

Assembly polls begin on April 9; West Bengal to vote in two phases

Polling will be held in Assam, Puducherry, and Kerala on April 9 and in Tamil Nadu on April 23, while West Bengal will vote on April 23 and 29; poll panel announces byelections to eight Assembly seats in various States; counting of votes on May 4

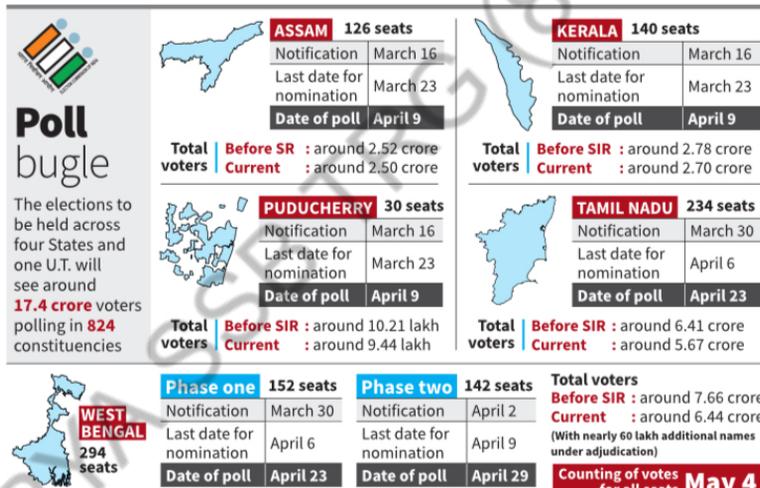
Sreeparna Chakrabarty
NEW DELHI

The Assembly elections will be held in a single phase in Assam, Puducherry, and Kerala on April 9 and in Tamil Nadu on April 23, while West Bengal will vote in two phases on April 23 and 29, the Election Commission of India (EC) announced on Sunday.

Counting for all four States and the Union Territory will be held on May 4.

The Model Code of Conduct has come into effect with the announcement of the poll schedule.

At a press conference here, Chief Election Commissioner Gyanesh Kumar said around 17.4 crore electors would vote in 824 Assembly constituencies across the four States and



one Union Territory.

In West Bengal, 152 constituencies will vote in the first phase and 142 in the second.

The commission an-

nounced byelections to eight Assembly constituencies in various States. Five of the eight Assembly seats will vote on April 9 and remaining three will vote on

April 23. Counting of votes for the bypolls will also be held on May 4.

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Parties welcome fewer poll phases in West Bengal

KOLKATA

With the 2021 Assembly election having been held in eight phases, major political parties in West Bengal have welcomed the two-phase polls announced for the State on Sunday. » **PAGE 13**

LDF swings into action in Kerala with list of names

THIRUVANANTHAPURAM

The ruling Left Democratic Front in Kerala sought to steal a march on the Congress-led United Democratic Front, with its two major alliance partners announcing their candidates on Sunday. » **PAGE 5**

Modi lauds Speaker Om Birla's 'impartial' leadership after no-confidence motion fails

The Hindu Bureau

NEW DELHI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Sunday commended Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla for conducting the House proceedings with “dedication, patience, and impartiality”, saying that his actions would strengthen the country’s parliamentary democracy.

In a letter to Mr. Birla, Mr. Modi congratulated the members of the House for rejecting “political misconduct” by defeating the Opposition’s no-confidence motion brought against the Speaker in the Lok Sabha.

“After the no-confidence motion was defeated, I listened carefully to the statement you delivered in the House. The



Om Birla

way you referred to parliamentary history, the responsibilities of the Chair, and the supremacy of the rules, with balance, patience, and clarity, is very impressive. I congratulate you for this,” he said.

Mr. Modi said the Lok Sabha Speaker’s responsibility was not only to conduct the proceedings, but

also to protect democratic traditions, rules, and institutional dignity.

The Prime Minister said differences of opinion were natural in a democracy, but added that it was a matter of concern when political disagreement turns into disrespect for parliamentary dignity. “In such moments, the person occupying the Chair is tested. The gentleness, balance, and impartiality with which you faced these situations is commendable,” he said.

Mr. Birla shared the letter on X, saying that Mr. Modi’s message would inspire all elected representatives in Parliament, State legislatures, and local bodies, transcending party boundaries.

NATIONAL SECURITY ACT

Activist Sonam Wangchuk freed as Centre revokes detention after 6 months

Decision comes days before hearing in SC



Sonam Wangchuk was detained for allegedly instigating violent protests in Ladakh last year

Mahender Singh Manral
New Delhi, March 14

NEARLY SIX months after activist Sonam Wangchuk was detained under the National Security Act (NSA) for allegedly instigating the violent protests in Ladakh on September 24 which led to four deaths in police firing, the Centre on Saturday said it has revoked his detention with immediate effect.

Following the Centre's decision, Wangchuk was released from Jodhpur central jail in the afternoon. A PTI report quoted Ratanada Police Station SHO Dinesh Lakhawat as saying: "He was released from jail at about 1.30 pm today following an order from the central government".

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Outside the Jodhpur central jail, Saturday. [MORE REPORTS, P 6](#)

'Centre withdrew NSA fearing defeat in SC'

Deeptiman Tiwary
New Delhi, March 14

IN THE wake of the Centre's decision to withdraw charges under the National Security Act (NSA) against Ladakh activist Sonam Wangchuk, Apex Body, Leh (ABL) co-chairman Chhering Dorje Lakruk speaks to *The Indian Express* on how this decision will impact the movement for the Sixth Schedule, among others, in Ladakh.

Excerpts:

What is your first reaction to the government withdrawing NSA against

EXPRESS
interview



CHHERING DORJE LAKRUK
CO-CHAIRMAN OF APEX BODY, LEH

Sonam Wangchuk?

We have been saying since the very beginning that all the allegations against Sonam

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

Wangchuk freed

In a statement, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) said: “The government remains committed to fostering an environment of peace, stability and mutual trust in Ladakh so as to facilitate constructive and meaningful dialogue with all stakeholders. In furtherance of this objective, and after due consideration, the government has decided to revoke the detention of Wangchuk with immediate

effect by exercising the powers available under the NSA”.

The decision comes days before a hearing in the Supreme Court on March 17; the court had indicated last week that this would be the final hearing in the matter. Wangchuk’s wife, Gitanjali J Angmo, had moved a habeas corpus petition before the SC challenging his detention.

Wangchuk was detained on September 26, 2025, two days

after the protests over demands for statehood for Ladakh and its inclusion under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution rocked Leh. The government had accused Wangchuk of inciting the protests. The NSA empowers governments to act pre-emptively against individuals seen as a threat to public order or national security.

Wangchuk was later transferred to Jodhpur central jail. The MHA statement on Saturday said that he has already undergone nearly half of the period of detention under the NSA.

On Saturday, Ladakh L-G Vinai Kumar Saxena welcomed the decision to revoke Wangchuk’s detention as “a positive step by the Centre towards fostering an environment of peace, stability and mutual trust in Ladakh”.

“There is no space for agitation and violence in Ladakh and all issues pertaining to the aspirations and concerns of the people, would be addressed through dialogue with various stakeholders, community leaders and citizens,” he said in a post on X.

Sonam Wangchuk's release comes two days before 25th hearing against NSA detention

Amaal Sheikh
New Delhi, March 14

THE UNION government Saturday revoked the preventive detention of Ladakh activist Sonam Wangchuk under the National Security Act (NSA) nearly six months after he was arrested for protests in Leh over statehood and constitutional safeguards for the region.

In a statement, the Union Ministry of Home Affairs said that the decision was taken "after due consideration" to foster "peace, stability, and mutual trust in Ladakh" and to facilitate dialogue with stakeholders. The government had accused Wangchuk of inciting the protests through speeches.

He was detained on September 26, 2025, and lodged in Jodhpur jail. The revocation of the preventive detention came two days before a hearing in the habeas corpus challenge to it, with the Supreme Court indicating last week that it would be the final hearing in the matter and that it would reserve its order the same day. Last week was the 24th hearing in the habeas corpus plea, filed by Wangchuk's wife Gitanjali J Angmo. Her lawyer Kapil Sibal

had expressed dismay over the repeated adjournments, saying: "This is sending a wrong signal across the country."

A Bench of Justices Aravind Kumar and P B Varale had adjourned the hearing to March 17, after government submission that Solicitor General Tushar Mehta was unwell and could not attend. Of the 24 adjournments, at least three were sought by the petitioners, at the start of the hearings — on October 14, 15 and 29. The plea was filed by Angmo on October 3, saying Wangchuk's detention was meant to silence dissent and questioning several statements attributed to him by the Government. The top court first took up the plea on October 5, and the hearings were over procedural issues. SG Mehta told the Court on October 6 the authorities would examine whether it was feasible to provide a copy of the detention order to Angmo, as the document had been given to Wangchuk.

The Bench said: "Detaining Authority shall ensure that the detainee receives the medical attention suitable to his condition as may be required..." When the matter came up on October 15, the petitioner sought permission that notes prepared by



He was detained in September 2025, and lodged in Jodhpur jail

Wangchuk in custody be shared with Angmo. The court allowed the request and directed the notes be transmitted through the jail superintendent. Wangchuk's counsel then informed the Bench that they wanted to amend the writ plea to place additional material on record.

At the next hearing on October 29, the petitioners informed the Bench that they intended to amend the writ petition. Subsequently, on November 24, the court recorded that a rejoinder affidavit had been filed by the petitioners. The SG, however, told the Bench that the document had been received only the previous day and that they needed additional time to respond. The Court recorded the request and listed the matter again. In December, the matter was listed twice. At the hearing

on December 8, a request was made for Wangchuk to appear before the court through video-conferencing from jail. The government opposed the request, saying that such a facility could not be granted in this case alone. The court did not pass a decision on the request at that stage and adjourned the matter to a later date. There was one more hearing in December, which was adjourned due to paucity of time.

In January 2026, the proceedings turned to Wangchuk's health. On January 29, the petitioner moved an application seeking medical examination and diagnostic tests, saying Wangchuk was suffering from health problems in jail. When the application was taken up, the Government placed medical records before the court stating that Wangchuk had been examined 21 times between when he was arrested on September 26, 2025, and January 27, 2026. The report said his blood pressure and oxygen levels were within the normal range. The Government also told the court that if further treatment was required, it would be provided and that Wangchuk would be examined by a specialist if necessary.

The court noted the sub-

mission by the Government to "immediately" provide any medical treatment to Wangchuk that was needed, and to ensure examination by a specialist. Directing that a report in this regard be filed in a sealed cover, the court disposed of the application and listed the matter again.

Arguments on the legality of the detention followed at the next hearings, with SG Mehta starting submissions on February 2 defending the detention order. The Bench recorded that the arguments remained incomplete and listed the matter again for the next day. At the next hearing, the Court noted that it had heard the arguments and directed that the case be listed again for continuation. On February 3, the Government argued that the NSA had been invoked to prevent acts that could disturb public order in a border region.

The Government said Saturday that Wangchuk had already undergone nearly half the period of detention under the NSA, and reiterated its commitment to addressing Ladakh's concerns through dialogue and a high-powered panel mechanism.

FULL REPORT ON
WWW.INDIANEXPRESS.COM

Setback for India's navigation system: 1 of 4 operational IRNSS satellites fails

Express News Service
Bengaluru, March 14

INDIA'S INDIGENOUS navigation satellite system—Navigation with Indian Constellation (NavIC)—has suffered a major setback with one of its four operational satellites reporting a failure “at the end of 10 years since its launch”, according to ISRO officials.

The Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System's IRNSS 1-F, launched on March 10, 2016, failed after its last functional atomic clock malfunctioned, space department sources indicated. The satellite had been operating with only one of its three onboard atomic clocks.

At least four indigenous navigation satellites must be fully operational for the NavIC system to provide navigation services to the public and government agencies such as railways and the military.

Senior ISRO officials associated with the NavIC satellites and the space programme did not respond to queries on the failure of the IRNSS 1F satellite. Isro chairman Dr V Narayanan did not speak on the issue but referred to an official statement posted on its website.

“On 13th March 2026, the procured on-board atomic clock stopped functioning. However, the satellite will continue to function in-orbit for various societal applications to provide one way broadcast messaging services,” Isro said in an official statement on Friday night.

“IRNSS-1F satellite launched in March 2016 has completed its

design mission life of 10 years on 10th March 2026,” the statement posted on the Isro website said.

Although Isro has launched 11 satellites since July 2013 for the nearly Rs 2,250 crore NavIC system, six satellites have failed primarily due to defective imported atomic clocks in the initial years, and on a few recent occasions, due to orbital issues.

Last year, in a reply in Parliament, the Centre had reported that only four of 11 satellites launched for the NavIC system were operational for positioning, navigation, and timing services, with the others being used on a sub-optimal basis.

“As of now, 11 satellites have been put in orbit. Some of them are not functioning. At present, four satellites are providing Position, Navigation and Timing (PNT) services, four satellites are being used for one way message broadcast, one satellite got decommissioned after its end-of-life service. Two satellites could not reach the intended orbit,” Minister of State for the PMO, Jitendra Singh, said in a reply in the Lok Sabha on July 23, 2025.

With the reported failure of the IRNSS 1-F, the functional NavIC satellites for PNT services at present are only the IRNSS 1-B, IRNSS 1-L, and IRNSS 1-J (NVS-01). With the reported failure of all atomic clocks on the IRNSS 1-F, a total of six of 11 Indian satellites meant for the NavIC system have failed due to the atomic clocks.

“Location services provided by the NavIC system in India are going to be affected,” space department sources said.

STRAIT OF HORMUZ CLOSURE; TANKERS CARRYING 92,700 TONNES OF LPG HEADED FOR GUJARAT

2 India-flagged LPG tankers cross, efforts on for 22 more ships: Govt

Navy is learnt to have deployed warships in Persian Gulf for safe passage of Indian vessels

Sukalp Sharma & Amrita Nayak Dutta
New Delhi, March 14

TWO INDIAN-FLAGGED liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) tankers headed to ports in Gujarat transited the critical maritime chokepoint of the Strait of Hormuz safely between Friday night and Saturday, the government announced on Saturday.

It said diplomatic efforts are on to facilitate safe passage for the remaining 22 Indian vessels — many of which are carrying hydrocarbons — that are stuck in the Persian Gulf, which is to the west of the war-hit Strait.

According to sources, the Indian Navy has deployed multiple warships to the Gulf region to escort merchant vessels carrying fuel to India amid heightened maritime tension in the region. At least two warships were known to have been on operational standby since Iran started the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz that

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2



US embassy personnel inspect the damage caused by a bombing in Baghdad, Saturday. AP

Iran's 'crown jewel'



NATION **PAGE 7**
DIFFICULT TO FORGE BRICS CONSENSUS: MEA ON CONFLICT

US hits key Iran island; oil prices may mount

Anil Sasi
New Delhi, March 14

IN WHAT marks a new escalatory phase, the US Friday bombed Iran's Kharg Island, a small 8-km-long rocky outcrop in the Persian Gulf around 50 km off the Iranian mainland, through which almost all of the country's oil exports flow. Despite some 5,000 places targeted in Iran since the start of the

US-Israel military operation, Kharg had been spared so far.

In a post on Truth Social, US President Trump said military targets on Kharg Island had been "totally obliterated" in "one of the most powerful bombing raids in the History of the Middle East." He said he had chosen not to target oil infrastructure on the island for now.

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Adequate stock of fertilisers for kharif season, says Vaishnaw

Express News Service
New Delhi, March 14

ANTICIPATING geopolitical uncertainty, the Central government Saturday said it had started preparing itself for the kharif season by procuring and advancing orders for fertiliser stocks from different geographies mid-February itself. This has ensured that "adequate" stocks of urea, diammonium phosphate (DAP) and NPK (nitrogen, phosphorus and potassium) fertilisers are available despite the supply disruption caused by the ongoing US and Israel war with Iran.

Demand for fertilisers peaks in the middle of May, with farmers sowing seeds over the

»CONTINUED ON PAGE 2

LATEST

• IRAN STRIKES UAE'S FUJAIRAH PORT; U.S. SENDS 2,500 MARINES TO REGION

• TRUMP CALLS ON ALLIES TO SEND WARSHIPS

MORE REPORTS, **PAGE 12**

2 tankers

connects the Persian Gulf (west) to the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea (east).

Under the Navy's Operation Sankalp, warships remain deployed in the Gulf of Aden and Gulf of Oman for anti-piracy and to secure maritime trade. Following the West Asian crisis, multiple warships have sailed to the region, the sources said. They had earlier indicated that New Delhi was in discussions with Tehran to facilitate safe passage of vessels headed for India, particularly energy tankers, through the Strait of Hormuz.

The two LPG tankers of the state-owned Shipping Corporation of India (SCI) that crossed the Strait of Hormuz — the narrow waterway between Iran and Oman that connects the Persian Gulf with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea — are very large gas carriers (VLGCs) *Shivalik* and *Nanda Devi*. They are

cumulatively carrying 92,700 tonnes of LPG, of which there is short supply in India. To put this in perspective, the annual domestic LPG demand with no restrictions on consumption is 33 million tonnes, which translates to about 90,000 tonnes a day.

The country's LPG imports have been severely hit by the effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz, forcing New Delhi to cut LPG supplies to commercial and industrial consumers to meet the kitchen fuel needs of over 33 crore households.

Shivalik crossed the freight waters of the Strait of Hormuz late Friday, as per ship tracking data, and is on its way to Gujarat's Mundra port, where it is expected to arrive on Monday. Shipping Ministry Special Secretary Rajesh Kumar Sinha informed that *Nanda Devi*, too, crossed the Strait on Saturday morning, and is likely to reach Kandla port in Gujarat on Tuesday. Both the VLGCs were chartered by government-owned refiner and fuel retailer Indian Oil

Corporation, according to industry sources.

Maritime traffic through the Strait of Hormuz — which usually accounts for a fifth of global oil and liquefied natural gas (LNG) flows and a bulk of India's energy imports — has effectively come to a halt since the West Asia military conflict started on February 28. A number of merchant vessels have come under attack in the region in recent days.

The effective closure of the Strait of Hormuz has created a major headache for India, which depends on imports to meet a bulk of its energy needs. Around 40% of India's crude oil imports, over 50% of its LNG imports, and a whopping 90% of its LPG imports transited the Strait, making the chokepoint particularly critical for India's LPG supplies.

India's annual LPG consumption stands at a little over 33 million tonnes, with an import dependency level of 60%. With 90% of India's LPG imports coming from West Asia, the Strait of Hormuz effectively sees

the movement of around 54% of India's LPG consumption.

With the crossings by *Shivalik* and *Nanda Devi*, there is growing hope of more vessels carrying energy supplies and other important cargo making their way to India, even as the situation in West Asia remains volatile.

Majority of the Indian vessels waiting to cross the Strait of Hormuz to get to India are oil and gas tankers. According to data provided by Sinha, there are six LPG tankers, four crude oil tankers, one LNG carrier, and one chemical or petroleum products tanker among the 22 Indian vessels in the Persian Gulf. All of these are loaded with energy cargoes. The remaining Indian vessels include three container ships, two bulk carriers, one dredger, and one empty vessel; three other vessels are on dry docks for routine maintenance. In all, these 22 vessels have 611 seafarers, according to Sinha. Three vessels — with 76 seafarers — are also stuck to the east of the Strait of Hormuz.

U.S. not ready for deal with Iran, might hit Kharg 'for fun': Trump

Trump says Iran wants a deal but he rejected it because the terms are not favourable enough yet; IRGC vows to hunt down and kill Netanyahu, labelling him a criminal; despite Trump's appeals to allies to send warships, no commitments emerge

Agence France-Presse

WASHINGTON

U.S. President Donald Trump warned that he is not ready to seek a deal to end the war with Iran, as U.S. ally Israel launched a new wave of strikes on Sunday and Tehran's Revolutionary Guards threatened to hunt down and kill the Israeli leader.

Mr. Trump, in an interview with *NBC News*, said he thought Tehran was keen to come to the table but that Washington would fight on for better terms and might bomb targets on Kharg Island "a few more times just for fun".

"Iran wants to make a deal, and I don't want to make it because the terms aren't good enough yet," Mr. Trump told *NBC News*, warning that U.S. forces would step up strikes on the Iranian coast north of the strait to clear a path for oil shipments to resume.

Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi said Iran was not interested in talks with the United States, pushing back on Mr. Trump's stance that Tehran wants a deal to end the war. He added that Tehran has "ample evidence" U.S. bases in the West Asia have been used to attack Iran, claiming missiles were launched from the UAE to attack the



Past the Dome: Israeli Army soldiers gather at the site of a projectile impact from an Iranian strike in southern Tel Aviv on Sunday. AFP

Kharg Island oil hub.

Despite Mr. Trump's appeal to China, France, Japan, South Korea, Britain and others to send warships to keep the Strait of

Hormuz "open and safe", no country stepped forward with a commitment on Sunday.

Meanwhile, the Israeli military announced a wave

of strikes against targets in Western Iran, after Iran's Revolutionary Guards branded Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu a criminal and vowed that they would pursue and kill him.

IRGC said they had carried out missile and drone strikes on targets in Israel and three U.S. bases in the region, calling the attacks the first round of retaliation for workers killed in Iran's industrial areas. At least eight persons were injured in Israel following repeated missile launches, at least two of which contained cluster munitions, according to Israeli authorities.

(With Reuters inputs)

Iran strikes UAE's Fujairah Port; US deploys 2,500 more troops to region

US attacked from bases in the UAE, says Tehran

Associated Press

Dubai, March 14

IRAN ISSUED an evacuation warning for three major ports in the United Arab Emirates on Saturday, including the busiest in the Middle East, openly threatening a neighbouring country's non-US assets for the first time as its war with the US and Israel entered its third week.

Iran said the US had used "ports, docks and hideouts" in the UAE to launch strikes on Iran's Kharg Island, without providing evidence. It urged people to evacuate areas where it said US forces were sheltering.

Hours after the threat, there was no sign of an attack on Dubai's Jebel Ali port - the Middle East's busiest - or the Khalifa port in Abu Dhabi. But Associated Press images showed a fire at the third port, in Fujairah, caused by debris from an intercepted Iranian drone hitting an oil facility.

Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi told *MS NOW* that the US attacked Kharg Island and Abu Musa Island with low-range artillery from two locations in the UAE, Ras Al-Khaimah and a place "very close to Dubai," calling that dangerous and saying Iran "will try to be careful not to attack any populated area" there.

Iran has fired hundreds of missiles and drones at Arab Gulf neighbors during the war, but it said it was targeting US

assets, even as hits or attempts were reported on civilian ones such as airports and oil fields.

On Friday, US President Donald Trump said the US "obliterated" military sites on Kharg Island, home to the main terminal handling Iran's oil exports.

He said oil infrastructure could be next if Tehran continues to interfere with ships' passage through the Strait of Hormuz, where vessels are backed up and one-fifth of global oil supplies usually transit.

Iran's parliamentary speaker has said strikes against country's oil infrastructure would provoke a new level of retaliation. Trump said Saturday that he hopes China, France, Japan, South Korea, the UK and others send warships to keep the Strait of Hormuz "open and safe".

A US official said Friday that 2,500 more Marines with the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit and the amphibious assault ship USS *Tripoli* are being sent to the Middle East, adding to military's largest buildup of warships and aircraft in the region in decades.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive military plans.

Marine Expeditionary Units are able to conduct amphibious landings but also specialize in bolstering security at embassies, evacuating civilians and providing disaster relief.

The deployment doesn't necessarily indicate that a ground operation will take place.

The Wall Street Journal first reported the Marine deployment. The *Tripoli* was spotted by satellites sailing near Taiwan, putting it more than a week away from the waters off Iran.



Plumes of smoke and fire rise after debris from an intercepted Iranian drone struck an oil facility, according to authorities, in Fujairah, United Arab Emirates, on Saturday. AP

Iran war fuels fears for West Asia water supplies reliant on desalination plants

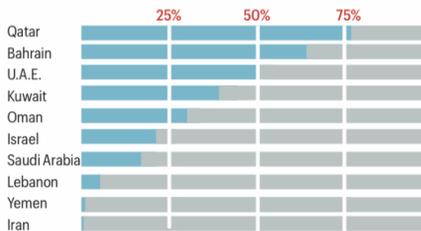
Mira Rojanasakul, Claire Brown & Hiroko Tabuchi
March 14

LAST WEEK, Abbas Araghchi, Iran's foreign minister, said an attack on a desalination plant on Qeshm Island, in the Persian Gulf, on March 7 had affected the water supply to 30 villages. While Iran blamed the United States for the attack, the Pentagon has denied responsibility, as has Israel.

And in Bahrain, the Interior Ministry blamed an Iranian drone for "material damage" to a desalination plant, though the country's water and electricity authority said water supplies had not been affected.

Over the last few decades, the arid countries of the Persian Gulf have become increasingly

• Share of water from desalination plants



DATA FOR ISRAEL, LEBANON, YEMEN AND IRAN AS OF 2022. ALL OTHER COUNTRIES AS OF 2025. SOURCES: GLOBAL WATER INTELLIGENCE; FOOD AND AGRICULTURE ORGANIZATION AQUASTAT.

come crucial infrastructure in places like Qatar and Bahrain, both of which now rely on the technology for more than 50 percent of their fresh water.

Efforts to remove salt from

erated on the Persian Gulf as climate change has made droughts more frequent and severe, and as desalination technology has improved.

Damage to a single large de-

Elimelech, an environmental engineer at Rice University.

The Al Dur plant in Bahrain, for example, supplies over one million people with water each day, providing more than a third of the country's needs. Desalination facilities are complex, and extensive damage could take a long time to repair.

While countries like the United Arab Emirates have tried to build up strategic water reserves, analysts say that some stocks would be depleted within days.

"The response would be to truck in bottled water, mobile desalination systems, tanker water," said David Michel, a fellow in the Global Food and Water Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, a policy research

Hamas urges Iran to avoid targeting neighbours but affirms right to self-defence

IRAN ASKS INDIA FOR BRICS STATEMENT AGAINST US

BRICS members involved in conflict, difficult to forge consensus: MEA

Shubhajit Roy

New Delhi, March 14

A DAY after Iran reached out to Delhi for a statement on behalf of BRICS, currently chaired by India, condemning the US and Israeli strikes, the External Affairs Ministry said on Saturday that it has been difficult to forge a consensus on the issue because of involvement of BRICS member countries in the ongoing conflict.

Without naming any country, MEA's official spokesperson Randhir Jaiswal said: "Some members of the BRICS are directly involved in the current situation in the West Asia region, which has impacted forging a consensus on a common BRICS position on the ongoing conflict. As Chair of BRICS, India has been facilitating discussions among members through the Sherpa channel."

He said the last virtual BRICS Sherpa meeting was held on March 12. In addition, "Indian leadership has been engaging with leaders of BRICS

members in the region. India will continue to engage," the MEA spokesperson said.

The Indian Express reported on Saturday that Tehran had reached out to Delhi to take the lead in issuing a statement on behalf of the BRICS, condemning the US and Israeli strikes against Iran in the last two weeks. This put Delhi in a diplomatic pickle since it has stayed away from taking sides in the ongoing conflict.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has spoken to leaders of the countries in the region hit in Iran strikes, condemned the attacks and thanked them for looking after the Indian community "in these difficult times".

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar also spoke to his Iranian counterpart Seyed Abbas Araghchi on Thursday night — their fourth conversation since the outbreak of hostilities on February 28. In a post on X on Friday, Jaishankar said they "discussed bilateral matters as also BRICS-related issues".

The BRICS grouping has

Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (the original five), besides Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Indonesia. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which host US bases and personnel, have been targeted by Iranian missiles and drones. The fact that all three countries are in the BRICS has made diplomatic navigation difficult for Delhi.

India, which holds the rotational presidency of the grouping for 2026, is expected to host the summit of BRICS leaders later this year.

PM Modi has spoken to leaders of Saudi Arabia, UAE and Iran — all BRICS members — in the last two weeks. Jaishankar has also spoken to his counterparts in these countries, as well as in Russia.

The BRICS has emerged as an influential grouping as it brings together 11 major emerging economies of the world, representing around 49.5% of the global population, around 40% of the global GDP and around 26% of the global trade.