

EU calls for stronger borders after Ceuta migrant surge, Von der Leyen urges 'united action'

BRUSSELS, AUG 5: European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen has called for stronger protection of the European Union's external borders following last week's mass migrant crossings into the Spanish enclave of Ceuta, saying the incident underscored the need for a coordinated European response to irregular migration.

In a letter to Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, von der Leyen praised Madrid's handling of the crisis but said the events had exposed vulnerabilities along the EU's external frontiers. "From this incident, it is clear that we must do more to further strengthen our borders at critical points," she wrote.

She added that "the protection of all our external borders is a shared European responsibility," calling for "vigilant monitoring and the use of physical barriers where needed."

The appeal came after tens of thousands of migrants crossed from Morocco into Ceuta in one of the largest sudden migration surges at the EU's southern border.

Spanish authorities estimate that around 69,500 migrants have since returned to



Morocco, surpassing earlier estimates of 50,000 returnees. Officials said 72 people died on the Spanish side of the border, while 11 fatalities were reported in Morocco.

The interior ministers are due to hold emergency talks via video conference on Tuesday to discuss the crisis and its implications for the bloc's migration policy.

Von der Leyen said the meeting would provide an opportunity to draw "lessons" from the Ceuta crossings, warning that the challenge of irregular migration requires "a common European response, united action and solidarity."

She urged EU member states to "double down" on

five priorities: preventing irregular migration through closer cooperation with partner countries, strengthening external borders, improving early warning systems, dismantling migrant smuggling networks, and accelerating the return of people with no legal right to remain in the bloc.

The migrant surge has also exposed divisions within the EU.

Italy temporarily suspended the Schengen arrangement with Spain in response to the influx, a move backed by Finland and Denmark. Czech Prime Minister Andrej Babi also called for Spain's temporary suspension from the Schengen system.

Sánchez criticized the reactions from some European governments, saying he had "serious concerns" about their response and stressing that Ceuta is not part of the Schengen area.

While many governments had shown "support and solidarity," Sánchez said others had chosen to attack Spain, "driven by prejudice, fake news, ignorance, or political interest." News Archive Search

Spain has blamed migrant trafficking networks for exploiting a recent Supreme Court ruling that limited the government's ability to immediately deport migrants arriving by sea.

Interior Minister Fernando Grande-Marlaska said the situation in Ceuta had "almost returned to normal", adding that authorities were installing a floating barrier along the maritime border with Morocco to help prevent further illegal crossings.

The crisis has reignited debate within the EU over border management and migration policy, with Brussels signaling that stronger border controls will be a central topic as member states seek a unified response to future migration surges. (UNI)

Taiwan kicks off annual military drills to counter potential Chinese attack

TAIPEI, (TAIWAN), AUG 5: Taiwan kicked off annual military exercises on Wednesday aimed at simulating a response to a potential Chinese invasion of the self-governed island, which Beijing claims as its own.

The live-fire exercises will test the Taiwanese army's ability to sustain 24-hour defence operations as well as counter China's "grey-zone tactics," which stop just short of open warfare. Urban resilience drills will test the population's response to a disruption in internet service.

The 10-day Han Kuang exercises are set to be held in various locations around the island. This year's drills will test new, US-inspired communication methods, including backbriefs - where subordinates explain to commanders how they plan to carry out assigned missions. The communication drills are intended to encourage first-line fighters to be more self-reliant and effective in battle, experts say.

Another focus of this year's drills is that they will mobilise the largest ever team of reservists, more than 5,000 service members across two brigades. Last year's drills involved one brigade of more than 3,000



reservists.

The drills will test how quickly reserves can mobilise from peacetime standby mode to full active duty.

Another focus of the exercises, reflecting Taiwan's longstanding emphasis on civil defence, is urban resilience drills. These will take place on different days in the major cities of Kaohsiung, Taichung and the capital, Taipei. During the drills, mobile internet speed will be reduced for about 30 minutes to simulate telecommunications interference in case of an attack.

Military equipment being tested will feature the newly acquired M1A2T Abrams

tanks. Taiwan procured 108 of the American-made tanks in 2019, the last batch of which arrived in April.

Taiwan sources most of its weapons from the United States, which is the island's main informal backer in the face of territorial claims from China.

Beijing regards democratic Taiwan as a breakaway province to be retaken by force if necessary. In recent years, it has ramped up a campaign of military pressure, which has involved sending military aircraft and warships near the island almost daily. Digital Newspaper Access Taiwan's parliament recently approved a USD 24.8 billion supple-

mentary budget bill for the purchase of US arms, which fell short of Taiwanese President Lai Ching-te's proposal for a USD 40 billion budget.

The island's Government is waiting on the US to greenlight a USD 14 billion arms sale package to Taiwan, which has been held up for months.

US President Donald Trump and the US Congress earlier approved a separate, record-breaking USD 11 billion package. But after travelling to China in May, Trump described arms sales to Taiwan as a "good negotiating chip" with Beijing and refrained from approving the newest arms sales package to Taiwan. (AP)

Russian missile and drone barrage in Ukrainian capital region kills at least 15

KYIV, AUG 5: Russian missile and drone strikes on Kyiv and the surrounding region killed at least 15 people and wounded 42 others overnight into Wednesday, Ukraine's state emergency service said.

The attack was the latest in a series of large-scale Russian ballistic missile strikes that have become near-routine this summer. Ukraine has a limited stockpile of interceptor missiles for the US-made Patriot systems, the sole air defense system in its arsenal able to shoot down ballistic missiles, making large volleys like Wednesday's hard to stop, even as Ukraine has stepped up deep strikes on Russian oil refineries and energy infrastructure.

In the wider Kyiv region around the capital, 14 people were killed and 27 wounded, with fires at multiple locations in Brovary, Bucha and Fastiv districts, Ukraine's emergence service said. Large warehouse fires



burned in the city of Brovary and the villages of Velyka Dymarka, Kvintseve and Peremoha. A fire involving vehicles at an enterprise in Fastiv district was extinguished. In Bucha district, crews battled a warehouse fire in the village of Chaiky after putting out a separate fire at a logistics facility in Sofiivska Bor-

shchahivka. In the capital, one person was killed and 15 were wounded, and emergency crews extinguished all fires sparked by the strikes in the Obolonskyi, Sviatoshynskyi, Holosiivskyi and Desnianskyi districts, the Kyiv City Military Administration said.

Serhii Beskrestnov, an ad-

viser to Ukraine's president on defense technology development, said the war of attrition has entered a new phase. "The enemy is attacking everything indiscriminately - retail warehouses, food storage facilities, logistics hubs, enterprises, building materials warehouses," he said on Facebook. (AP)

Imran Khan's supporters stage protests across Pak as ex-PM completes 3 years in jail

LAHORE, AUG 5: Former Pakistan prime minister Imran Khan's supporters staged protest rallies in several parts of the country on Wednesday to mark three years of his imprisonment, defying police crackdown.

In Punjab province, the police arrested more than 20 workers of Khan's political party for staging a demonstration.

The 73-year-old cricketer-turned-politician has been behind bars since August 5, 2023, after being convicted in a corruption case. There are several cases against him - and convictions in some of them were either suspended or overturned. But he remains in prison pending trial in other cases.

Khan's party workers sought permission from the authorities to organise rallies in several locations across Pakistan's four provinces on Wednesday.

Permissions were denied in Punjab, Sindh and Balochistan provinces, following which a gathering in Peshawar emerged as the centerpiece of the party's campaign, primarily demanding Khan's release.



At least two of Khan's sisters are expected to address the gathering in Peshawar, the capital of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, where his party, Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf, is in power. Despite being refused permission elsewhere, the leadership of the party asked its workers in regional units to organise rallies, senior party leader Sheikh Waqas Akram said.

That led to police crackdowns, and arrests were reported in Punjab. "But we will come out for him

(Khan)," Akram added. Party lawyer Abuzar Salman Niazi said, "Punjab Police have arrested over 20 workers in Mianwali, hometown of Imran Khan, stopping them from coming out to demand the release of their leader."

Senior party leader and former federal minister Moonis Elahi said Khan has endured "every kind of hardship" during his imprisonment, alleging that he has been denied family meetings and proper medical treatment.

Isabelle Lassee, Amnesty International's acting regional director for South Asia, said Pakistan's authorities had "systematically denied Imran Khan the right to a fair trial, subjected him to prolonged solitary confinement, and limited his access to medical care and visitation rights". She also said Khan had not been allowed to meet his family for more than eight months and that both he and his wife, Bushra Bibi, had been denied regular access to legal counsel since December 2025. (PTI)

Opposition MPs take out protest march in Parliament complex, seek Shah's statement on 'police excesses'



NEW DELHI, AUG 5: Opposition MPs took out a protest march in Parliament House complex on Wednesday, demanding Home Minister Amit Shah's statement on alleged police excesses on students, discussion on "misappropriation" of Ram temple donations and statehood for Jammu and Kashmir.

Carrying placards and raising slogans against the gov-

ernment, the Opposition MPs, including Leader of Opposition in the Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi and Congress general secretary Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, marched from the statue of Mahatma Gandhi at Prerna Sthal to Makar Dwar. Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge also participated in the protest and demanded accountability from the government.

Taking a swipe at Shah, Kharge asked why hasn't he been coming to the House.

"They are disrespecting Parliament. It has been so many days but they don't want to step inside the House. What is the issue in coming to the House and giving a statement?" Kharge told reporters. Are they deaf and dumb, he asked.

The MPs carried placards

slamming the Government and demanded a statement by Shah in both Houses of Parliament on the alleged "atrocities" committed by police and other forces on students during protests over the paper leak issue last month.

Several MPs also raised the issue of "misappropriation" of donations at the Ram temple in Ayodhya. E-paper Subscription Service

Many MPs, including those from Jammu and Kashmir, carried placards, demanding statehood for Jammu and Kashmir.

Wednesday marks the seventh anniversary of the abrogation of Article 370 and J-K being turned into a Union Territory.

The MPs raised slogans such as 'chhanda chor, gaddi chor', 'Amit Shah jawaab do' and 'chanda chor kahan milenge, BJP ke daftar mein'.

The MPs also kept donation boxes in front of Makar Dwar steps to symbolise the alleged theft of donations at the Ram temple and lined up around them to raise slogans against the government.

India's prisons reach 112.7 pc occupancy in 2024; Delhi tops at 194.6 pc, over 3.71 lakh undertrials

NEW DELHI, AUG 5: India's prisons operated at 112.7 per cent occupancy in 2024, with 609 jails housing more inmates than their sanctioned capacity and Delhi recording the highest occupancy rate of 194.6 per cent, according to data tabled in the Rajya Sabha on Wednesday.

Replying to a question on prison occupancy, Minister of State for Home Affairs Bandi Sanjay Kumar furnished the latest National Crime Records Bureau (NCRB) data, which showed that prisons had a sanctioned capacity of 4,53,769 inmates but were housing 5,11,542 prisoners as on December 31, 2024.

The data showed that the inmate population exceeded the sanctioned capacity by 57,773, with prisons operating at 112.7 per cent occupancy nationwide.

Among the states and Union territories, Delhi had 19,512 inmates against a sanctioned capacity of 10,026, translating into 194.6 per cent occupancy. Meghalaya followed with 1,406 prisoners against a capacity of 860 (163.5 per cent), while Jammu and Kashmir housed 5,383 inmates against a sanctioned capacity of 3,629 (148.3 per cent). Jammu Kashmir Travel

Madhya Pradesh had 45,092 prisoners against a capacity of 30,644 (147.1 per cent occupancy), while Maharashtra housed 39,003 inmates against 27,110 (143.9 per cent).

Kerala reported 10,307 inmates against a capacity of 7,823 (131.8 per cent). Punjab had 30,663 inmates against 26,543 (115.5 per cent), while Uttar Pradesh, despite having the country's

largest prison capacity of 76,162, housed 86,762 inmates, taking occupancy to 113.9 per cent.

In response to another question on undertrial prisoners, the Government informed the Rajya Sabha that there were 3,71,440 undertrial prisoners in the country as on December 31, 2024.

Of these, 968 undertrial prisoners were found eligible for release under Section 479 of the Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita (BNSS)/Section 436A of the Code of Criminal Procedure, while 627 were actually released during the year.

Kumar said no specific reasons for the delay in releasing the remaining eligible undertrial prisoners had been reported by states and Union territories to the Ministry of Home Affairs.

He said prison administration and the management of

prisoners fall under the State List of the Constitution, making it the responsibility of states and Union territories to expand prison infrastructure, address overcrowding and ensure timely release of eligible undertrial prisoners.

The Centre has released Rs 608.6 crore to states and Union territories during the last five financial years under the Modernisation of Prisons project for construction of high-security prisons, strengthening prison security infrastructure and improving correctional administration through inmate skilling and rehabilitation initiatives.

On concerns relating to overcrowding and its impact on prisoners' rights, healthcare, legal aid and rehabilitation, the government said these matters primarily fall within the jurisdiction of states.