

# U.S. 'allows' India to buy Russian oil for 30 days

Analysts say the move can help India mitigate price and supply shocks; however, Russian oil may no longer come at a discount, with China also competing for supplies, say government sources

**T.C.A. Sharad Raghavan**  
**Saptaparno Ghosh**  
NEW DELHI

The U.S. Treasury Department on Friday issued an order that would "allow" India to import Russian oil for 30 days, U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent said while sharing the order on X.

Analysts say this will help mitigate the spike in the price of oil and delays in oil shipments to import-dependent India.

However, government sources confirmed that Russian oil may no longer come at a discount and that China was also competing for it. The government is currently studying the legal order, they added.

Mr. Bessent said the U.S.



was granting India this reprieve to "alleviate pressure caused by Iran's attempt to take global energy hostage".

"This deliberately short-term measure will not provide significant financial

benefit to the Russian government as it only authorises transactions involving oil already stranded at sea," Mr. Bessent said.

**CONTINUED ON**  
**» PAGE 12**

## Cong. slams govt. over U.S. remark

NEW DELHI

Criticising the Centre over U.S. remarks, Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge alleged that India's strategic autonomy and national sovereignty are under threat "because PM is getting blackmailed on Epstein files and Adani case". **» PAGE 14**

## Use cooking fuel judiciously: govt.

CHENNAI

With restrictions placed on LPG supplies, the public has been advised to use the fuel judiciously. Sources said commercial consumers using 19 kg cylinders were told they will not be given supplies. **» PAGE 15**

# U.S. 'allows' India to buy Russian oil for 30 days

The price of Brent crude has increased to nearly \$88 a barrel, a jump of about 20% in a week. Global oil supplies are currently constrained due to Iran's blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, and tankers avoiding the region due to the conflict.

This comes at a time when the Indian government has made assurances that the country has adequate amounts of crude oil, petrol and diesel in reserve. According to sources, India currently has 25 days of crude oil in reserve, and 25 days of petrol and diesel each. The order also follows a relatively sustained period where India has been cutting back on its Russian oil imports and increasing oil imports from the U.S.

A previous analysis by *The Hindu* of the latest preliminary data from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry shows that India imported \$1.98 billion worth of crude oil from Russia in January 2026, the month before India and the U.S. issued a joint statement about an interim trade agreement between the two countries. This was the lowest in 44 months. As a result of this, Russia's share in Indian oil imports fell to 19.3% in January 2026, the lowest since December 2022. In comparison, Russia's share was 27.5% two months earlier, and 33% in May 2025. A second government official, who did not want to be identified, had stated earlier this week that, at present, India procures 1.04 million barrels per day of crude oil from Moscow.

## Need for Russian oil

"Considering more than 55% of India's oil imports pass through the Strait of Hormuz, elevated price and delays will stretch India's oil bill (\$11.5bn/month) unless India ramps up imports from Russia (19% currently versus 43% in July 2024)," JM Financial Services said in a note. It added that, in the "extreme" scenario of Brent crude prices breaching the \$90 per barrel mark, India's Current Account Deficit (CAD) could stretch to 1.4% of GDP, and the rupee could depreciate to ₹95 per U.S. dollar. "However, in such a scenario, imports of Russian fuel will take centre stage," it added.

Moody's also pointed out that India stands out among large Asian economies that rely on crude and LNG from West Asia due to its high share of West Asian crude among total oil imports, and pressure from the U.S. to cut its energy imports from Russia. "Costly energy imports would weaken the rupee, raise inflation, worsen the current account balance and complicate monetary policy as well as fiscal management if they lead to expanded subsidies to help offset the economic shock," Moody's said.

The sources in the government, however, said that Indian refiners have sourced more crude stocks from other parts of the world than what is currently stuck in the Strait of Hormuz.

In his post, Mr. Bessent further said that "India is an essential partner of the United States", and that the U.S. anticipates that India will "ramp up" purchases of U.S. oil.

# US-Iran diplomatic battle plays out in Delhi as war enters Day 6

US Dy Secy of State talks about 'endgame'; war duration in our hands: Iran envoy

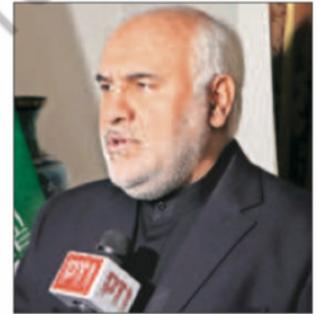
Shubhajit Roy  
New Delhi, March 5

AMID THE ongoing conflict in the West Asia region, a diplomatic battle played out between the US and Iran in Delhi on Thursday after a US submarine torpedoed an Iranian warship, which had taken part in a military exercise in India last month, in international waters in the Indian Ocean.

US Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau, while speaking at the Raisina Dialogue organised by think tank ORF, said: "I think the endgame is a Middle East that is not a threat to other parts of the world... We tried very, very hard to explain our red line (to Iran), which is no development of a nuclear



External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar meets US Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau on the sidelines of Raisina Dialogue, (right) Iran Ambassador Mohammad Fathali in New Delhi on Thursday. PTI



weapon. I mean, could you imagine... what a threat to the world it would be to have an Iran that basically was able to blackmail the world with a nuclear device."

"We tried very hard to talk sense into the Iranians... And ultimately we concluded that that was not going to work. So these are unsettled days right now. But I think the truth is, this part of the world has been quite unsettled for quite a long time. And if you look at the roots of a lot of this, they can be traced back to Tehran," he said, adding that he was a teenager when Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi

was overthrown, and since then Iran has been in a "death to America posture".

Iran's ambassador to India Mohammad Fathali said: "We don't want war, but we are ready for war... We entered the negotiation table (with US, Israel) despite being aware of their intention... they destroyed the negotiation table." "We showed sincerity, they showed open hostility, and they started the war, but the duration of the war is in our hands, this is very important," the Iranian envoy said.

Fathali said Iran does not target its neighbouring countries,

but alleged that some regional bases were used by the United States. "They know very well where the location of Iran is. Unfortunately, the Zionist regime wants to destroy and disturb all the regions," he said.

The envoy also claimed that three F-15 fighter jets had been shot down during the conflict.

"Iran is not attacking its neighbourhood. We don't attack our neighbours; they provide the bases. You heard that three F-15s were shot down... We announced to all neighbours that we will attack the bases of the United States."

# U.S. 'allowing' India to buy Russian oil is 'humiliating' for sovereignty: Congress

Kharge says **strategic autonomy under threat**, while Rahul points to **'exploitation of a compromised individual'**; Opposition will seek discussion on the West Asia conflict in Parliament, says Ramesh

## The Hindu Bureau

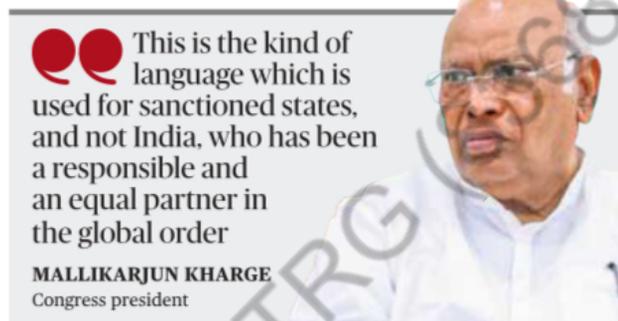
NEW DELHI

**C**riticising the Modi government over U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent's comment that President Donald Trump had "allowed" Indian refiners to buy Russian oil for 30 days, the Congress on Friday said it was "deeply humiliating for India's sovereignty".

Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, in a post on X, alleged that India's **strategic autonomy and national sovereignty was under dire threat "because Prime Minister Modi is getting blackmailed on Epstein Files and Adani case"**. Targeting the government, the Leader of the Opposition in the Lok Sabha, Rahul Gandhi, said India's foreign policy was the result of the "exploitation of a compromised individual".

## Slams U.S. remarks

The party also raised a red flag over the recent remark by U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau that the U.S. would put



America first in the trade deal with India. "India's foreign policy emerges from the collective will of our people. It should be rooted in our history, our geography, and our spiritual ethos based on *satya* and *ahimsa*. What we are witnessing today is not policy. It is the result of the exploitation of a compromised individual," he said on X.

The Opposition leader also shared his February 11 speech in the Lok Sabha during the discussion on the Budget, where he **spoke about India's energy security being compromised. "The U.S. will tell us who we can or cannot buy oil from; if it's Russia or Iran, the U.S. will decide. But our Prime Minister will**

not decide," Mr. Gandhi had said.

Echoing the sentiment, Mr. Kharge hit out at the government for ceding diplomatic space to the U.S. In a post on X, Mr. Kharge said: **"The U.S. proclamation to 'allow' and grant us 'permission' to buy Russian oil, as a 'waiver for 30 days' clearly demonstrates Modi government is continuously ceding diplomatic space. This is the kind of language which is used for sanctioned states, and not India, who has been a responsible and an equal partner in global order."**

"From trade to oil, from data to India's long-term relationships with friendly countries, Modi ji SUR-RENDERED it all," Mr.

Kharge said, adding that Mr. Modi had made India a "vassal state".

Congress general secretary (organisation) K.C. Venugopal also said it was deeply humiliating for India's sovereignty that it needed a U.S. "waiver" to purchase oil from a time-tested partner like Russia. "Instead of standing up to the U.S. dictating terms, Compromised PM Modi is handing our energy sovereignty on a platter to other countries," he said on X. Addressing a press conference, Congress spokesperson Pawan Khara said Mr. Gandhi's words on February 11 in the Lok Sabha - that the U.S. would decide from whom we should be purchasing oil - yet again proved prophetic.

Congress communications chief Jairam Ramesh, in a post, asked, "How long will the America blackmail continue". He also said the Opposition would press for a full-fledged discussion in Parliament on the West Asia conflict once the Budget Session resumes on March 9.

# India denies assisting U.S. Navy in attack on Iran's ship

**Saurabh Trivedi**

NEW DELHI

India has denied reports that it assisted the United States in targeting an Iranian vessel near Sri Lankan waters, with a top naval official on Friday describing such reports as “baseless”.

*IRIS Dena* was sunk by a U.S. Navy submarine on March 4 in international waters off the coast of Sri Lanka.

The officer said that India had not provided any assistance to U.S. authorities or its military in relation to the Iranian warship and clarified that existing India-U.S. communication and logistics agreements do not automatically apply to such situations.

The officer added that New Delhi had not received any request from Washington seeking logistical assistance. India and the United States signed the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016, which enables reciprocal, case-by-case logistical support such as refuelling, supplies and repairs between the two militaries.

However, officials emphasised the

**Existing agreements like LEMOA and COMCASA do not bind India to support American defence operations, say officials**

agreement applies only to mutually agreed activities such as exercises and port calls and does not provide automatic access or obligate either side to extend support. Each request is considered individually, ensuring India's strategic autonomy.

The two countries also concluded the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in 2018, which facilitates the transfer of advanced encrypted communication equipment and enables secure, real-time data exchange between the militaries. Officials stressed that this arrangement is not automatic and does not mandate or guarantee immediate technology transfer or logistical support.

Officials reiterated that the pacts do not bind India to support American defence operations.

# Responded to Iran warship SOS, searched: Navy

At Iran embassy, Foreign Secretary offers India's condolences on the death of Ayatollah Khamenei, others

Amrita Nayak Dutta  
& Shubhajit Roy  
New Delhi, March 5

A DAY after a US submarine torpedo sank an Iranian warship near Sri Lanka as it headed home after participating in Exercise MILAN and the International Fleet Review in Visakhapatnam, the Indian Navy said Thursday had sent its aircraft and ships to augment the search and rescue (SAR) efforts for IRIS Dena after it put out a distress call.

The Indian Navy statement came on the day the government condoned the death of Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and others killed in air strikes by Israel and the US.

Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri visited the Iranian embassy in New Delhi and signed the condolence book—the first public gesture from the govern-

## Sri Lanka allows crew of second Iran ship to disembark in Colombo

Chennai: A day after a US submarine torpedoed and sank an Iranian naval frigate near Sri Lanka's southern coast, a second Iranian warship waited for hours just outside Sri Lanka's territorial waters. Eventually, the country's President, Anura Kumara Dissanayake, said the crew of the Iranian naval ship, IRIS Bushehr, will be disembarked at Colombo Port. He said the vessel will then be taken to Trincomalee Harbour, while the Sri Lanka Navy makes arrangements to bring the 208 personnel on board safely to Colombo. [PAGE 8](#)

ment ever since the assassination of the Iranian leader.

According to sources, Misri, [▶CONTINUED ON PAGE 2](#)



Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri signs a condolence book at the Iran Embassy in New Delhi, Thursday, days after Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was killed in Israel-US strikes. PTI

# Merchant ships stranded near Strait of Hormuz

**M. Kalyanaraman**

CHENNAI

With the conflict in West Asia escalating, merchant ships continue to be stranded upstream of Strait of Hormuz, even as the world awaits the rollout of the U.S. government's promise of deploying its Navy to escort the ships and funding war risk insurance for the vessels.

On Thursday, Sonangal Namibe, a crude oil carrier whose owners are based in Houston, Texas, as per Equasis database, became the ninth ship attacked in the region since the conflict started. Skylight, a ship sanctioned by the U.S. for Iranian links and manned mostly by Indian crew, was also among the ships attacked. Insurance companies are seek-



**Fear reigns::** Ships on the Persian Gulf route may have to pay 10 times or 15 times more for insurance coverage.

ing to renegotiate their coverage of ships serving the Persian Gulf.

## War risk cover

War risk insurance policies that can cover ship transit through the Strait of Hormuz come with premiums of 1% to 3% of the vessel cost itself, says David Osler, Law and Insurance Editor of Lloyds List Intelligence.

This means vessels transiting the Strait of Hormuz will now need to pay weekly insurance premiums of nearly the same amount they would pay for an entire year, he says.

Insurance premiums have registered increases across the world since the recent conflict started. Ships on the Persian Gulf route may have to pay 10

times or 15 times more for insurance coverage, which is a basic requirement for any merchant ship to embark on a voyage. Experts talk of affiliative risk - vessels may have owners formally based in neutral countries and the ships may fly flags of other nations but if they have links with not just Iran but also the U.S. and Israel, then they may have to pay much higher premiums.

Governments such as the U.K. had historically footed the bill for such war risk insurance. In December of last year, Denmark passed a law providing such a cover for its ships.

One fifth of the world's oil and gas supplies pass through the strait.

More than 600 ships are estimated to be trapped, out of whom some 250 are

oil tankers and gas carriers. At least 10% of the oil and gas ships are estimated to be Indian flagged vessels bound for India. Government-owned Shipping Corporation of India is among the leading ship owners whose vessels have been stranded in the Persian Gulf west of the strait.

Though oil and gas facilities have been hit and some such as Qatar's facilities have been shut down, many Persian Gulf ports continue to be operational.

Lloyds List Intelligence reports that there has been a 95% decrease in the number of ships transiting the Strait of Hormuz.

No India related ship has transited the strait. SCI has ships with some nine lakh tonne cargo capacity in the area while Sanmar has some 3 lakh tonne.

# War to impact India's gem, jewellery industry

**Lalatendu Mishra**

MUMBAI

The Indian gem & jewellery industry is expecting a major impact on trade on account of the escalating geopolitical tensions in West Asia with the U.S.-Israel-Iran war spreading to the whole of the oil-rich Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Apex trade body Gem & Jewellery Export Promotion Council (GJEPC) said there would be a dual shock to the supply chain.

India is heavily dependent on the UAE for both exports and raw materials. India's Cut and Polished Diamond (CPD) and gold jewellery exports flow to UAE which supplies rough diamonds and bullion to the Indian market.

The war is leading to upstream supply disruptions



**Key market:** India is heavily dependent on the UAE for both exports and raw materials. REUTERS

and posing threats to raw material inflows.

## UAE demand hit

Downstream market disruptions have started impacting demand in UAE, a key centre. Rerouting via the Red Sea is rising freight and insurance costs.

As per available data, GCC's share of India's total exports doubled from 14% in FY22 to around 22% in

FY25, rising to 36% during April-December 2025.

India's gem & jewellery exports to GCC surged from \$5.1 billion in FY22 to \$8.3 billion in FY25, showing strong growth. UAE and Saudi Arabia are leading importers driving a majority of the gem and jewellery trade in GCC.

The GCC emerged as a key sourcing hub and its share surged to 32% over

the last four years. India's gem and jewellery imports from GCC surged from \$16 billion in FY22 to \$28 billion in FY25.

## Major suppliers

GCC countries supply over 30% of India's gem & jewellery imports providing raw materials and precious metals. In all these, UAE acts as a key hub for gold and diamond imports.

## Dubai, key hub

Dubai serves as a key diamond trading hub with bilateral agreements enhancing trade flows. Now that Dubai has come under attack, uncertainties have caused business disruptions. GCC accounts for over 50% of India's gold jewellery exports.

"The situation is a matter of serious concern and we hope for stability and

peace to return at the earliest to make it conducive of conducting regular business. Being a key hub for gold bar imports, UAE supports India's jewellery manufacturing and retail sectors," the trade body said.

"From an industry standpoint, the GCC countries and MENA region is not only an important export destination for India's gem and jewellery sector, but also a key hub where Indian companies have established business interests," GJEPC said.

"At present, the industry is closely monitoring the developments. GJEPC is in touch with stakeholders from Industry and Government of India. We will assess any potential impact on India's gem and jewellery exports and urge the Government to take steps accordingly," it added.

# Centre directs refiners to maximise LPG production

Govt. invokes Essential Commodities Act, tells oil companies to prioritise domestic supply; order seeks to re-prioritise allocation of propane, butane streams for cooking gas production

**The Hindu Bureau**  
NEW DELHI/CHENNAI

Despite assuring Indians that the country has “comfortable” stocks of crude, diesel, petrol and LPG, the Centre on Wednesday invoked the Essential Commodities Act (ECA), 1955, directing domestic oil refiners to prioritise the production of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) – a tacit admission that there are supply bottlenecks that could affect distribution in the near future.

The order issued on Wednesday read: “All oil refining companies operating in India shall maximise and ensure that propane and butane streams produced, recovered, fractionated or otherwise available with them are utilised for production of LPG and make it available to the three public sector oil marketing companies.”

The order said that all public sector oil marketing



**Allaying concerns:** IOCL issued a statement seeking to reassure consumers that the country has adequate reserves. FILE PHOTO

companies (OMCs) shall ensure that LPG so produced is supplied or marketed solely to consumers of domestic LPG.

The order further states that oil refining companies “shall not divert, utilise, process, crack, convert or otherwise employ propane or butane streams for manufacture of petrochemical products or other such downstream derivatives.”

The cooking fuel is formed from a combination of propane and bu-

tane and liquefied under pressure. It may contain trace quantities of higher hydrocarbons as well.

“LPG is largely a mixture of propane and butane. These gases are found along with natural gas, but are also produced in the crude oil refining process. The refining process can be tweaked to increase the butane-propane content of the output and rebalance the other output products, thereby boosting the production of

liquefied petroleum gas for use as cooking fuel,” said Prashant Vasisht, Senior Vice-President at ICRA.

Mr. Vasisht added that the government is prioritising the availability of LPG for household cooking gas use rather than supplying it to vehicles or commercial establishments.

Some 60% of India's LPG is imported, much of it from Persian Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia and Qatar. With the Strait of Hormuz closed since March 1, LPG imports have been badly hit. OMCs such as Indian Oil Corporation and Bharat Petroleum Corporation produce roughly 40% of India's LPG requirement domestically.

The fuel is then bottled and distributed across the country.

Separately, IOCL issued a statement seeking to reassure consumers that the country has adequate reserves, dismissing social media chatter about a “fuel shortage” as “rumours”.

# Use cooking fuel judiciously, consumers told

**Sangeetha Kandavel**  
**Deepa H. Ramakrishnan**  
CHENNAI

With restrictions placed on liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) supplies for both domestic and commercial consumers from Thursday night, the public have been advised to use the fuel judiciously.

An oil industry source said single bottle domestic consumers will be allowed to make fresh bookings only after 21 days from the date of last booking and those with double bottles can book only after 30 days. “Consumers can book only using their registered mobile numbers and delivery will be done only if the OTP is given. These are steps to ensure the fuel is used judiciously,” said a distributor.

Sources said commercial consumers using 19 kg cylinders were told they will not be given supplies. But after talks, existing customers were given a portion of their requirements.

“Private gas companies

do not have stock. We heard supplies to industrial consumers were being stopped,” a source said.

Hoteliers in Tamil Nadu said this could cripple their business. They fear distributors may cite shortages to divert supplies to the black market or increase prices, raising operating costs for restaurants and hotels.

“They have slowed the supply of LPG for commercial purposes. From next week, we don’t know how we will run our business. Distributors say they don’t have any stock,” said D. Sreenivasan, owner of the Sree Annapoorna Sree Gowrishankar Hotels, Coimbatore and Honorary President of Tamil Nadu Hotel Association.

“LPG is our primary fuel. Many who are working and living in hostels depend on restaurants for their day-to-day food. Even the hospital sector depends on us for food for patients,” added Jegan Damodarasamy, CEO of Sree Annapoorna Sree Gowrishankar Hotels.

# Indices fall 1.3% as rising oil prices keep investors on the edge

**Ashokamithran T.**  
MUMBAI

Benchmark indices fell 1.3% for the third time in the week on Friday following rising oil prices and supply shocks as Iran blocked passage through the Strait of Hormuz.

The Nifty 50 opened steady at 24,656.40 points, and after trading flat for the better part of the day, fell to the day's low of 24,415.75 points before closing at 24,450.5 points. Sensex, too, fell 1.4% to 78,918.90 points.

Of the 21 sectoral indices

on Nifty, only three closed higher than the previous day. Most of the indices were in the negative, shedding nearly 2% of their previous day's close.

About 55% of the stocks that were trading actively on NSE and BSE declined, marking a broad-based ne-

gative investor sentiment. This was however slightly better than the ratio on Monday, when the markets lost ground after Iranian strikes began.

The week had just four trading sessions on account of a market holiday for Holi on Tuesday.

"Investors are moving towards traditional safe-haven assets and adopting a cautious stance, awaiting greater clarity. We expect that reassurance over control of the Strait of Hormuz will help stabilise market sentiment. We advise avoiding a panic sell-off

and adopting a disciplined, long-term perspective and exercising patience over the next several weeks, as current price levels may offer a strategic entry point for medium- to long-term investors," said Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Investments Limited.

# Trump demands 'surrender'; IRGC warns of 'long war'

U.S. President says there would not be a deal with Iran without its 'complete surrender' and selection of an 'acceptable' new leader; Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian says some countries have begun mediation efforts, but asks them to focus on those who 'ignited the conflict'; IRGC warns the enemy should expect 'painful blows'; at least 1,332 people have been killed in Iran in the U.S.-Israeli strikes

Stanly Johnny

U.S. President Donald Trump on Friday said there would be no deal with Iran "except unconditional surrender", even as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) said they were prepared for a "prolonged war".

"There will be no deal with Iran except unconditional surrender! After that, and the selection of a great & acceptable leader (s), we, and many of our wonderful and very brave allies and partners, will work tirelessly to bring Iran back from the brink of destruction, making it economically bigger, better, and stronger than ever before," Mr. Trump wrote in a social media post.

Earlier in the day, Iran's President Masoud Pezeshkian said some countries had begun mediation efforts to end the war, but asked them to focus on those who "ignited the conflict". "Some countries have begun mediation efforts. Let's be clear: we are committed to lasting peace in the region, yet we have no hesitation in defending our nation's dignity and sovereignty, Mr. Pezeshkian, a medical doctor-turned-politician who got elected President in 2024, wrote in social media. "Mediation should address those who underestimated the Iranian people and ignited this conflict," he added.

As the war entered the seventh day on Friday, the U.S. and Israel carried out broad strikes across Iran,

where the death toll climbed to 1,332, according to authorities. The Israeli military claimed to have achieved "near-complete air superiority" in Iran. Israel also launched massive attacks in Lebanon where its troops are fighting Hezbollah, a Shia militia group.

## Multiple hits

Iran's state media reported on Friday, citing satellite images, that Iranian attacks "destroyed" several U.S. military radars in the UAE and Jordan.

"One such radar, supporting an American THAAD missile battery at Muwaffaq Salti Air Base in Jordan, appears to have been hit and destroyed in the opening days of the war, according to satellite imagery captured Mon-



**Clear stance:** Donald Trump speaks about the Iran war in the East Room of the White House, in Washington on Thursday. AP

day," claimed a Press TV report.

Iran also targeted the Israeli embassy in Bahrain and Qatar's al-Udeid U.S. airbase overnight, according to semi-official Fars News Agency. A key oil re-

finery in Bahrain got hit on Thursday. Manama said it shot down multiple drones and missiles overnight.

Israeli media reported on Friday that Iranian missiles hit southern parts of the country.

An IRGC spokesperson said Iran was "fully prepared for a prolonged war" and was set to introduce a new set of strategic weaponry. "These technologies have not yet been deployed on a large scale. The enemy should expect painful blows in every upcoming operational wave," Brigadier General Ali Mohammad Naeini said.

The IRGC has launched the 22nd wave of Operation True Promise 4 with a barrage of Khorramshahr 4, Khaibar and Fatah missiles targeting the "heart of the occupied territories," claimed the state media.

Mohammad-Bagher Ghalibaf, Iran's Parliament Speaker, claimed on Friday that Iranian attacks forced the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier to retreat.

"What a fuss they kicked up over the aircraft carrier Abraham Lincoln to put pressure on us, but this so-called bride of praise, in its first encounter with Iranian missiles and drones, abandoned the battlefield and retreated," he wrote in a social media post. "The navy that was supposed to defend the security and stability of America's allies can't even defend itself against a few drones and takes to its heels in flight!"

## 'Long prepared for war'

Iran's Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said the country was "long prepared for this war."

"Iran's Powerful Armed Forces are ensuring that it becomes a quagmire for whomever chooses to pursue it," he wrote in a social

media post. "We negotiated twice with this U.S. Administration. Both times, we were attacked in the middle of talks. It bears full responsibility for bloodshed."

Earlier in an interview with an American TV, when he was asked whether Iran was afraid of a ground invasion by U.S. forces, Mr. Araghchi said, "We are waiting for them."

According to Mr. Araghchi, the U.S.'s "Plan A for a clean rapid military victory failed".

He added: "Your Plan B will be even bigger failure. The truth: Chance for unique deal burned after the 'America Last' cabal obscured "significant progress" we made in negotiations. 'Israel First' always means 'America Last'."

# 12,000 Indians in Gulf seek help to return home

by A

New Delhi, March 5

THE US-Israel-Iran war enters its sixth day, around 12,000 Indian citizens stranded in the Gulf countries have sought the help of the Indian government for their return and are in touch with embassies across the region, The Indian Express has learnt.

Most requests have come from those stuck in the United Arab Emirates, where air space remains largely closed and commercial flight operations continue to be suspended amid unrelenting attack from the Iranian side. Sources said the stranded Indians include tourists and transit visitors, who were in the UAE for short durations. Some of them are also students whose educational institutions have shut in the wake of Iranian attacks, or have switched to online classes.

As of Monday, two days after the war started, around 22,000 Indian nationals had reached out to the Indian government through various missions, seeking return to India, as per sources. Of them, around 10,000 have been able to return in the

last three days through some non-scheduled flights operating from the region.

Around 850 Indian nationals sought to return from Doha, where air space is completely shut, as per the source. They were able to return to India through Riyadh airport after taking the land route to cross over to Saudi Arabia.

As Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Doha – among the busiest airports in the region – continue to be shut for scheduled flight operations, some flights have taken off from Fujairah in the UAE.

The UAE remains the biggest point of concern for the Indian side, as per those monitoring the situation, because of the sheer volume of Indian nationals in the country and also because it has been constantly under attack from Iran.

In fact, many have been lining up at the UAE-Oman border to cross over through the land route and take flights back home through the Muscat airport. There have been reports of huge queues and delays faced by Indian nationals at the immigration check post.

FULL REPORT ON  
[WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM](http://WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM)

# Day after Iranian frigate sunk, Lanka lets in crew from another warship

**Arun Janardhanan**  
Chennai, March 5

A DAY after a United States submarine torpedoed and sank an Iranian naval frigate near Sri Lanka's southern coast, a second Iranian warship waited for hours just outside Sri Lanka's territorial waters. Eventually, the country's President, Anura Kumara Dissanayake, said the crew of the Iranian naval ship, IRIS Bushehr, will be disembarked at Colombo Port. He said the vessel will then be taken to Trincomalee Harbour, while the Sri Lanka Navy makes arrangements to bring the 208 personnel on board safely to Colombo.

Earlier, Sri Lankan authorities had confirmed that the vessel was positioned within the country's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), awaiting a decision on whether it would be allowed to enter port for assistance. Government spokesman and media minister Nalinda Jayatissa had told Parliament that the government was deliberating its next steps while prioritising humanitarian concerns.

"We are aware of it and are contemplating action to safeguard all lives on board," Jayatissa said earlier in the day. "We are intervening to resolve this issue to safeguard regional peace."

The development came a day after the Iranian frigate IRIS Dena, a Moudge-class warship from Iran's Southern Fleet, was sunk by a torpedo fired from a US submarine on Wednesday morning while sailing roughly 40 nautical miles south of Galle, outside Sri Lanka's territorial waters but within its EEZ. US War Secretary Pete Hegseth publicly confirmed that the United States carried out the attack. The frigate was returning from a naval exercise hosted by India. (MILAN-26)

The US government claimed that it was the first time since the



President Anura Kumara Dissanayake said the crew of IRIS Bushehr will be disembarked at Colombo Port

Second World War that the United States had targeted an enemy vessel in those waters.

Sri Lankan authorities said they first received an emergency message at 5.08 am from the distressed vessel, which had about 180 crew members on board. The vessel had sunk completely by the time aerial surveillance arrived.

In Sri Lanka's Parliament on Thursday, opposition politicians pressed the government on whether the Iranian warship had earlier sought permission to enter Sri Lankan waters. SJB Member of Parliament Mujeebur Rahman questioned why the vessel had been forced to wait for hours offshore. "The vessel waited for 11 hours about 40 nautical miles off Galle port for permission from the Sri Lankan government to berth, as it had difficulties returning to Iran due to the conflict situation," Rahman said in Parliament.

Speaking to *The Indian Express*, Rahman said the delay raised troubling questions about whether geopolitical pressure had influenced the government's decision.

His remarks reflected a growing domestic debate in Sri Lanka over whether the government had been caught between competing geopolitical pressures as tensions escalated across the Middle East.

# The legal framework that governs maritime conflict

The sinking of the frigate, in which at least 80 sailors were killed, has widened the theatre of the war between US-Israel and Iran



AMRITA NAYAK DUTTA,  
ANAGHA JAYAKUMAR  
& SANDEEP SINGH

A US submarine on Wednesday torpedoed Iranian warship IRIS Dena off the coast of Sri Lanka, outside its nautical boundary.

The ship was returning after participating in the International Fleet Review and MILAN-2026, a multilateral naval exercise organised by the Indian Navy off Visakhapatnam last month.

The sinking of the frigate, in which at least 80 sailors were killed, has widened the theatre of the war between US-Israel and Iran — beyond West Asia and the Gulf to India's immediate neighbourhood.

It also ignited a debate in India about maritime security in the Indian Ocean, a region where New Delhi maintains a significant naval presence.

Several Indian Navy officers maintain that once a ship enters international waters, there is not much of a role any country can play in protecting it from an adversarial force. Here's a look at what maritime law and conventions say.

## Conventions and laws

International maritime law falls under the purview of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). The US is not a signatory to it.

But it does not contain explicit provisions regulating the conduct of belligerent parties during armed conflict, as its primary focus is on peacetime governance.

Instead, the law of naval warfare operates in parallel with UNCLOS during conflicts. So, it doesn't matter if the Dena was directly participating in the conflict. It was a warship of the Iranian navy and, therefore, a legitimate target.

The UN Charter, too, addresses the use of force in international waters. Article 51 of the Charter, concerning the Right of individual or collective self-defence, provides an exception to the prohibition of the use of force as stipulated in Article 2 (4) of the Charter. Article 51 allows UN members to exercise their right to self-defence in the event of an "armed attack".

Alternatively, the Casebook of the International Committee of the Red Cross cites

## • HOW A MARK-48 TORPEDO WORKS

The Mark-48 torpedo is the US Navy's main sub-launched weapon for attacking ships and other vessels

• Introduced in 1972 and built at a Navy base in Virginia, the Mark-48 heavyweight torpedo has been updated periodically.

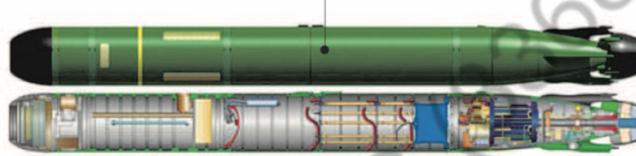
• It uses sonar to find its target and dive down underneath it

1700 kg

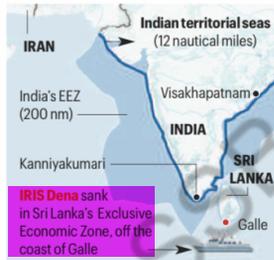
approximate weight of the most recent version

• There, the equivalent of roughly 500 pounds of TNT detonates

• This creates a bubble of gases that rises upward and snaps the ship's spine (keel) through metal fatigue



• The impact of the underwater explosion rips the ship into two or more pieces, causing it to sink quickly.



### A 'PRIZE SHIP'

• IRIS Dena, described by US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth as a 'prize ship', sank off the coast of Sri Lanka after a torpedo attack.

• Dena was returning to Iran after taking part in a naval exercise last month in Visakhapatnam.



• The warship is likely to have been armed with basic weapon systems, including close-in weapon systems and area defence systems at the time of the attack.

## A RARE ATTACK

Since World War II, submarine torpedo strikes that sank major warships have been relatively rare.

Here are the prominent instances:

### INS KHUKRI (DECEMBER 9, 1971)

Pakistani submarine PNS Hangor sank the Indian frigate off Diu. The attack killed 176 sailors.

### ARA GENERAL BELGRANO (MAY 2, 1982)

UK sub HMS Conqueror struck the Argentine cruiser during Falklands War. The attack killed 323 sailors.

### ROKS CHEONAN (MARCH 26, 2010)

The South Korean corvette sank after a suspected torpedo attack by North Korea.

The last American submarine to fire a torpedo at an enemy vessel was the USS Torsk, which sank a 750-ton Japanese vessel on August 14, 1945.

authorisation by the UN Security Council as grounds for a strike. While this measure dates back to the 1990 Gulf War, it may not be feasible. Chapter VII of the UN Charter, which outlines such authorisation, requires a majority vote from the council members with none of the permanent members — including the US — exercising their veto rights.

## The sanctions on the ship

The Iranian warship was sanctioned by the US Treasury Department in February 2023, along with executives of an Iranian drone company called Paravar Pars. In a statement, the US Department of the Treasury said that Iran was supplying UAVs for Russia's combat operations to target critical infrastructure in Ukraine.

However, sanctions don't mean that the ship cannot participate in a peacetime multilateral maritime exercise, but largely remains restricted to business or transactional activities.

At the time of the attack, the ship is likely to have been armed with basic weapon systems, including close-in weapon systems and area defence systems.

## What experts say

Vice Admiral G Ashok Kumar (Retd), former vice-chief of the Indian Navy and the country's first national maritime security coordinator, pointed out that there is no restriction on a war zone in the maritime domain. "It is very sad for us that the incident happened as the ship was returning from an international event organised by the Indian Navy, but in the maritime domain, there is no restriction of battle or war zone, and the war started after they departed India," he told *The Indian Express*.

The former Navy officer added that the incident took place in the exclusive economic zone of Sri Lanka, and hence, they could quickly get into the search and rescue operation. "The fact that they were so close to the border might have meant that they were aware of some threat," he said.

However, Rear Admiral Sudhir Pillai NM (Retd) argued in a Substack post that the use of force against a foreign warship on the high seas is presumptively unlawful unless clearly justified as self-defence or as part of an armed conflict.

In his Substack essay, he noted that a military strike in such circumstances could have been valid if it met the grounds for self-defence under Article 51 of the UN Charter.

A senior Navy official said that the US submarine attack to down the Iranian warship in international waters while it was on a peaceful passage is a "big escalation" in the ongoing US-Israel-Iran war.

"The ship was on a peaceful passage, and it wasn't in the conflict zone. Even as the US has justified its action, this is a big escalation in the ongoing war," said a senior official with the Indian Navy, who did not wish to be named.

He further said that while warships have measures to counter torpedo attacks, the Iranian ship would have likely been taken by surprise.

"They would not have expected an attack as they were on a peaceful passage and not in the conflict zone and were struck early morning. They may not have anticipated such an attack in international waters," the official said.

# Bombing of Tehran intensifies

## More tankers come under attack; death toll crosses 1,200

Iran sends drones into Azerbaijan, 4 people injured

Jonathan Saul  
& Anna Hirtenstein  
March 5

MORE TANKERS came under attack in Gulf waters on Thursday as the U.S.-Iran war escalated, and Iranian drones entered Azerbaijan, threatening to spread the crisis to more oil producers in the region.

A Bahamas-flagged crude tanker was targeted by an Iranian remote-controlled boat laden with explosives while anchored near Iraq's Khor al Zubair port, according to initial assessments. A second tanker at anchor off Kuwait was taking on water and spilling oil after a large explosion on its port side.

Nine vessels have come under attack since the conflict broke out between the U.S., Israel and Iran on Saturday. Iran launched a wave of missiles at Israel early on Thursday and also sent drones into Azerbaijan, injuring four people.

The escalation comes after a motion to halt the US attacks was blocked in Washington



A satellite image shows damaged buildings at the Garmdarah missile base in Iran on Wednesday. AP

and as the son of Iran's slain supreme leader emerged as a frontrunner to succeed him, suggesting Tehran was not about to buckle under the pressure.

Around 200 ships, including oil and liquefied natural gas tankers as well as cargo ships, remained at anchor in open waters off the coast of

major Gulf producers, according to Reuters estimates based on ship-tracking data from the MarineTraffic platform.

Hundreds of other vessels remained outside the Strait of Hormuz unable to reach ports, shipping data showed. The waterway is a key artery for around a fifth of the world's oil and LNG supply.

President Donald Trump offered US Navy escorts and insurance in a bid to restart shipping flows and curtail energy prices. Insurance market Lloyd's of London said on Thursday it is engaging with the US government on a plan.

BP evacuated foreign staff from Iraq's Rumaila oil field after two unidentified drones

landed inside the field, Iraqi oil sources said. Iraq has cut its oil production by nearly 1.5 million barrels a day as it ran out of storage and was unable to load tankers, officials told Reuters. A refinery in Kuwait shut down and another reduced its processing rate. A third refinery in Bahrain also cut its output.

REUTERS

Trump says US should have a role in picking Iran's next leader

Steve Holland  
Washington, March 5

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump told Reuters on Thursday that he wants the US to play a role in choosing Iran's next leader and encouraged Kurdish opposition groups to go on the offensive.

Trump said in a telephone interview it was very early in the process of picking a new leader but that the late Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei's son Mojtaba was an unlikely choice, without elaborating.

"We want to be involved in the process of choosing the person who is going to lead Iran into the future," Trump said. "We don't have to go back every five years and do this again and again." Trump also encouraged Iranian Kurdish forces to go on the offensive.

When asked if the US would provide or had offered air cover, he responded, "I can't tell you that," but added that the objective for the Kurds would be "to win." "If they're going to do that, that's good," he added. REUTERS

# 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."

# RSP landslide in Nepal polls; rapper Balen to be new PM

**Sanjeev Satgainya**

KATHMANDU

The Rastriya Swatantra Party (RSP), born just four years ago, has altered the syntax of Nepali politics as it heads towards an electoral landslide, with early trends putting it far ahead of Nepal's established parties that have ruled the country for decades.

According to Election Commission data, the RSP is leading in 110 constituencies out of 165, while Nepali Congress and the Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist-Leninist) trailed at 10 and seven constituencies, respectively.

With the RSP's impending victory, rapper-turned-politician Balendra Shah, popularly known as Balen, is set to become the nation's PM, and its youngest ever, at just 35 years.

He is leading in the vote count against K.P. Sharma Oli of the CPN-UML.



RSP candidate and soon-to-be PM of Nepal Balendra Shah during a rally in Janakpur, Nepal on January 19. AFP

In Mr. Oli's home turf of Jhapa-5, Mr. Shah has secured 15,169 votes against 3,344 for the CPN-UML leader.

The RSP is also ahead in the proportional representation (PR) count, securing 18,830 votes (59%) of the 31,882 votes counted till 8:05 p.m., while the NC secured 5,560 votes (17%).

**CONTINUED ON**  
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# RSP landslide in Nepal polls; Balen to be PM



Biraj Bhakta Shrestha, an RSP candidate offers a ceremonial scarf to a woman waiting outside a counting centre after winning a seat from his constituency, a day after polling concluded, in Kathmandu. REUTERS

Under the PR system, the Rastriya Prajatantra Party, a pro-Hindu, pro-monarchist force, is third with 2,848 votes (9%), followed by the CPN-UML with 2,101 (6.5%).

Counting is under way in Nepal, which voted on Thursday in its first election since last year's Gen Z protests that claimed 77 lives. The protests toppled the Oli government.

## Majority mandate

The RSP's victory path busts the long-standing notion that Nepal's mixed electoral system largely prevents any party from securing a majority.

With the centrist liberal party appearing set to hit the threshold of 138 in the 275-member House of Representatives, Nepal could see a majority government for the first time in 27 years, with the mandate to complete a full five-year term. This would mark a rare reset in Nepali politics.

Though the Nepali Congress had won 113 seats in the then 205-member Parliament in 1999, infighting within the party led to the government's collapse in just over a year.

Founded in 2022, the RSP surprised many in that year's election by emerging as the fourth-largest party. In the run-up to Thursday's vote, it enjoyed a groundswell of support, with public opinion tilting towards it, largely because of Mr. Shah, popularly known as Balen. Balen, who won the Kathmandu mayoral election in the 2022 local polls as an independent candidate, joined the RSP only in December last year, three months after the Gen Z protests.

Voter turnout on Thursday stood at 58.7%, the lowest since Nepal's first election in 1991, a year after democracy was restored in the country. Some see it as voter fatigue, but analysts say the low turnout also indicates that many old-party loyalists stayed home, frustrated by repeated failures.

# 204 of 238 Indian cities did not meet air quality standards, says CREA

## The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

During the last winter, 204 out of 238 Indian cities recorded average PM2.5 (a chief pollutant) levels above the Indian standard of 40 g/m<sup>3</sup>, as per the Central Pollution Control Board (CPCB) data analysed by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA).

Ghaziabad was the most polluted city, recording an average PM2.5 concentration of 172 g/m<sup>3</sup>, followed by Noida (166 g/m<sup>3</sup>), and Delhi (163 g/m<sup>3</sup>), as per CREA, a Finland-based independent research group.

As per the analysis, Greater Noida was the fourth most polluted, followed by Bahadurgarh, Dharuhera, Gurugram, Bhiwadi, Charkhi Dadri, and Baghpat. Uttar Pra-

desh and Haryana accounted for four cities each in the top ten most polluted cities, along with Delhi and one from Rajasthan.

The analysis was based on Continuous Ambient Air Quality Monitoring Stations data from the CPCB between October 1, 2025, and February 28, 2026. Also, none of the cities analysed met the World Health Organization's PM2.5 standard of 5 g/m<sup>3</sup>, as per the analysis.

“Delhi, Kolkata (78 g/m<sup>3</sup>), Mumbai (48 g/m<sup>3</sup>), and Chennai (44 g/m<sup>3</sup>) recorded winter 2025-26 average PM2.5 above the national standard. Bengaluru recorded an average PM2.5 of 39 g/m<sup>3</sup>, slightly below the NAAQS limit,” CREA said. Chamarajanagar in Karnataka was the cleanest city in India during the last winter.

# Karnataka, A.P. set to ban social media use by minors

## The Hindu Bureau

BENGALURU

Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh are set to ban social media for children to prevent the adverse effects of increasing mobile phone use.

Karnataka Chief Minister Siddaramaiah made an announcement in this regard on Friday, during the presentation of the State Budget. He did not spell out a road map for the implementation of the ban.

While Karnataka said it proposes to ban social media for children under 16, Andhra Pradesh Chief Minister N. Chandrababu Naidu said the government would impose the restriction on children below 13.

### 90-day window

Speaking in the Assembly, Mr. Naidu said the ban is likely to be in place within the next 90 days. He added that the government is also examining possible regulations for children in the 13-



A.P. govt. said social media will be prohibited for children below 13 years, the Karnataka govt.'s ban will apply for those under 16. PTI

16 age group.

It was during a recent meeting with the Vice-Chancellors of State public universities chaired by the Governor, that Mr. Siddaramaiah had proposed a mobile ban for schoolchildren and sought opinion from all stakeholders.

There has been a public debate on this issue since, and experts are divided on the impact and feasibility of a blanket ban.

A similar ban on social media for children below the age of 16 was made into

a law in Australia in December 2025.

The law forces social media platforms to restrict access to children below 16 years of age and violations can attract very high penalties up to \$32 million for serious and repeated violations.

Reacting to Karnataka's proposal, A.P. Minister for IT and Education Nara Lokesh stated in an X post: "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery" and said he was pleased to see Karnataka considering restric-

tions on social media for young users.

He noted that Andhra Pradesh had earlier proposed similar measures aimed at protecting young minds from the darker side of the digital world, and wished the Karnataka government success in implementing the idea.

Responding to queries on how the ban will be regulated in schools, colleges or at home, Mr. Siddaramaiah said, "We will formulate a programme for that. Once the programme is finalised, we will inform you." In January, State Minister for Electronics, IT/BT Priyank Kharge had informed the Assembly that the government was holding consultations regarding the measures.

The move aimed at preventing adverse effects on children drew encouragement as well as scepticism.

### 'Blanket ban not ideal'

Dr. Rakshay Shetty, Clinical Director, Pediatric Services

Head, Pediatric Intensive Care Services, Rainbow Children's Hospital, said that while there are a lot of disadvantages of excessive use of mobile devices by children, considering their ill effects on children's psychology, at the same time, they provide a lot of practical utility for parents, teachers and children.

"We need to look at a balanced solution because a blanket ban can be counterproductive – implementing it is not practical, and it might remain a paper tiger – a rule but no one follows it. Instead, giving guidelines on how to use mobile devices and limit excessive use would be more practical," he said.

BJP Rajya Sabha member from Karnataka Lahar Singh Siroya welcomed the move on X, stating that he had raised this issue via a special mention in Parliament.

SEE ALSO

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# Justice Dept. releases Epstein files with claims against Trump

**Agence France-Presse**

WASHINGTON

The U.S. Justice Department published additional FBI documents on Thursday describing interviews with a woman who said President Donald Trump sexually assaulted her after she was introduced to him by Jeffrey Epstein.

The documents had not been made public under previous file releases related to the late convicted sex offender because they were mistakenly marked “duplicative,” it said.

The documents released on Thursday include descriptions of multiple 2019 interviews the FBI held with the woman, who alleged she was as-



Protesters with masks depicting Donald Trump and Jeffrey Epstein stage a demonstration near the White House on Thursday. REUTERS

saulted by both Epstein and Mr. Trump while she was between 13 and 15 years old.

In one interview, the woman said Epstein took her to “either New York or New Jersey” and introduced her to Mr. Trump. She told investigators that

she bit Mr. Trump as he attempted to force her to perform oral sex on him.

The woman said she and people close to her received threatening calls over the years demanding she keep quiet that she believed were related to Epstein.