But it is not easy to become the messiah of women. We saw what happened to women in Hathras, what happened to our Olympic medalists and others," she said.

The Congress leader said the entire country has seen how the Modi government is defeated when the opposition unites.

"The opposition could not have supported the move (delimitation). It (voting on women's reservation bill) showed that the opposition can defeat them (government) when united," she added.

Asked how it would counter the BJP's efforts to dub the opposition "anti-women", Priyanka Gandhi said, "The public is seeing this. The public continues to suffer with multiple problems... and it can see through their narrative."

Vadra said the struggles of women have intensified and "they are watching the government's PR and media tactics, understanding them. Therefore, none of that will work now."

"The people of the country are aware; the government cannot mislead them," she said.

The reality is that the people's trust in this government has already eroded and "they cannot be trusted, she said.

In a major setback to the government, the Constitution (131st Amendment) Bill to implement 33 per cent reservation for women in legislatures by 2029 and to increase the number of Lok Sabha seats to 816 was defeated in the Lower House on Friday.

While 298 members voted in support of the Bill, 230 MPs voted against it. (Agencies)

## Defeated delimitation bill in Parliament to defend idea of India: Cong leader Rahul Gandhi

**CHENNAI, APR 18:** Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday said the opposition parties defeated the delimitation bill in the Parliament on Friday to defend the "idea of India."

Addressing a poll rally at Ponneri here, he said the BJP-led government at the Centre brought a new bill on April 16, and said they were trying to pass the women's bill, which he said was passed in 2023.

"In the so-called Women's Bill, delimitation was hidden. The idea was to reduce

Tamil Nadu's representation in the Union of India... the delimitation move by BJP was to weaken the strength of southern states, small states, north eastern states," he alleged.

"We defeated in Parliament, a bill in which delimitation was hidden; we defeated it to defend the idea of India."

Rahul added that India that is Bharat, is a union of states, and every single state should have a voice, be free to express itself, and protect its tradition. (PTI)



## Nepal stops unauthorised IVF camp by Indian doctors

**KATHMANDU, APR 18:** Nepal has prevented two Indian doctors from conducting an In Vitro Fertilisation consultation camp at a hotel in Kathmandu, a top official of the country's medical regulatory body said Friday.

The step by Nepal Medical Council (NMC), the regulatory body, on Thursday came after it was found that the two doctors had not taken any permission from it for the medical camp.

"We had also asked for help from the district administration office to pre-



vent the Indian doctors camp without our approval," Dr Satis Kumar

Deo, Registrar of the Council told PTI.

"Foreign doctors must register their medical degrees with the Council and take approval for the service before conducting any health camps or services in Nepal," Deo pointed out, adding they failed to carry out due procedure.

The Indian doctors "asked for pardon in writing, admitting their mistake and also promised to not repeat such a mistake in future, so we have not taken any further action against them," Deo said. (PTI)

## Foreign ministers of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkiye, and Egypt hold 3rd consultative meeting in Antalya

**ISLAMABAD, APR 18:** Foreign Ministers of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Turkiye, and Egypt have discussed ways to enhance cooperation in "key areas of mutual interest" in a third consultative meeting held in Antalya.

The meeting between Pakistan's Foreign Minister Ishaq Dar, Saudi Arabia Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, Turkiye Foreign Minister Hakan Fidandan and Egyptian Foreign Minister Badr Abdelatty was held on the sidelines of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum on Friday, according to a statement issued by the

Foreign Office (FO) on Saturday.

"The Foreign Ministers expressed a shared commitment to advancing this partnership, deepening coordination and expanding collaboration across key areas of mutual interest," it said.

They also exchanged views on evolving regional dynamics, reaffirming the vital role of dialogue and diplomacy in promoting peace, stability, and shared prosperity.

The meeting comes as Pakistan prepares to host the second round of high-

stakes talks between the US and Iran to resolve the West Asia conflict, which caused significant economic strain and threatened regional stability.

The US and Iran held rare direct talks in Pakistan last week aimed at ending their conflict, but the talks ended without any agreement.

The group held the first meeting last month in Saudi Arabia, followed by a second one in Pakistan.

Earlier, the senior diplomats from the four countries met in Islamabad on April 14 for the inaugural Senior Officials' Meeting.

They also met Ishaq Dar, also the Deputy Prime Minister, who urged them to devise a "cooperative framework" among Egypt, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Turkiye.

Dar had appreciated the close, brotherly relations and convergence of views on important regional and global matters among the four brotherly countries, the FO said. "He called for devising a cooperative framework among the four countries, focusing on the shared goals of peace, prosperity and economic development," the FO added. (PTI)

**ISLAMABAD, APR 18:** Pakistan's Chief of Defence Forces Field Marshal Syed Asim Munir has concluded his three-day visit to Iran as part of Islamabad's efforts to resolve the conflict between the US and Iran.

Munir, who was heading a high-level delegation to Iran, landed in Tehran on Wednesday, becoming the first foreign military leader to visit the country since a two-week ceasefire was agreed between Iran and the US on April 8.

During the visit, Munir held discussions with Iran President Masoud Pezeshkian and also met with Parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf and Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi, the military's media wing said on Saturday.



He also met the Commander of Khatam ul Anbiya Headquarters Major General Ali Abdullahi.

Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi was also part of the Pakistani delegation.

The Inter-Services Public Relations (ISPR), in a statement, said the discussions were "focused upon bringing sustainable peace to the region, with particular emphasis on the evolving regional

security environment, ongoing diplomatic engagements, and collaborative measures aimed at promoting enduring peace and stability in the region".

Munir stressed the need for "dialogue, de-escalation, and peaceful resolution of outstanding issues through sustained diplomatic engagements", the ISPR said.

The Pakistan Army chief expressed "deep apprecia-

tion" for the "warm hospitality" extended by Iran during the delegation's visit, it added.

"The visit reflects Pakistan's unwavering resolve to facilitate a negotiated settlement to the Middle East conflict and to promote peace, stability, and prosperity in the region," the statement said.

Pakistan has started preparing to host the second round of high-stakes talks between the US and Iran during the next week, officials said on Friday.

The US and Iran held rare direct talks in Pakistan over the weekend aimed at ending their conflict, but the talks ended without any agreement.

The ceasefire between the US and Iran is set to expire on April 22. (PTI)

## Australia, Japan seal USD 6.5B warship deal with 3 Mogami frigates ordered first

**MELBOURNE, APR 18:** Australia and Japan signed contracts on Saturday to deliver the first three of a 10 billion Australian dollar (USD 6.5 billion) fleet of Japanese-designed warships, with the first due for delivery in three years.

Mitsubishi Heavy Industries will build the first three Mogami-class frigates in Japan. Australia plans to build another eight in a shipyard in Western Australia.

Japanese Defence Minister Shinjiro Koizumi and his Australian counterpart Richard Marles attended a signing ceremony aboard the Mogami-class frigate JS Kumano, which is part of the Japan Maritime Self-Defence Force, docked off the Australian city of Melbourne.

The Kumano had taken part in the recent Exercise Kakadu, biennial multinational maritime drills hosted by Australia.

Australia announced in August last year that the Japanese bid had won the contract to provide Australia's next generation of general-purpose frigates over Germany's MEKO A-200 from Thyssenkrupp Marine Systems. The deal gave a major boost to Japan's still-underdeveloped defence industry after it lost out on Australia's submarine con-



tract to a French company in 2016.

The Japanese-designed fleet will replace Australia's ageing ANZAC-class frigates that are considered increasingly vulnerable to modern missile and drone attack.

Marles said the Japanese frigates were a major step toward delivering Australia a larger and more lethal surface combat fleet. The first of the Mogami-class frigates is due to arrive in Australia in 2029.

"The timeframe that we've announced is the fastest acquisition of a surface combatant into service in the Royal Australian Navy ever, and so this is a very rapid timeframe," Marles told reporters.

Japan has been accelerating its military buildup while expanding its defence ties beyond its only treaty ally, the United States. It now considers Australia to be a semi-ally.

Marles said Australia welcomed Japan's relaxation of export controls on defence equipment and technology with "trusted partners like Australia."

"Japan is an industrial powerhouse, and it offers so much opportunity for Australia and the development of our own defence industry as the Mogami project represents," Marles said.

Koizumi said that the introduction of Japanese vessels into the Australian navy meant "a major step is finally

being taken to elevate our bilateral defence cooperation to a greater height."

He said Japan continued to be Australia's "indispensable partner" in a new Australian defence strategy announced this week, in which AUD 53 billion (USD 38 million) will be added to the defence budget over a decade.

Koizumi said a "decisive factor" in Australia choosing the Japanese frigate was that it could be operated with just 90 personnel, around half the crew of Australia's current ANZAC-class version.

Australia says its Mogami-class frigates will be equipped with surface-to-air and anti-ship missiles and could operate combat helicopters.

## Sri Lanka sees drop in tourist arrivals in March due to West Asia war

**COLOMBO, APR 18:** Tourist arrivals in Sri Lanka fell significantly in March due to the war in West Asia, the Sri Lanka Tourism Development Authority (SLTDA) said on Saturday.

January and February recorded 277,327 and 279,328 arrivals respectively, however this positive trend was disrupted in March as arrivals dropped significantly to 183,979, the

SLTDA said.

"The sudden dip can be largely attributed to the ongoing conflict in the Gulf/Middle East regions," it added.

The war had disrupted Sri Lanka's key transit hubs and affected travel plans leading to reduced arrivals, the SLTDA said.

In March, India again emerged as Sri Lanka's largest inbound market

with 47,533 arrivals with a market share of 25.8 per cent. British tourists were placed second with 18,092 arrivals with 9.8 per cent share of the market. Russian and Chinese tourists were placed third and fourth.

"India has overtaken all other markets to become Sri Lanka's undisputed largest source market, growing by over 21 per cent year on

year," SLTDA said.

India's proximity, extensive air connectivity and flights between Sri Lanka and India not having to transit through Middle Eastern hubs have insulated the market, it added.

"For Sri Lanka, India now represents a stable high volume short haul anchor that can partially offset losses from Europe," the release said. (PTI)

## Nepal SC recognises Gagan Thapa faction as official Nepali Congress

**KATHMANDU, Apr 18:** The Gagan Thapa-led faction has been recognised as the official Nepali Congress by the Supreme Court, dealing a blow to Sher Bahadur Deuba.

A division bench of Justices Saranga Subedi and Nripa Dhwoj Niroula on Friday ruled in favour of the Election Commission's (EC) recognition of the current Central Working Committee (CWC) led by Thapa, myRepublica newspaper reported.

Thapa, 49, was elected as the Nepali Congress president in a special general convention from January 11 to 14 in Kathmandu, which was challenged by the Deuba-led faction.

Former prime minister Deuba and party's acting president Purna Bahadur Khadka had challenged the EC's decision as well as the validity of the special general convention, arguing that the recognition of the Thapa-led leadership was unconstitu-

tional, unlawful and contrary to the party statute.

The Deuba faction later moved the Supreme Court on January 18.

With the verdict, the SC dismissed their petitions, effectively affirming the legitimacy of both the EC's decision and the leadership structure emerging from the special general convention.

On March 19, Thapa had submitted his resignation as president of the Nepali Congress after the party's defeat

in the recently held general elections.

However, his resignation was rejected by the CWC and he has since continued to lead the party.

The Nepali Congress (NC) secured just 38 seats in the 275-member Lower House known as the Pratinidhi Sabha.

Thapa, who was projected as the NC's prime ministerial candidate, also lost from Dhanusha-4 constituency. (PTI)