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India's response focused on peace, de-escalation: Jaishankar

escalate tensions and address underlying issues. Sir, it is also imperative that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states in the region be respected," he stressed.

Jaishankar said developments in the region are a cause of deep concern to "all of us", and added that the conflict has continued to intensify and the security situation in the region has deteriorated significantly.

The minister emphasised that Prime Minister Narendra Modi continues to closely monitor emerging developments and the relevant ministries are coordinating to ensure effective responses.

He said the prime minister has spoken to leaders of several countries in West Asia and has received assurances that the well-being of the Indian community would be a priority for them.

"I have similarly been in close touch with my counterparts in these countries. Insofar as the United States is concerned, we have maintained regular contacts through diplomatic channels. While attempts have been made, contacts with Iran at the leadership level are obviously difficult at this time. I have, however, spoken to Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi on February 28 and March 5, 2026. We will continue these high-level conversations in the coming days," he assured the house.

Jaishankar informed Parliament about the steps taken by the government to bring back Indians and provided details of the operation of flights by several airlines to bring back those affected.

Referring to concerns on the energy front amid rising global crude oil prices, he said the government remains committed to ensuring that fully, taking into account costs and risks of the energy markets.

"For us, the interests of the Indian consumer have and will always be the overriding priority. Where required, Indian diplomacy has supported the endeavours of our energy enterprises in this volatile situation," he asserted.

On the Iranian vessel currently docked in Kochi, the minister said the Iranian side requested permission on February 28 for three ships in the region to dock at Indian ports and permission was accorded on March 1.

"IRIS LAVAN actually docked on 04 March in Kochi. The crew is currently in Indian naval facilities. We believe that this was the right thing to do and the Iranian Foreign Minister has expressed his country's thanks for this humane gesture," he said.

He noted that in view of the large number of Indians living and working in Gulf countries and a few thousand in Iran for study or employment, ensuring regional stability was critical for India. The Gulf is also central to India's energy security and trade, accounting for nearly USD 200 billion in commerce," he said.

The minister said attacks on merchant shipping have affected Indian seafarers, with casualties reported and one Indian mariner still missing.

He also informed Parliament that his ministry, as well as Indian embassies in West Asian countries, had been issuing regular advisories to Indian citizens there, asking them to avoid non-essential travel to Iran and advising those already there to remain in contact with the Indian embassy.

The Ministry of External Affairs has also set up a dedicated control room to monitor the situation and respond to requests from Indian nationals, while the Directorate General of Shipping has created a quick response team.

Fulfilling people's aspirations core objective of Union Budget: Modi

health infrastructure has been strengthened. He said new medical colleges have opened in hundreds of districts and through the Ayushman Bharat scheme, access to health services has been extended to villages via wellness centres.

Modi also talked about the "youth power" of the country and said it becomes "national power" only when it is healthy, disciplined, and brimming with self-confidence.

"That is why, in the past few years, sports have been viewed as an important stream of national development," he said.

The prime minister said initiatives like Khelo India have infused a new energy into the country's sports ecosystem and sports infrastructure is being strengthened across the country.

NEET UG application deadline extended

https://neet.nta.nic.in or mail to neetug2026@nta.ac.in

This follows complaints from multiple candidates on March 8 that due to server issues or the website of the NTA not working, they were unable to apply or pay the fee.

The NEET UG is the basis on which admission to MBBS, BDS and other undergraduate medical courses in the country takes place.

Soldier goes missing during training

today," the White Knight Corps said in a post on X. "Extensive search operations are underway with all available resources of Army and civil agencies being employed to locate the missing soldier," it added.

Police HC held in graft case

As the complainant did not wish to pay the bribe, he approached ACB to take legal action against the accused in accordance with the law.

On receipt of the complaint, a discreet verification was conducted, which corroborated the demand of bribe by the accused and accordingly, a case was registered at ACB police station, Udhampur, and investigation was taken up, officials said.

During the course of investigation, a trap team headed by a DSP-rank was constituted. The team laid a successful trap and the accused was caught red-handed while demanding and accepting the bribe amount of Rs 5,000 from the complainant in the presence of independent witnesses. The accused was arrested on the spot by the ACB team after following due process of law, officials said.

The bribe money was also recovered from the possession of accused in the presence of independent witnesses associated with the trap team. A search was also con-

Woman, newborn killed in road accident

JAMMU, MAR 09: A woman and her 5-day old newborn baby lost their lives in a road accident in Sunderbani area of Rajouri district today.

According to officials, the incident took place in the afternoon after a car, which was on way to Rajouri from Jammu, collided with a school bus.

Three occupants of the ill-fated car, who sustained critical injuries, were shifted to the sub-district hospital, Sunderbani, where the woman and her newborn baby were declared brought dead.

The dead woman was identified as Shanaz Akhter (40), wife of Abdul Majid of Mandi, Poonch. Car driver, who was identified as Shakeel Ahmed, son of Mohammad Sadiq of Mandi, was undergoing treatment at the hospital.

A case in this connection was registered at the concerned police station.

ducted in the residential quarter of accused at Talwara in the presence of a magistrate.

Further investigation was in progress.

No immediate hike in petrol, diesel prices

Top government sources said the government is closely monitoring global oil markets, but there is no immediate plan to raise retail fuel prices. Oil marketing companies are expected to absorb the current cost pressure for the time being.

While the country has adequate stocks of both raw material (crude oil) and finished products (fuels) to meet requirements for the next 6-8 weeks, the government has tweaked the policy for ordering a cooking gas LPG refill.

The minimum gap for booking a domestic LPG refill has been increased to 25 days from the current 21 days, a move aimed at preventing hoarding and ensuring equitable distribution of cylinders.

Sources said the minimum waiting period for booking a domestic LPG cylinder refill increased from 21 days to 25 days to prevent hoarding.

Average households consume 7-8 LPG cylinders of 14.2 kg in a year and should normally not need a refill in less than 6 weeks, they said, adding the refill booking period has been increased to prevent hoarding and creation of artificial scarcity in the market.

The oil companies have an adequate stock of LPG, they added.

Sources said the government is closely monitoring the evolving global energy situation and has taken steps to ensure that supply chains remain stable.

"Every petrol pump in the country is functioning, every piped natural gas (to household kitchens) is operational, every CNG station is open," he said. "There is no cause for panic." For India, which imports 88 per cent of its requirement of crude oil, which is turned into fuels like petrol and diesel at refineries, higher global prices translate into a larger import bill and potential inflationary pressures.

However, retail fuel prices are not expected to be raised immediately, as the government continues to follow a calibrated policy of allowing companies to build margins when international prices are low and cushioning consumers when rates rise, sources said.

Retail petrol and diesel prices have been on a freeze since April 2022, with fuel retailers like Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd (HPCL) absorbing losses when crude prices are high and making profits when rates are low.

India imports 88 per cent of its crude oil needs and roughly half of its natural gas requirement. These mostly come via the Strait of Hormuz.

As India scouts for more LPG and gas supplies, some recalibration in supplies to different sectors is being done.

Following the US and Israeli attacks on Iranian government, military and nuclear facilities, Iran warned shipping away from the strait, and insurers withdrew coverage, effectively halting tanker movements.

"They (oil companies) have enough cushion to sustain this kind of price spike," a source with direct knowledge of the matter said.

"We have seen prices rise to USD 119 per barrel in June 2022 in the aftermath of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. That year, they had nominal profits, but in FY24, they posted record Rs 81,000 crore profit." This year, the three companies have posted Rs 23,743 crore profit in the December quarter alone.

LPG booking period increased

the sources reaffirmed, as India scouts for more LPG partners. Countries like Algeria, Australia, Canada, Norway have approached to sell LPG to India, they added.

Petrol and diesel prices in India are unlikely to increase, unless and until crude oil prices breach USD 130 per barrel, government sources said.

The fuel prices are unlikely to increase as India has enough stock, the sources said. "We expect crude oil prices to be around USD 100 per barrel," one of the sources said. "No problem of shortage of petrol and diesel at any pump in country."

They also said that sourcing crude other than the Strait of Hormuz route has been accelerated.

Further, the said sources indicated that India has enough stock of Aviation Turbine Fuel (ATF). "India is a producer and exporter of ATF, no need to panic about ATF," they said.

India, the sources said, is better placed than other countries.

LS fails to take up resolution on Birla's removal

House to take up the resolution against Birla.

Pal reminded the opposition that the no-confidence resolution against the Speaker was already on the House agenda, and their adjournment notice seeking debate on the West Asia crisis could not be taken up.

He accused the opposition of wasting taxpayers' money -- about Rs 9 crore per day -- by holding the House "hostage" to its demands. Pal described the opposition behaviour as "immature and irresponsible".

He said the government and the Chair were willing to take up the resolution, but the opposition was creating obstacles, even as Birla was not presiding over the House until the no-confidence motion against him was settled.

Around 12 noon, as soon as Jaishankar rose to make a statement in the lower house on the "situation in West Asia", opposition members started raising slogans against the government and demanded a full-fledged discussion on the ongoing crisis in West Asia.

Pal, chairing the proceedings, said the questions being raised by the opposition through their placards were being elaborately answered by the government.

He said that while a resolution to remove Birla as the Lok Sabha Speaker is already on the agenda, the Opposition was pushing for a notice for adjournment of the proceedings to discuss West Asia.

Rijiju said their notice to remove Birla from office has already been accepted, and the government is willing to discuss it, but the opposition was disrupting the proceedings.

Outside the House, opposition MPs, including Congress president Mallikarjun Kharge, former party chief Rahul Gandhi, and SP chief Akhilesh Yadav, staged a protest demanding a discussion on the West Asia conflict and slamming the government for its "silence" on critical issues related to it.

Sources said the government is keen to have the discussion on the no-confidence motion against Birla as early as possible. Birla has not been chairing the House ever since a notice was given by 118 opposition MPs on the motion in the first part of the Budget session.

The motion will be moved by three Congress members -- Mohamed Jawed, K Suresh, and Mallu Ravi.

The proposed motion questioned the conduct of the Speaker in disallowing the leader of the opposition and other opposition leaders to speak and in "making unwarranted allegations against women MPs belonging to the Opposition".

It also referred to the suspension of opposition MPs for an entire session for raising issues of "public concern and not rebuking ruling party members for making wholly objectionable and derogatory remarks against former PMs".

The opposition alleged that Birla "openly espouses the version of the ruling party on all controversial matters" and that all these acts constitute "a serious danger to the

proper functioning of this House and ventilating effectively the felt concerns and grievances of the people, and therefore resolves that he be removed from his office".

Birla can defend himself and vote on the resolution, but cannot chair proceedings when the matter is being discussed. Though rules are silent, he may sit in prominent rows of the treasury benches.

Since he does not have a "division number" like other members, he will not be able to use the automated voting system if the resolution comes up for a vote. He will have to use a slip to register his vote.

This is not the first time that a no-confidence motion against the Chair has been moved by the opposition. In 2024, the opposition moved a similar motion against the then Rajya Sabha Chairman and Vice President, Jagdeep Dhankhar.

History also records at least three instances since Independence when a no-confidence motion was moved against the Speaker. The first was in 1954 against the first Lok Sabha Speaker, G V Mavalankar, after MP Vigneshwar Misra alleged that he was not impartial.

ECI set to announce poll schedule for 4 states

ahead of the crucial polls.

Along with the CEC, Election Commissioners Sukhbir Singh Sandhu and Vivek Joshi are part of the full bench reviewing arrangements in the state. The team is scheduled to return to New Delhi on March 10 after holding a series of meetings with election officials, law enforcement authorities and representatives of political parties.

The commission had earlier undertaken similar review visits to poll-bound Assam, Tamil Nadu, Kerala and Puducherry to evaluate preparedness for the forthcoming assembly elections.

The commission has also undertaken a Special Intensive Revision (SIR) of electoral rolls in West Bengal, Kerala, Tamil Nadu and Puducherry to ensure their accuracy and integrity.

Azad supports 'One Nation, One Election'; terms move in country's interest

lection would come. The election process was unending. It was very difficult," he said.

Azad said simultaneous elections would be in the interests of the country.

"Lakhs of officials are involved in elections. If simultaneous elections are held, offices will function, time will be saved, and there will be development and improvement in governance," he said.

Chairman Chaudhary said Azad had spoken "in the interest of the country" and suggested that everyone should come together for the initiative keeping aside party lines.

He said time will be saved and government resources will be saved if a single election for both the assembly and the Lok Sabha was held with a single voters' list.

"When elections are held at different times, government employees and teachers are deployed. They are given training and that results in suffering of the students as the teachers cannot teach the students," he said.

Chaudhary said even some opposition members sought a single voters' list.

He said Azad had a long experience. He shared his legal and political experience with the members. He cleared many doubts of the members, Chaudhary said.

"He (Azad) told us that during his time, he had been in campaigning mode for years together," he said.

Chaudhary said governance does not get priority when elections are held at different times, and members too have realised that 'one nation one election' initiative is in the interest of the country, not for any political party.

"Rising above party lines, all political parties should work for this," he said.

Chaudhary said former Union law minister and former chief minister of Karnataka M Veerappa Moily was supposed to appear before the committee on Monday but could not do so as he was indisposed.

The Joint Committee on the Constitution (129th Amendment) Bill, 2024, and the Union Territories Laws (Amendment) Bill, 2024 was constituted after the two proposed legislations were introduced in the Lok Sabha in December, 2024.

The joint committee has met constitutional experts, economists and the Law Commission chairman among others since it was constituted.

The bills were introduced following a report submitted by a high-level committee on simultaneous elections, headed by former president Ram Nath Kovind.

The Kovind committee was constituted by the government of India on September 2, 2023. Its primary objective was to explore the feasibility of conducting simultaneous elections for the Lok Sabha and state legislative assemblies.

It solicited extensive public and political feedback, and consulted with experts to analyse the potential benefits and challenges associated with this proposed electoral reform.

This report presented a detailed overview of the committee's findings, its recommendations for constitutional amendments, and the anticipated impact of simultaneous elections on governance, resources, and public sentiment.

SC allows govt to extend term of tribunal members; new Bill likely

ability. To whom are they accountable? There should be some mechanism. If their work is not up to the mark, why should their tenure be at all extended?" the CJI asked.

Venkataramani said the new Bill will be in accordance with the top court's 2025 verdict and smoothen the functioning and appointments of members in various tribunals.

Senior advocate Sanjay Jain, appearing for the CAT Bar Association, said that the 2025 Madras Bar Association judgment mandated a minimum tenure of five years for the members and around 31 members are set to superannuate soon. He said that another concern is that administrative members are allowed to act as acting chairperson of the tribunal when the judicial members superannuate.

3 elected unopposed to Rajya Sabha

to their unopposed election.

Both seats were earlier held by the Congress. However, given the current strength of the state assembly - where BJP holds 54 seats and the Congress 35 - the outcome was expected to result in each party winning one seat.

Meanwhile, Congress leader Anurag Sharma was elected unopposed to Rajya Sabha from Himachal Pradesh. The election became uncontested after BJP decided not to field any candidate for the seat. Subsequently, Sharma was declared elected without the need for voting. Sharma began his political career with the National Students' Union of India (NSUI) in 1995.

Ladakh admin accords warm farewell to Kavinder

cial of the administration had consistently emphasised the importance of teamwork and coordinated efforts for development.

He expressed satisfaction over the initiatives undertaken for the progress of Ladakh and said that he always tried to showcase Ladakh's rich culture and heritage wherever he travelled.

He cited the example of presenting a traditional Ladakhi Thangka painting to PM Narendra Modi as a gesture, high-

lighting the region's unique cultural identity.

He said Ladakh was progressing due to the hard work of its people and the dedication of the administrative machinery.

He commended officials of the UT administration for their tireless service in a region known for its challenging terrain and harsh climatic conditions.

He also highlighted that several initiatives during his tenure focused on promoting renewable energy to protect Ladakh's fragile ecosystem, along with strengthening the sectors of healthcare, education and power connectivity.

Gupta said he had travelled nearly 10,000 km across Ladakh to understand the ground realities and the issues faced by people in even the most remote areas of the Union Territory.

He also spoke about various Memoranda of Understanding signed with educational institutions to benefit students from Ladakh and expand opportunities for higher education and skill development.

Emphasising inclusive development, he underlined the importance of effective dissemination of central government schemes so that the people of Ladakh can fully benefit from them.

He also appreciated the people of Ladakh for taking pride in their rich culture, heritage and native languages, while also embracing the national language Hindi, which strengthens national unity.

He said although many initiatives had been undertaken during his tenure, much more remains to be accomplished, and he expressed confidence that Ladakh would continue to progress on the path of development.

On the occasion, the Lt Governor also released the second edition of the "Sindhu Darshan" magazine, highlighting Ladakh's cultural and spiritual heritage.

The ceremony witnessed the presence of several dignitaries, including Ladakh DGP Mukesh Singh, 14 Corps GOC Hitesh Bhalla, Principal District & Sessions Judge, Leh, Spalzes Angmo, LG's commissioner L Franklin, administrative secretaries, directors and heads of departments, officials from Army, BRO, police and the UT administration.

Mukesh Singh lauded Gupta's dedication to public service and nation-building, noting that his commitment and leadership had earlier earned him important positions such as Mayor of Jammu, Speaker of the Jammu and Kashmir Legislative Assembly, and Deputy Chief Minister of Jammu and Kashmir.

Franklin highlighted the distinguished career and leadership qualities of Gupta and described him as a simple, approachable and compassionate leader. He noted that the outgoing LG patiently listened to officials and delegations and always came across as someone who genuinely cared for the welfare of the people. He congratulated him on his well-deserved appointment as the Governor of Himachal Pradesh.

During the ceremony, various organisations and departments felicitated Gupta in recognition of his service and contributions to Ladakh. The event also featured cultural performances by local artists, adding a vibrant and heartfelt tribute to the occasion.

The farewell ceremony concluded with warm wishes from the UT administration and all dignitaries present for Gupta's continued success in his future responsibilities.

Earlier, the officials and staff of Lok Niwas and LG Secretariat also bid farewell to Gupta.

India becomes world's 2nd largest arms importer

1995 due to expanded domestic production of its own designs, the think tank noted in its report, 'Trends in International Arms Transfers'.

The United States supplied 42 per cent of all international arms transfers during 2021-25, up from 36 per cent in 2016-20, it said.

Four states in Asia and Oceania -- India, Pakistan, Japan and Australia -- ranked among the 10 largest arms importers globally in 2021-25.

The main supplier to the region in 2021-25 was the US, which accounted for 35 per cent of regional arms imports. Russia accounted for another 17 per cent and China for 14 per cent.

"India was the world's second largest arms importer. Its imports decreased marginally (4 per cent) between 2016-20 and 2021-25," the SIPRI said.

"The largest share of Indian arms imports came from Russia, at 40 per cent -- a significantly smaller share than in 2016-20 (51 per cent) and almost half that in 2011-15 (70 per cent)," it said.

Overall, the report said the volume of major arms transferred between states increased by 9.2 per cent between 2016-2020 and 2021-2025.

"States in Europe more than trebled their arms imports, making it the biggest recipient region. Total exports by the United States, the world's largest supplier of arms, increased by 27 per cent. This included a 217 per cent increase in US arms exports to Europe," it said.

G7 'not there yet' on release of oil reserves amid Mideast War: French Fin Min

dom and the United States, were scheduled to discuss a joint release of strategic oil reserves coordinated by the International Energy Agency (IEA).

The report said three G7 countries, including the United States, had so far backed the idea.

France is also seeking to put together a meeting of G7 energy ministers that would take place on the sidelines of a nuclear energy summit in Paris on Tuesday.

"I wanted us to be able to mobilise close coordination at G7 level to better manage energy issues," said Macron. The European Union insisted there was "no imminent oil supply" shortage in Europe.

Oil has continued its surge as the US-Israeli war against Iran stretches into a second week and Tehran carries out retaliatory strikes against crude-producing Gulf nations, leaving governments scrambling to respond.

The Japanese government had instructed domestic oil reserve bases to prepare to make releases. Tokyo said no decision had been taken.

Japan's strategic oil reserves were more than 400 million barrels as of December, and are among the world's largest. Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi said last week the reserves were equivalent to 254 days of domestic consumption.

The IEA was created to coordinate responses to major supply disruptions after the 1973 oil crisis.

In order to ensure energy security, the IEA imposes on its members an obligation to hold emergency oil stocks equivalent to at least 90 days of net oil imports.

The war in the Middle East is unlikely to trigger a collapse of the world economy on the scale of the 2008 global financial crisis, Nobel prize-winning economist Philippe Aghion said Monday.

Iran names Khamenei's son as Supreme Leader; oil prices surge

drones at energy and water infrastructure.

On Monday, a fire broke out at an oil facility in Fujairah, United Arab Emirates. Bahrain's only oil refinery was apparently also hit, and Saudi Arabia said it had intercepted several drones attacking its Shaybah oil field.

Israel, meanwhile, claimed strikes on targets in Iran's city of Isfahan, saying it hit command centres for the Revolutionary Guard and its volunteer Basij force, as well as a rocket engine production facility and missile launch sites. There was no immediate confirmation from Iran.

The war has killed at least 1,230 people in Iran, at least 397 in Lebanon and at least 11 in Israel, according to officials. Israel reported its first soldier deaths Sunday, saying two were killed in southern Lebanon, where its military is fighting Hezbollah.