

# Nitish files his RS papers ahead of exit as Bihar CM

JD(U) chief submits papers in the presence of Home Minister Amit Shah, BJP chief Nitin Nabin; Nitish says on social media he wishes to be an RS member; Opposition slams 'betrayal of mandate'

**Amarnath Tewary**

PATNA

Marking the end of an era, Bihar Chief Minister Nitish Kumar filed his nomination papers for the Rajya Sabha in the presence of Union Home Minister Amit Shah. He was accompanied by the other four candidates of the ruling National Democratic Alliance, including BJP national president Nitin Nabin, who filed their papers for the five Rajya Sabha seats from Bihar that will fall vacant on April 9.

While the Opposition mocked Mr. Kumar for becoming a “puppet of the BJP”, accusing him of betraying the electoral mandate, rumours buzzed within the NDA about who would succeed him in Pat-



**New beginning:** Chief Minister Nitish Kumar filing his nomination for the Rajya Sabha at the Vidhan Sabha in Patna on Thursday. ANI

na, with discussions about the Janata Dal (United) chief's son being given the Deputy CM role under a BJP CM.

**'Spotless tenure'**

Confirming speculation

about the end of his 20-year rule in Bihar with a post on social media, Mr. Kumar declared that he had a “desire in his heart” to become a member of both the Houses of Parliament. As he has previously

been a Lok Sabha member, he now “seeks” to become a member of the Rajya Sabha, he said.

After all five candidates filed their nomination papers, Mr. Shah praised Mr. Kumar's tenure in Bihar as “spotless, memorable, and golden”.

He added: “Nitish Kumar *ji* will be remembered for the glorious works he has done for the development of the State.”

NDA sources told news agency PTI that it will take a few weeks before Mr. Kumar relinquishes the CM's post, which he is likely to hold until leaving for the national capital to be sworn in as an MP.

**CONTINUED ON**

» PAGE 14

**END OF AN ERA**

» PAGE 14

# Ahead of crucial Assembly elections, Tamil Nadu, West Bengal Governors changed

**Vijaita Singh**

NEW DELHI

President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday appointed Tamil Nadu Governor R.N. Ravi as the Governor of West Bengal, while Kerala Governor Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar was given the additional charge of Tamil Nadu. The appointments come ahead of the announcement of crucial Assembly elections in these States.

Bihar, which saw a major political change during the day with Chief Minister Nitish Kumar filing nominations for the Rajya Sabha elections, also witnessed a change in the gubernatorial seat, with Lt. General Syed Ata Hasnain (retd) being appointed the Governor, replacing Arif Mohammed Khan.

Shiv Pratap Shukla, Governor of Himachal Pradesh, was transferred to Telangana; Governor Jishnu Dev Varma was transferred from Telangana to Maharashtra; Delhi's Lieutenant-Governor Vinai Kumar Saxena was moved to Ladakh, while Ladakh L-G Kavinder Gupta was elevated to Governor of Himachal Pradesh, according to a communication from the Rashtrapati Bhavan.

Taranjit Singh Sandhu, former Indian Ambassador to the U.S., who later joined the Bharatiya Janata Party and unsuccessfully contested the 2024 Lok Sabha election from Amritsar, was appointed the new L-G of Delhi.

BJP leader and former Bihar Assembly Speaker Nand Kishore Yadav was appointed Governor of Nagaland.

## Gubernatorial postings

President Droupadi Murmu announced new Governors for seven States and Lt. Governors for two Union Territories on Thursday



**Rajendra Vishwanath Arlekar**

**Given additional charge of Tamil Nadu**

**Current/previous role Governor of Kerala**



**R.N. Ravi**

**Appointed Governor of West Bengal**

**Current/previous role Governor of Tamil Nadu**

Name	State/Union Territory
Jishnu Dev Varma	Maharashtra
Shiv Pratap Shukla	Telangana
Kavinder Gupta	Himachal Pradesh
Lt. Gen. (Retd.) Syed Ata Hasnain	Bihar
Nand Kishore Yadav	Nagaland
Taranjit Singh Sandhu	Delhi
Vinai Kumar Saxena	Ladakh

**West Bengal Governor C.V. Ananda Bose has resigned from his post ahead of Assembly polls**

West Bengal Governor C.V. Ananda Bose and Ladakh Lieutenant-Governor Kavinder Gupta resigned on Thursday.

Mr. Gupta was appointed Ladakh's L-G in July 2025. His tenure witnessed unprecedented violence on September 24, 2025, in Leh city, when four people, including a Kargil war veteran, were killed in police firing when a protest to demand constitutional safeguards for the region turned violent.

### Stormy relations

Relations between Mr. Ravi and the M.K. Stalin government in Tamil Nadu have been stormy, with the ruling DMK accusing the former of positioning himself as a political rival to an elected government.

Mr. Ravi withheld assent for several Bills, following which the Supreme Court invoked powers in April 2025 to declare 10 Bills "effectively approved". Mr.

Ravi had also repeatedly walked out of the Assembly without reading out the customary Governor's Address or digressing from the government's prepared text.

Incidentally, it was at Mr. Ravi's suggestion that the name of Raj Bhavan was changed to Lok Bhavan a few months ago.

### Shocked, says Mamata

Mr. Bose, who had been in the position for more than three years, submitted his resignation to Ms. Murmu in Delhi.

West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said on Thursday that Union Home Minister Amit Shah called her and informed about Mr. Ravi's appointment. Ms. Banerjee said she was "shocked and deeply concerned by the sudden news of the resignation" of Mr. Bose.

**CONTINUED ON**

**» PAGE 14**

# India condoles Khamenei death as Misri visits Embassy of Iran

The Supreme Leader was killed in U.S.-Israel strikes; Jaishankar dials Iranian counterpart Araghchi; Iranian interlocutor says Tehran is facing an 'existential war' and that access to the Strait of Hormuz for energy buyers remains uncertain

**Kallol Bhattacharjee**  
NEW DELHI

India on Thursday condoled the death of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who was assassinated in the opening salvo of the U.S.-Israel war on Iran on February 28.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri signed the book of condolence that was opened at the Embassy of Iran here, as External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar held a round of telephone conversation with his Iranian counterpart, Seyed Abbas Araghchi.

The outreach from India coincided with remarks from a senior Iranian interlocutor who announced here that Iran is facing an "existential war" and that access to the Strait of Hormuz for energy buyers remains uncertain in the current circumstances.

"Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri visited the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and signed the condolence book, on behalf of the people and the Government of India, on the demise of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Syed Ali Khamenei," said External Affairs Ministry spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal.

India had so far remained silent following the



**Offering commiserations:** Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri, on behalf of the Government of India, signed the condolence book at the Embassy of Iran in New Delhi on Thursday. ANI

## assassination of Khamenei

The conversations between Indian and Iranian officials coincided with senior Iranian officials expressing disappointment over India's unwillingness to condemn the assassination of Khamenei as officials in the External Affairs Ministry expressed disappointment over Iran targeting oil tankers, which left at least three Indian sailors dead. The overall state of current India-Iran relations came up during the Jaishankar-Araghchi telephone conversation, with sources indicating that India is urging for an "early cessation of hostilities" and conveying to all sides that safety of Indian citizens in the West

Asian states and on oil tankers near the Strait of Hormuz is of utmost interest.

## Iranian strikes

A senior Iranian diplomatic source, however, argued that Tehran's retaliation to the U.S.-Israeli attacks was "precise and deliberate" and was aimed at the military and intelligence assets of its adversaries. The blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, the source said, was part of Iran's strategy to deal with the "existential threat" posed by the U.S.-Israel coalition. He said that Iran's relation with India had been "consistent" and that Iran expected that "third party"

like Israel or the U.S. would never be able to influence that relation. He expressed disappointment that third parties are at present a reality in India-Iran relations.

"All our actions are based on what we had told our neighbours before the beginning of the war. We had told them that this is what we would have to do if your airbases and assets are used to attack us," said the official pointing to the attacks on U.S. military bases in the West Asian states and the choking of the Strait of Hormuz. "We stop attacks as soon as they stop. We were pragmatic and that is why we went for negotiation with the U.S."

but now that they started the war we are left with no other strategy apart from resisting. We have to resist and that is our only strategy," said the senior Iranian official.

Explaining Iran's position on the situation at the Strait of Hormuz, he pointed to the insurance companies that are backing out of extending insurance to cargo vessels and said, "It is not just Iran's Army that has closed the Strait of Hormuz." He said there was a moral and ethical requirement on every stakeholder to condemn the killing of Khamenei, saying, "We call upon everyone, including India, to condemn the killing of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei. That they can decapitate or assassinate the head of another state at will is a breach of law and this breach of law is going to haunt everyone."

Trying to balance the interest of the West Asian states that host more than a crore Indian expatriate workers and Iran, which controls the Strait of Hormuz, India has maintained a cautious approach in the conflict. Against this backdrop, India has reached out to multiple suppliers to ensure that the energy shockwave of the conflict is absorbed without disrupting the Indian economy.

# Iran launches fresh attacks against Israel, U.S.

## Associated Press

DUBAI

Iran launched a new wave of attacks against Israel, American bases and countries around the region on Thursday, even as Israel and the U.S. hammered the Islamic Republic for a sixth day. Bahrain said an Iranian missile hit a state-run oil refinery. It said the fire on Thursday night was extinguished and the refinery was still working.

The war keeps escalating each day, affecting additional 14 countries across West Asia and beyond. On Thursday, Azerbaijan accused Iran of attacking it with drones – though Tehran denied that. A day earlier, the U.S. said it sank an Iranian frigate in the waters off Sri Lanka.

Israel, meanwhile, is-

sued a mass evacuation warning for all of Beirut's southern suburbs as the fighting escalated with Lebanon's Iran-allied Hezbollah militants. UN peacekeepers reported ground combat in southern Lebanon as more Israeli troops crossed the border.

All the while, the U.S. and Israel have battered Iran with nationwide strikes, targeting their military capabilities leadership and nuclear programme. Israeli and American leaders have also suggested that toppling the government was a goal.

The war has killed at least 1,230 people in Iran, more than 70 in Lebanon and around a dozen in Israel, according to officials in those countries. Six U.S. troops have been killed.

An Iranian cleric called



**Under fire:** A plume of smoke rising after a strike on the Iranian capital of Tehran on Thursday. AFP

on state television for the shedding of both Israel's and "Trump's blood". A statement from Ayatollah Abdollah Javadi Amoli gave a rare call for violence by an ayatollah, one of the highest ranks within the clergy of Shia Islam. There are dozens in Iran.

Israel announced multiple incoming missile attacks and air sirens sounded in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. The Israeli military said it carried out a wave of strikes on Iran's ballistic missile launch sites.

Gulf countries also re-

ported coming under fire. In Abu Dhabi, a drone was shot down near the Al Dhafra Air Base, which hosts U.S. forces, and shrapnel fell to the ground, authorities said. Six people were wounded.

Qatar evacuated residents near the U.S. Embassy in Doha as a temporary precaution and later reported a missile attack on the city. Saudi Arabia said it destroyed a drone in its province bordering Jordan.

Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev accused Iran of carrying out "a groundless act of terror and aggression" after a drone crashed Thursday near the airport in Nakhchivan.

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» PAGES 15, 17 & 18

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» PAGE 10

## Maldives, Sri Lanka alarmed at bombing in Indian Ocean

**Sahasini Haidar**  
NEW DELHI

The sinking of an Iranian ship by the U.S. in the Indian Ocean raises concern for the smaller countries in the region, leaders from Sri Lanka and the Maldives, who have gathered for the Raisina Dialogue here, said on Thursday.

Indian diplomats described the attack in the Indian Ocean, close to Sri Lanka, as concerning, especially given that the warship, *IRIS Dena*, was returning from multilateral exercises held with the Indian Navy last month.

**FULL REPORT ON**  
» PAGE 15

# Sri Lanka evacuates the crew of second Iranian ship near its territorial waters

**Meera Srinivasan**  
COLOMBO

Sri Lanka is evacuating 208 crew members from an Iranian naval ship – *IRIS Bushehr* – stranded near its territorial waters, President Anura Kumara Dissanayake said on Thursday, a day after a U.S. submarine torpedoed another Iranian warship off Sri Lanka's southern coast, killing at least 84 sailors and widening the war in West Asia into the Indian Ocean region.

The Sri Lankan Navy would take the crew to the Colombo Port, while the vessel will be diverted to the eastern Trincomalee harbour, Mr. Dissanayake said in a televised address on Thursday night. Sri Lanka's response, he said, was



Injured sailors from Iranian frigate *IRIS Dena* walking on hospital premises in Galle, Sri Lanka, on Thursday. REUTERS

on humanitarian grounds and focused on saving lives, after the vessel reported an engine fault. “No one deserves to die in this war. Every life is precious”, he said.

Emphasising that Sri Lanka would continue to

pursue a neutral foreign policy, he said the country was “hoping for the best and preparing for the worst,” amid concerns over the possible impact of the war in West Asia on the global economy and people's livelihoods. After the U.S. and Israel launched an attack on Iran last week, Colombo called on “all concerned parties to exercise maximum restraint” and to de-escalate tensions. The government has so far not responded to the U.S. claim on Wednesday that its submarine attacked the Iranian frigate *IRIS Dena*.

News of the second Iranian vessel near Sri Lankan waters drew attention during a parliamentary debate earlier on Thursday. Flag-

ging regional security, Leader of the Opposition Sajith Premadasa pointed to a second Iranian ship positioned close to the Colombo Port. In response, Cabinet spokesman and Minister Nalinda Jayatissa told Parliament that the vessel was in the country's Exclusive Economic Zone near the maritime boundary, and not in Sri Lanka's territorial waters. The government was “fully aware” of the situation, he said, adding that Mr. Dissanayake – also Minister of Defence – and the Security Council, were working on resolving the matter to minimise loss of life and safeguard regional peace.

**CONTINUED ON**  
» PAGE 14

# Sinking of ship brings war to region: Sri Lanka, Maldives leaders

**Suhasini Haidar**  
NEW DELHI

The sinking of an Iranian ship by the U.S. in the Indian Ocean raises concern for the smaller countries in the region, leaders from Sri Lanka and the Maldives, who have gathered for the Raisina Dialogue, said on Thursday. They called for closer communication on the issue with India as a “net security provider” in the region.

Indian diplomats also described the torpedo attack in the Indian Ocean, close to Sri Lanka, as concerning, especially given that the warship, the *IRIS Dena*, was returning on Wednesday from multilateral exercises held with the Indian Navy in Visakhapat-

nam last month. The External Affairs Ministry did not respond to a question on whether India had raised the issue with the U.S.

“We don’t want the war spilling over into our waters. I think it’s worrying that this war is coming home for us. India is the net security provider in the region and we are confident that India will rise to the occasion,” former Maldives President Mohamed Nasheed said.

Maldives President Mohamed Muizzu has spoken to several leaders in West Asia, including his counterpart in the UAE, Mohammed Bin Zayed. He has criticised the U.S. and Israel for the war in the region, but has not commented on the incident in



I think it’s worrying that this war is coming home for us... we are confident that India will rise to the occasion

**MOHAMED NASHEED**  
Former Maldives President

the Indian Ocean.

Sri Lankan Navy personnel rescued about 30 Iranian sailors after responding to a distress call, with estimates of more than 80 killed in the explosion.

“For smaller countries, particularly Sri Lanka that is coming out of an [economic] crisis, we haven’t still been able to build enough buffers to withstand an external shock if it

prolongs for more than a couple of weeks,” Sri Lankan Opposition UNP MP Harsha Da Silva told *The Hindu*. “Obviously therefore we depend on India to work in partnership, particularly when it comes to maritime affairs,” he added, pointing out that Sri Lanka was the “centre of the Indian Ocean”, where India helms a number of multilateral organisations.

## Indian leadership

In the past few years, India has upgraded its SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) policy to MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions). It also hosts the annual Indian Ocean Conference, houses

the Information Fusion Centre - Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), convenes the Colombo Security Initiative (which includes Sri Lanka, the Seychelles, the Maldives, Mauritius, and Bangladesh), and takes a leading role in organisations such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association.

Last month, it hosted the Navies of 75 countries, including Iran, at three major events in Visakhapatnam – the International Fleet Review 2026, Exercise MILAN 2026, and Indian Ocean Naval Symposium Conclave of Chiefs.

Former Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal said the Iranian ship would not have been in the Indian Ocean at this time if it had not been invited by India.

“The attack by the U.S. submarine was premeditated as the U.S. was aware of the Iranian ship’s presence in the exercise to which the U.S. Navy was invited but withdrew from participation at the last minute, presumably with this operation in mind. The U.S. has ignored India’s sensitivities as the ship was in these waters because of India’s invitation,” he said on X, adding that India had a “moral and human responsibility” to condole the loss of lives of its guests.

The conflict overshadowed the opening day of the Raisina Dialogue, with about 1,100 of the 1,800 international delegates cancelling their plans to attend due to airspace restrictions and flight cancellations.

# Turning to Iranian Kurds, US seeks out old ally in West Asia

Rishika Singh

New Delhi, March 5

AS THE conflict in West Asia spreads, the US is turning to some older, non-state allies for support. Israeli and US intelligence agencies, the Mossad and the CIA, respectively, are reportedly arming the Kurds to ensure an on-ground presence against the Iranian regime.

The US has long supported the ethnic group with thousands of trained fighters to bolster its own strategic aims in West Asia.

## Stateless group

The Kurds are the world's largest stateless ethnic group, numbering around 25 to 35 million. They are spread across Turkey, northern Iraq, northeastern Syria, north-western Iran, and southern Armenia, and are a minority in these countries.

Reputed to be fearless fighters, the Kurds have served as mercenaries in armies for centuries, but never had their own independent national homeland.

After World War I, the Kurdish Ottoman diplomat Mehmet Sherif Pasha proposed a new Kurdistan covering parts of modern

Turkey, Iraq, and Iran. However, the Treaty of Sèvres, which partitioned the old Ottoman dominions, marked a smaller territory, entirely in today's Turkey. After negotiations with the Allies, Turkey signed the Treaty of Lausanne, which ended the idea of a self-governing Kurdistan.

Over time, the Kurds made attempts at establishing a de facto Kurdistan and attracted Turkish repression, including bans on the Kurdish language, songs, and dress. The Kurds in Iran have also had grievances with both the Islamic Republic regime and the Pahlavi dynasty before them.

In 1978, the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK in Kurdish) sought to establish an independent Kurdistan, leading to violent clashes with the Turkish state. In 2013, the PKK declared a ceasefire, but this collapsed when Turkey fought the Islamic State (IS) in 2015 and started to bomb PKK targets in Iraq.

## Role in Syria, Iraq

As the IS swept across Syria and Iraq in the early 2010s, the only fighters who were able to resist the onslaught were the Syrian Kurdish militias, the most powerful of

## Iran's other minorities

- Apart from Kurds, Iran also has a sizable population of other ethnic minorities.

- These include the Azeri Turks (comprising around 15 to 20% of the total population of 90 million) and the Baloch (around 2 to 3%).

- Not all of them are equally interested in politically mobilising against the government.

which was the People's Protection Units or the YPG. In 2014, as the US joined the war against ISIS, it found in the YPG a helpful regional ally. The Kurds also served as a counterpoint against the Iranians and Russians, who supported the Syrian regime.

This was not the first such extension of support. As *Al Jazeera* reported, "The US provided tactical support in the form of no-fly zones that protected Kurdish groups during the 1991 uprising (in Iraq), although Washington was criticised for prompting the revolt and then abandoning people as Iraqi forces under Saddam Hussein responded violently." The no-fly zone allowed the creation of a de facto Kurdish-controlled region in northern Iraq, officially recognised in 2005.

In Syria, once the Kurds had forced ISIS out of the northern region, they took over the recaptured land along the Syria-Turkey border. The YPG has close links with the PKK, and for Turkey, this constituted a serious security threat.

## Possible shift

Over time, the Kurds developed their own governing institutions in parts of

Syria. However, the fall of the al-Assad government in 2024 saw a more US-friendly regime come to power. The current government is keen to establish total territorial control after years of war and has offered some concessions to Kurdish groups by recognising their cultural rights.

Fighting also broke out between the Syrian government and Kurdish forces a few months ago, halted by a ceasefire. The importance of the Kurds for the US establishment thus seemed to wane.

The US envoy to Syria, Tom Barrack, said in January that the situation had "fundamentally changed" and the Kurdish forces' original purpose had "largely expired". But with the events surrounding Iran, another shift may be underway.

Three Iraqi Kurdish officials told the *Associated Press* that US President Donald Trump and the heads of two main Kurdish parties in Iraq spoke to discuss military support to the Iranian Kurdish groups. Israel has also lent support to the Kurds, owing to its historically fraught ties with Arab nations.

Apart from the Kurds, Iran also has a sizable population of other ethnic minorities.

# Strait of Hormuz shut, a few tankers with Russia crude oil divert to India

**Sukalp Sharma**

*New Delhi, March 5*

WITH VESSEL passage through the Strait of Hormuz disrupted due to the West Asia conflict, there are early signs that India could be increasing its intake of Russian crude.

Two crude oil tankers laden with Russian oil, which were earlier showing East Asia as their destination, arrived at Indian ports Thursday, according to ship tracking data. Another tanker, while still showing Singapore as its destination, appeared to be heading towards India's west coast. In recent months, India had cut down

significantly on its oil imports from Russia amid trade negotiations with the US.

Oil tankers Matari and Odune, both sailing under the flag of Sierra Leone, arrived at the ports of Vadinar in Gujarat and Paradip in Odisha respectively, Thursday morning, vessel tracking data showed. The two tankers together are estimated to be carrying over 1.4 million barrels of Russian crude.

Another Sierra Leone-flagged tanker, Indri, has turned northwards towards India although it is still signalling Singapore as its intended destination, according to the data. Indri is

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

# Tankers divert to India

estimated to be carrying around 0.7 million barrels of Russian crude. Indri and Odune had set sail from Russia's Primorsk port, while Matari set out from the Ust-Luga port.

On Wednesday, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said Moscow is ready to satisfy additional demand for oil from India and China, if the need arises. "Always ready," he said in response to a question on whether Russia plans to increase oil supplies to India and China amid the escalation of the conflict, Russian news agency Interfax reported. "Our oil is in demand. If they buy, we will sell," the report quoted Novak as saying.

Sources in the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas (MoPNG), while making no direct comment on the issue of additional oil imports from Russia, said India is in touch with all international suppliers, including national oil companies and large traders like Vitol, Trafigura, and ADNOC Trading, to source additional volumes of crude oil and liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) from their international portfolios. India, the sources said, is in a comfortable position with regard to oil and fuel stocks, and currently there is no need to ration fuels. The sources also ruled out any increase in retail fuel

prices for the time being.

On Monday, *The Indian Express* reported that government and public sector refiners were considering increasing imports of Russian crude as part of the effort to ensure oil supply continuity amid the effective halt in shipments through the critical chokepoint of the Strait of Hormuz. According to trade sources, apart from the option of getting oil from Russia, there is continued availability of Russian crude cargoes in the Indian Ocean and Arabian Sea region, including volumes in floating storage. This volume build-up was partly a result of Indian refiners substantially reducing their intake of Russian crude. Roughly 10 million barrels of Russian crude was available in Asian waters, according to industry estimates.

In February, India imported 1.1 million barrels per day (bpd) of Russian crude, almost half of the 2025 peak of over 2 million bpd, according to tanker data from Kpler. Loadings of Russian crude for Indian ports, which averaged 1.7 million bpd last year, was 0.7 million bpd in February. Around 2.5-2.7 million bpd of India's crude imports, accounting for around half of the country's total oil imports, have transited the Strait of Hormuz in recent months.

# Flight cancellations, shipping surcharge hit exporters hard

Suspension of flights from India to West Asia disrupts supply chain for vegetables, fruits, and seafood exported from South India

**Dhinesh Kallungal**

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

**T**he cancellation of scheduled flights from India to West Asia has put exporters in trouble, as it has disrupted the supply chain for vegetables, fruits, and seafood exported from South India, including Kerala, which has a strong market in West Asian cities as well as in Europe. The suspension of flight services has also led to the accumulation of perishable goods in the warehouses of exporters in Kerala, forcing many to sell export-quality produce in local markets at cheaper rates.

An Instagram reel showing export-quality vegetables and fruits being sold by local vendors in the Tirur market, after they could not be exported to overseas markets through Calicut International Airport, has gone viral in Kerala. Speaking to *The Hindu*, K. Suresh Kumar, chairman of the Air Cargo Agents Association of India (ACAAI), a body of air-freight forwarders with around 600 members in the State, said about 100-150 tonnes of vegetables, fruits, flowers, and seafood are exported daily to West Asian and European markets from the Thiruvananthapuram International Airport.



**Edged out:** The perishable goods kept at the warehouse of the Kerala State industrial Enterprises Ltd. in Kozhikode. FILE PHOTO

The total volume of perishable goods exported to overseas markets through the four international airports in Kerala is about 400-600 tonnes of cargo per day. Around 30-40% of the cargo is meant exclusively for the West Asian market, while the rest is routed to European destinations, including the U.K., France, and Italy, as well as to Canada and the U.S. Transit flights operated by Emirates and Qatar Airways are primarily used to ship consignments to Europe via Dubai and Doha.

On the other hand, exporters depend on flights operated by IndiGo, Air India Express, and Air Arabia to ship goods to the West Asian market.

The suspension of flights has led to a near-total halt in exports from Kerala and other cities in India, inflicting heavy losses

on exporters and farmers from southern India, Mr. Suresh said.

The bulk of the vegetables routed through Kerala is sourced from neighbouring States like Tamil Nadu and Karnataka.

## **Emergency surcharge**

Adding to their woes, shipping carriers have imposed an emergency surcharge ranging between \$2,000 and \$4,000 on cargo transiting through the Strait of Hormuz, citing escalating security risks. This has pushed exporters further to the brink, said Munshid Ali, secretary of the Kerala Exporters' Forum.

In the case of air shipments, airlines such as Emirates are now charging ₹215 per kg of cargo, compared with around ₹60 per kg earlier, following the partial reopening of airspace, Mr. Suresh said.

# UK sends more fighter jets to West Asia as Starmer calls for Iran talks

Reuters

London, March 5

BRITISH PM Keir Starmer on Thursday called for a negotiated settlement with Iran, the target of US and Israeli air strikes, as he deployed a further set of fighter jets to West Asia to bolster the UK's "defensive operations".

Addressing reporters from Downing Street in London, Starmer reiterated his stance against the UK joining the strikes on Tehran and said he remained focussed on providing "calm, level-headed leadership" in favour of Britain's national interest. "No matter the pressure to do otherwise, the longstanding British position is that the best way forward for the region and the world is a negotiated settle-



UK Prime Minister Keir Starmer

ment with Iran, where they give up their nuclear ambitions," Starmer said in his address.

"That's why I took the decision that the UK would not join the initial strikes on Iran by the US and Israel. That decision was deliberate. It was in the national interest and I stand by it."

"I can announce today that

we are sending four additional Typhoon jets to Qatar to strengthen our defensive operations in Qatar and across the region. Wildcat Helicopters with anti-drone capabilities are arriving in Cyprus tomorrow," he said.

These planes would be in addition to the RAF jets already over Jordan, Qatar and other allies in the region, offering refuelling facilities in the air to prolong their defence mission.

On the "special relationship" with the US, he said: "We're working with the Americans in the deployment from our bases. We are working together in the region. The US and the British working together to protect both the US and the British in joint bases where we're jointly located and we're sharing intelligence on a 24/7 basis in the usual way."

## Iran war to cost \$3 billion a week under current limitations: Israel

Harinder Mishra

Jerusalem, March 5

THE ONGOING war with Iran could cost Israel an estimated NIS 9.4 billion (USD 3 billion approximately) per week under current restrictions on economic activities, the Israeli Finance Ministry has warned.

"In a letter sent to the Home Front Command chief, Maj. Gen. Shai Klapper, Finance Ministry Director General Ilan Rom asked to ease restrictions to allow for a gradual, partial reopening of businesses and workplaces as early as Thursday," the Times of Israel reported.



A building hit in an Israeli strike in Lebanon on Thursday. PTI

"There is no dispute about the need to preserve a defence policy adapted to the security situation, but at the same time, shutting down the economy on a broad scale carries heavy economic costs," Rom warned. "We need a solution that ad-

dresses both the security needs of the Home Front and the needs of the economy, after two and a half years in which the economy has been paying a heavy economic price in light of the increase in security needs and the repercussions of the war," the top Finance Ministry executive reportedly said.

Soon after Israel and the US launched their joint offensive against Iran on Saturday morning, the IDF Home Front Command issued nationwide guidelines prohibiting all gatherings, educational activities and workplaces, except for essential businesses. PTI