

# Central Chronicle

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**Kerala: CPI(M) expels senior leader and former Shoranur MLA PK Sasi from the party**



**US-Iran talks were close to success before war broke out: Lavrov**

## Iran hits US tanker in the gulf hours after torpedo attack on its warship

### Tit for tat

New Delhi: Hours after an Iranian warship was attacked in the Indian Ocean, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) on Thursday claimed it struck an American tanker in the northern Persian Gulf, Reuters reported. The Iranian state media said the US ship was on fire. The attack comes as the Iranian foreign minister warned that the US would "bitterly regret" Wednesday night's strike on IRIS Dena off the Sri Lankan coast. The attack came soon after the powerful IRGC said in a statement that the passage of ships through the Strait of Hormuz would be under its control. The development marks a significant escalation in the conflict, which has left over a thousand dead in Iran and claimed the lives of six American soldiers.

Thursday's claim by Iran of having struck the oil tanker comes less than 24 hours after a US submarine sank an Iranian warship off the southern coast of Sri Lanka, expanding the war zone to the Indian Ocean and bringing it to India's backyard.

The frigate, IRIS Dena, was heading back to Iran from India's Visakhapatnam after participating in two naval exercises last month when it was hit by a US torpedo. The surprise attack in international waters left 87 Iranian sailors dead. The commander of IRIS Dena and some senior officers were among the 32 rescued. Over 60 are still missing.

A video released by the US Pentagon showed a massive explosion after the warship was hit by a torpedo, which blew apart the rear of the vessel. It sank soon after.

US Defence Secretary Pete Hegseth, addressing reporters, said the Iranian warship died a "quiet death".

As the war entered its sixth day, Iran on Thursday launched a wave of missiles toward Israel, sending millions scrambling into bomb shelters and air raid sirens echoing across major cities. The barrage came just hours after efforts in the US to rein in Washington's air campaign against Iran were blocked in the Senate.



**US tests nuclear-capable 'doomsday' missile**

### Iran warns gulf leaders to expel Americans

Iran has warned all countries in the Gulf countries to expel all Americans from their territories and ensure the complete removal of all US military bases, directly linking American military presence to recent escalations as Tehran continues to attack regional bases. An Iranian MP of Parliament, quoted by Tehran Times, said, "If the leaders of UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, Turkey, and similar countries want to see an end to threat of Iranian missiles, they should expel the Americans from their territories and ensure the complete removal of all US military bases."

### Death toll in Iran reaches 1,230

**Airstrikes devastate major cities** The humanitarian crisis in Iran has intensified as the death toll from ongoing U.S. and Israeli airstrikes surged to 1,230. Since Saturday, relentless bombardments have left a trail of destruction across multiple urban centers, leveling infrastructure and leaving thousands injured. Rescue teams are currently working against time to pull survivors from the mounting rubble. Despite the escalating violence, Tehran has officially denied reports of launching missiles at Turkey, even as regional tensions reach a breaking point.



## 'Military conflict cannot resolve issues'

**India and Finland support peace efforts in Ukraine and West Asia: PM Modi**

New Delhi: Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday said India and Finland agree that military conflict alone cannot resolve global disputes and reiterated their support for efforts aimed at bringing peace to regions affected by war, including Ukraine and West Asia.

Addressing a joint press meet with Finnish President Alexander Stubb, PM Modi said both countries shared a commitment to dialogue, diplomacy and the rule of law while calling for an early end to ongoing conflicts.

"India and Finland both believe in the rule of law, dialogue and diplomacy. We agree that military conflict alone cannot resolve any issue," Modi said.

"Whether it is Ukraine or West Asia, we will continue to support every effort aimed at bringing a swift end to the conflict and achieving peace," he added.

The Prime Minister also highlighted growing economic and technological cooperation between India and Finland, particularly in the wake of the recently concluded India-European Union Free Trade Agreement earlier this year.

"At the beginning of 2026, a historic India-European Union Free Trade Agreement was concluded. This agreement will further strengthen trade, investment and technology cooperation between India and Finland," Modi said.

He said the two countries are working to elevate their ties into a future-oriented partnership focused on emerging technologies and sustainable development.

"We are shaping India-Finland relations into a strategic partnership in digitalisation and sustainability," Modi said. "This partnership will accelerate and energise our cooperation in several high-tech sectors, ranging from AI to 6G telecom, and from clean energy to quantum computing."

### MUSTREAD



### India Condoles Khamenei's Death

New Delhi: India on Thursday condoned the death of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei with Foreign Secretary Vikram Misri conveying to the Iranian ambassador New Delhi's message of sympathy. Misri visited the Iranian embassy and signed the condolence book on behalf of the government of India. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) also released a photograph of the foreign secretary's conversation with Iranian envoy to India Mohammad Fathali Khamenei was killed in an Israel-US strike on February 28. Though India called for resolution of the West Asia crisis through dialogue and diplomacy, it chose not to react to Khamenei's killing. Misri's visit to the Iranian embassy and signing of the condolence book assumed significance as several opposition parties had criticized.

### Magnitude 3.3 earthquake hit Gujarat

New Delhi: A light magnitude 3.3 earthquake hit 98 km away from Khambhat, State of Gujarat, India, in the early afternoon of Thursday, at 3.08 pm local time (GMT +5:30). The depth of the quake could not be determined, but is assumed to be shallow. The quake was reported felt by some people near the epicenter. The closest larger town where the quake might have been felt is Botad, a city with more than 130,000 inhabitants in India, in 14 km distance north of the epicenter.

**Sensex**  
BSE..... 80,015.90 (+899.71)  
NSE..... 24,765.90 (+285.40)

**Bullion**  
Gold..... 1,62,930 (24 carat 10gm)  
Silver..... 2,85,000 (1kg)  
USD(\$)/INR(Rs)..... 91.79

**Weather**  
Sunrise | Sunset | Day | Night  
6.38 | 6.26 | 37.1 | 18.5

## Jal Ganga Samwardhan Abhiyan

- 'Jal Ganga Samwardhan' is foundation of development and security for future generations: CM Yadav
- CM issues directives regarding 'Jal Ganga Samwardhan' Abhiyan-2026



Bhopal: In a powerful push for environmental sustainability, Chief Minister Dr. Mohan Yadav has launched the Jal Ganga Samwardhan Abhiyan-2026. Positioning the campaign as the "foundation of future security," the CM directed a multi-departmental crackdown on encroachments within catchment areas and called for the systematic rejuvenation of river origins across Madhya Pradesh.

### From policy to people's movement

Dr. Yadav emphasized that the fight against declining groundwater levels and deteriorating ancient water structures cannot be won by the government alone. "This must become a result-oriented, Jan-andolan (people's movement)," he stated, urging participation from village panchayats to urban local bodies. A key directive includes the establishment of public drinking water kiosks (pyau) as a social responsibility, alongside a strong push to eliminate plastic bottle usage.

### Major milestones & key projects

The campaign officially kicks off

on March 19 (Varsh Pratipada), featuring a massive roadmap of conservation:

- River Rejuvenation: Focused action plans for the Betwa, Kshipra, and Gambhir rivers.
- Infrastructure: The Rural Development Department will implement 2,200 projects worth Rs 170 crore, alongside completing over 86,000 farm ponds.
- Urban Greenery: Strengthening 120 water harvesting structures and developing 50 new green zones in cities.
- Eco-Initiatives: The Forest Department will plant 28 lakh saplings and construct 400 structures to ensure water availability for wildlife.

### Global dialogue & cultural heritage

The Abhiyan will culminate in high-profile events, including an International Water Conference in Bhopal (May 23-24) and the Shipra Parikrama Yatra. On Ganga Dussehra (May 26), the Shipra banks in Ujjain will host the Mahadev River Katha, blending spiritual heritage with modern ecological goals.

## Russia offers to mediate amid simmering U.S.-Iran tensions

Moscow: Russia has officially signaled its readiness to serve as a diplomatic bridge between Washington and Tehran to prevent further military escalation. Mikhail Ulyanov, Russia's permanent representative to international organizations in Vienna, stated that Moscow is prepared to mediate peace talks if the necessity arises. In an interview with the Russian newspaper Izvestia, Ulyanov noted that while the immediate resumption of direct dialogue remains unlikely, both sides must recognize that their core objectives cannot be achieved through sheer military force. According to the senior diplomat, Iran is expected to welcome



such a Russian intervention, given their strategic partnership.

However, the road to the negotiating table remains obstructed by

American reluctance. Ulyanov pointed out that the United States has largely rejected the need for external mediation, operating under the belief that it can manage the volatile situation independently. Critiquing the current American approach as "very poorly handled," the Russian diplomat warned that unilateral maneuvers are failing to stabilize the region. As international concerns grow over a potential conflict, Russia's offer places the ball back in Washington's court, highlighting a stark divide in how the world's major powers intend to navigate the complex geopolitical standoff in the Middle East.

## CM Nitish Kumar left Bihar, files Rajya Sabha nominations

Patna: JD(U) chief Nitish Kumar filed nomination for the upcoming Rajya Sabha elections, bringing the curtain down on his tenure as the longest-serving Chief Minister of Bihar. Kumar, who has been the CM since 2005, said the new government that will be formed in the state will have his full cooperation and guidance. This comes barely about four months after Kumar was sworn in for a record 10th term at a grand ceremony in Patna on November 20. Filing of nomination papers for the Rajya Sabha polls will close on Thursday.

Kumar said that from the very beginning of his parliamentary journey, he wanted to become a member of both Houses of the Bihar legislature as well as both Houses of Parliament. The development has sparked intense political speculation in the state, with discussions gaining momentum that Bihar could soon see its first Chief Minister from the



Bharatiya Janata Party. The Election Commission has announced that polling for 37 Rajya Sabha seats across 10 states, including Bihar, will be held on March 16.

### Amit Shah hails move

Union Home Minister Amit Shah on Thursday credited Chief Minister

Nitish Kumar for bringing Bihar out of what he described as the "jungle raj" era, saying the state has witnessed significant improvements in governance, law and order, and development over the past two decades. He further said that the Bihar CM is now entering into national politics.

## A seismic shift in Bihar's power dynamics

By Pravesh Kumar Mishra  
New Delhi: The curtains are finally drawing on one of the most enduring chapters in Indian state politics. Nitish Kumar, the central axis of Bihar's power for over two decades, is set to transition to the Rajya Sabha. This move is being viewed not merely as a change in designation but as the definitive conclusion of the "Nitish Era"—a period that redefined Bihar's 21st-century trajectory.

### A masterstroke of BJP strategy

Political analysts suggest that Nitish's departure is the culmination of a long-term blueprint by BJP strategists. By facilitating a digni-

## The sunset of the Nitish Kumar era

fied transition for the veteran leader to central politics, the BJP has secured NDA unity while successfully claiming the primary seat in a state where it long played "junior partner." For the first time since the 1990s, the path is clear for the BJP to establish its own singular dominance, filling the political vacuum created by Nitish's exit.

### The race for the throne

As the state stands at a crossroads, the question of succession dominates the corridors of power. The BJP is reportedly evaluating several heavyweights to ensure a balance of administrative experience and complex caste equa-

- tions. Leading the pack are:
    - Samrat Choudhary & Vijay Sinha: Current Deputy CMs with significant grassroots clout.
    - Nityanand Rai: Union Minister and a key organizational face.
    - Prem Kumar: Senior legislator with deep experience.
- Interestingly, whispers from the JD(U) camp suggest a potential role for Nitish's son, Nishant Kumar, as a Deputy CM candidate—a move aimed at keeping the party's base intact.

### Challenges and the road ahead

The post-Nitish landscape presents a dual

challenge: Can JD(U) survive without its founding patriarch? And can the next leader transcend Bihar's deeply entrenched caste arithmetic to deliver economic prosperity? While the BJP is expected to prioritize Nitish's endorsement for the new leader to ensure a smooth handover, the opposition RJD remains a formidable shadow in this transition.

Nitish Kumar's nomination to the Upper House is more than a parliamentary shift; it is the end of a specific style of governance. Bihar now waits to see who will inherit the legacy of the man who was, for 20 years, the "Sushasan Babu."

