



Learn Beyond

Date: 15.03.2026

## General Studies – II (Governance, Constitution, Polity, Social Justice & International Relations)

### 1. U.S. bombs Iran’s Kharg Island; Tehran hits back - 1

# U.S. bombs Iran’s Kharg Island; Tehran hits back

U.S. forces ‘obliterated’ military targets on the island, says Trump; Iran threatens to strike oil, economic and energy facilities in the region linked to the U.S. if its oil infrastructure is targeted

#### Associated Press

DUBAI

A missile struck a helipad inside the U.S. Embassy compound in Baghdad of Iraq and debris from an intercepted Iranian drone hit an oil facility in the UAE on Saturday while U.S. President Donald Trump claimed military sites on an island vital to Iran’s oil network were destroyed.

Mr. Trump said U.S. forces on Friday “obliterated” targets on Iran’s Kharg Island, which is home to the primary terminal that handles the country’s oil exports.

Meanwhile, an American official said 2,500 more marines and an amphibious assault ship are being sent to West Asia.

Iranian Parliament

### Rising tensions

The U.S. said it struck military targets on Kharg Island, a crucial hub in Iran’s oil export network, as tensions escalate around the Strait of Hormuz

- Kharg Island hosts Iran’s main oil export terminal and is central to the country’s crude shipments to international markets. Disruption here could affect global oil supplies
- Donald Trump said U.S. forces ‘obliterated’ military sites on Kharg Island
- Trump warned Iran’s oil infrastructure could be targeted next if shipping through the Strait of Hormuz is disrupted
- An American official said 2,500 more marines and an amphibious assault ship are being sent to West Asia



Source: GRAPHIC NEWS

Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf had warned on social media on Thursday that attacks on the islands on Iran’s southern maritime frontier would cause Iran to “abandon all restraint,” underscoring how

central they are to the country’s economy and security.

On Saturday, Iran’s joint military command reiterated its threat that it will attack the U.S.-linked oil and energy facilities in the re-

gion if the Islamic Republic’s oil infrastructure is hit.

**CONTINUED ON**

» PAGE 7

» ‘PEARL OF PERSIAN GULF’

» PAGE 13

## **U.S. bombs Iran's Kharg Island; Tehran hits back**

Iran has continued to launch widespread missile and drone attacks on Israel and neighbouring Gulf Arab states, and effectively closed the Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's traded oil passes, even as U.S. and Israeli warplanes pummel military and other targets across Iran.

Elements from the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit and the amphibious assault ship *USS Tripoli* have been ordered to West Asia, according to the U.S. official. Marine Expeditionary Units are able to conduct amphibious landings, but they also specialise in bolstering security at embassies, evacuating civilians, and providing disaster relief. The deployment does not necessarily indicate that a ground operation is imminent or will take place.

The 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, as well as the *Tripoli* and other amphibious assault ships carrying the marines, are based in Japan and have been in the Pacific Ocean for several days, according to images released by the military. The *Tripoli* was spotted by commercial satellites sailing alone near Taiwan, putting it more than a week away from the waters off Iran.

The U.S. strikes on Iran's Kharg Island in the Persian Gulf targeted military sites but left its oil infrastructure alone for now, Mr. Trump said in a social media post. But he warned that if Iran or anyone else interferes with the passage of ships through the Strait of Hormuz, he will reconsider his decision not to "wipe out the oil infrastructure."

Ebrahim Zolfaghari, spokesperson for the Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, warned they will target "all oil, economic, and energy infrastructures belonging to oil companies across the region that have American shares or cooperate with America."

The Iranian joint military command also threatened to attack cities in the UAE, saying the U.S. used "ports, docks and hideouts" there to launch strikes on the islands. It called on people to evacuate those areas where it said U.S. forces were sheltering.

Iran's semiofficial Fars news agency said on Saturday that the U.S. strikes caused no damage to the island's oil infrastructure. The agency said at least 15 explosions followed the strikes, which it said targeted an air defence facility, a naval base, the airport control tower and an offshore oil company's helicopter hangar.

## 2. 2 LPG carriers cross Strait of Hormuz, says official - 1

# 2 LPG carriers cross Strait of Hormuz, says official

**Saptaparno Ghosh**

**M. Kalyanaraman**

NEW DELHI/CHENNAI

Two liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) carriers, *Shivalik* and *Nanda Devi*, have crossed the Strait of Hormuz and are headed to India, Rajesh Kumar Sinha, Special Secretary at Ministry of Shipping and Waterways, said at an inter-ministerial press briefing on Friday.

“Of the 24 vessels with an Indian-flag operating in the Persian Gulf, LPG carriers *Shivalik* and *Nanda Devi* crossed the Strait of Hormuz early this morning safely, and are headed to India,” Mr. Sinha said.

*Shivalik* is expected to reach Mundra Port by March 16, while *Nanda Devi* is expected to reach Kandla Port by March 17, he said.

# Two LPG carriers cross Strait of Hormuz, head to India: official

Vessels *Shivalik* and *Nanda Devi* carry approximately 46,000 tonnes each of cooking gas, says Special Secretary at Shipping Ministry; *Shivalik* is expected to reach Mundra Port on March 16, while the latter will reach Kandla Port by March 17, he adds

**Saptaparno Ghosh**  
**M. Kalyanaraman**  
NEW DELHI/CHENNAI

Two liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) carriers, *Shivalik* and *Nanda Devi*, have crossed the Strait of Hormuz and are headed to India, Rajesh Kumar Sinha, Special Secretary at Ministry of Shipping and Waterways, said at an inter-ministerial press briefing here Friday.

"Of the 24 vessels with an Indian-flag operating in the Persian Gulf, LPG carriers *Shivalik* and *Nanda Devi* crossed the Strait of Hormuz early this morning safely, and are headed to India," Mr. Sinha stated.

The senior official added that the two carriers were holding approximately 46,000 tonnes each of cooking gas, cumulatively 92,712 tonnes.

*Shivalik* is expected to reach its destination, Mundra Port, by March 16, while *Nanda Devi* is expected at Kandla Port on March 17, he said.



**Promising pitch:** With the exit of *Shivalik* and *Nanda Devi*, a total of 22 vessels are on standby at the western part of the Strait of Hormuz, says a senior official. REUTERS

With the exit of the two vessels, a total of 22 vessels are on standby at the western part of the Strait. As many as 611 seafarers are on board the ships.

Of the 22 vessels, Mr. Sinha said, six are loaded with LPG, one with natural gas, and four with crude oil. One is a chemical products tanker.

Together these constitute the energy-based vessels. Of the remainder, three are container ships, one is a dredger, one is an

emptying ballast, two are bulk carriers and three are dry-docks (ships that are headed for repair and/or maintenance).

The Special Secretary reiterated that the Ministry instructed LPG carriers about priority rebirthing for continued energy supply.

Six such vessels in the past three days, which have sailed from outside the Gulf area, have been accorded the provision, he added. India imports

about 200 lakh tonnes of LPG every year. Much of this come from foreign flagged vessels chartered by oil majors.

## Two days worth imports

When the two India-bound ships discharge their cargo, it will add two days worth of imports India was using prior to the start of the conflict that triggered curbs on commercial use of LPG.

At least two of Indian-flagged LPG carriers are

still in the Persian Gulf. And some are headed towards East Asia.

With the Persian Gulf out of bounds, India will need to find alternative sources from where these vessels can bring in LPG. Many ships including *Sahyadri* are drifting off the coast of India waiting for orders.

In November 2025, India's oil companies signed a one-year contract to import 2.2 million tonnes of LPG from the U.S. Gulf Coast in 2026. This represents about 10% of India's annual imports. The U.S. is the number one exporter of LPG in the world with some 60 million tonnes of annual exports.

The contracts with the U.S. are underway but the voyages will take some two months for a round-trip.

The U.S. may well be the biggest alternative source of LPG imports but long voyage durations will pose a challenge for India, which is among the world's largest importers of LPG.

### 3. Wangchuk released after 170 days as government revokes his detention under NSA - 1

# Wangchuk released after 170 days as govt. revokes his detention under NSA

**Vijaita Singh**  
NEW DELHI

Ladakhi activist Sonam Wangchuk was released from Jodhpur Central Jail on Saturday, after the Union Home Ministry revoked with “immediate effect” his 170-day detention under the National Security Act (NSA).

Invoking its powers under Section 14 of the stringent Act, the Ministry revoked the Leh District Magistrate’s order through which Mr. Wangchuk has been detained since September 26, 2025. He has “already undergone nearly half of the period of detention” under the NSA, the



The release comes ahead of a court hearing on a petition filed by Sonam Wangchuk’s wife challenging the NSA order. FILE PHOTO

Ministry said.

The Ministry is not known to have exercised this provision for any detainee in the past.

The 1980 Act enables

detention of an individual for up to a year, based on executive orders and without a trial in a court of law, on the grounds that the person poses a threat to

national security or to prevent them from disrupting public order.

The release comes ahead of the Supreme Court hearing next week on a petition filed by Mr. Wangchuk’s wife Gitanjali J. Angmo challenging the NSA order, and two days before a protest called by civil society groups in Leh and Kargil to demand constitutional safeguards for the Union Territory.

The Leh Apex Body and the Kargil Democratic Alliance have decided to go ahead with the March 16 protest.

**CONTINUED ON**  
**» PAGE 7**

#### 4. Ladakh group to protest tomorrow despite Sonam Wangchuk's release - 7

# Ladakh groups to protest tomorrow despite Sonam Wangchuk's release

Struggle for rights continue, say civil society groups while demanding release of two more detained since September 2025; Opposition questions Centre over the prolonged detention of the activist, says PM should apologise to people of Ladakh

**Vijaita Singh**  
NEW DELHI

**A** protest planned for Monday demanding constitutional safeguards for Ladakh will not be called off even after the release of climate activist Sonam Wangchuk from detention, civil society groups in the Union Territory, who are also engaged in dialogue with the Union Ministry of Home Affairs, said on Saturday.

The Leh Apex Body (LAB) and the Kargil Democratic Alliance (KDA), the two groups representing the Leh and Kargil districts of Ladakh, had announced the protest on March 10 to draw the Centre's attention towards their demands - which include Statehood, inclusion under the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution (tribal status), a Member of Parliament each for Leh and Kargil, and filling of existing government vacancies. They said the meetings of the high-powered committee had not led to any outcome yet.

Cherring Dorjay Lakruk, co-convenor of the LAB and the president of the influential Ladakh Buddhist



The civil society groups in Ladakh had announced the protest on March 10 over several demands, including Statehood. FILE PHOTO

Association told *The Hindu* that the release of Mr. Wangchuk was one of several issues being pursued and the protest will go on as planned. "Sonam Wangchuk's release is one of the several issues we have been pursuing. Our demands for constitutional safeguards and development for the region are yet to be fulfilled. The protest will go on as planned, there are two other activists who remain in jail (since September 2025)," he said.

Sajjad Kargili of the KDA said around 1,000 people are expected to converge

in Kargil on Monday to protest. "The revocation of NSA [National security Act] is a welcome move. However, our struggle for our legitimate rights continues. We also demand the immediate release of Deldan Namgial (former Congress MLA) and Smanla Dorjey and appeal that all charges against those detained on September 24 be dropped unconditionally," Mr. Kargili said.

Meanwhile, Opposition parties questioned the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led government for the prolonged detention of Mr. Wangchuk. Claiming

that the Narendra Modi government now stood exposed, Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) national convenor Arvind Kejriwal said the time spent in jail by the climate activist is a loss to the country. "The Modi government stands exposed once again. A scientist and climate activist who had dedicated his life to the nation was arrested without any evidence. The months he spent in jail were not only a personal loss for him but also a loss to the country. This sheer dictatorship must be called out and stopped immediately," he said.

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav said BJP first offered Statehood to Ladakh and then backtracked. "He [Mr. Wangchuk] should not have been jailed at all. The BJP should have supported his protest, but they betrayed him," Mr. Yadav said.

Welcoming the move to revoke Mr. Wangchuk's detention, Jammu and Kashmir Chief Minister Omar Abdullah said, "He should never have been arrested".

Congress leader Jairam Ramesh said the Modi government should apologise to the people of La-

dakh for the "completely bogus" arrest of Mr. Wangchuk. "The INC had condemned the arrest of Sonam Wangchuk on completely bogus grounds six months back. Now the Modi govt. has done a total U-turn. It stands fully exposed. It should apologise to not only Mr. Wangchuk and his family, but to the people of Ladakh as well. It should also immediately release all those who were detained for staging peaceful and democratic protests," Mr. Ramesh posted on X.

Former Rajasthan Chief Minister Ashok Gehlot questioned the "convenient use" of laws such as the NSA. "The same individual, who just a few months ago was branded a threat to national security and thrown behind bars, is now suddenly being released—meaning no evidence was found against him.?"

Ladakh, earlier part of Jammu and Kashmir, became a Union Territory in 2019 following the reading down of Article 370 of the Constitution and the civil society groups have been demanding constitutional safeguards since 2020.

## 5. Government is working to minimise impact of war on people: PM - 7

# Govt. is working to minimise impact of war on people: PM

### **The Hindu Bureau**

GUWAHATI

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said that the Congress was capitalising on the war in West Asia to create panic in India.

Addressing a gathering after inaugurating development projects in poll-bound Assam's Silchar, he said the Centre was working hard to minimise the impact of the war on the citizens of the country.

“We expected Congress to play the role of a responsible political party, but it failed yet again to prioritise national interest. Congress

is trying hard to ensure people in the country panic and get trapped in a difficult situation, so that it can go after Modi,” the Prime Minister said.

He further said that every State in the country has been teaching the Congress a lesson after it got ejected from Assam.

Mr. Modi, on Saturday, laid the foundation stone for the ₹24,000-crore Shillong-Silchar High-Speed Corridor. He said the corridor, the first of its kind in the Northeast, would help the region gain faster access to the vast markets of Southeast Asia.

## 6. The pearl of the Persian Gulf – 13

# The pearl of the Persian Gulf

### Kharg Island

The U.S. strike on the island, which handles up to 90% of Iran's crude exports, could further destabilise the global energy market, pumping up prices

#### Smriti Sudesh

**A** U.S. attack has “totally obliterated every military target” on Kharg Island, Iran's crown jewel in the Persian Gulf, said President Donald Trump in a social media post on March 14. The strike came after Mr. Trump's earlier warning to Iran not to shut the Strait of Hormuz, a critical maritime checkpoint connecting the Gulf with the Arabian Sea. The strait remains effectively closed.

As the U.S.-Israel war on Iran enters its second week, Kharg Island is now at the centre of the conflict. The tiny coral outpost in the Gulf sits at the centre of Iran's oil export network.

Barely 8 km long and covering about 20 sq. km, the island rises from the northern Persian Gulf as a small island, about 25-30 km off Iran's mainland coast. It sits in the turquoise waters of the Gulf. The landscape is dominated not by nature but by industry: massive storage tanks, sprawling jetties and an airstrip cutting across the island.

Jalal Al-e-Ahmad, the celebrated 20th century Iranian writer and philosopher, once described Kharg as the “orphan pearl” of the Persian Gulf. Today, many Iranians term it the “forbidden Island” because of the tight military



restrictions surrounding it. Guarded by the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), entry is limited to those with official clearance.

Kharg has long been part of regional trade networks. Ancient records from around the 10th century describe it as a stop for pearl divers and traders travelling between India and Basra, Iraq. Dutch merchants fortified the island in the 18th century before being driven out, and the British briefly occupied it in the 19th. Unlike most of Iran's coastline, where shallow waters make it difficult for large tankers to dock, Kharg has deep waters and long jetties that allow multiple ships to load oil at the same time. Its oil terminal was built in the late 1950s with help from the American company Amoco.

The island soon became Iran's main export hub for two key reasons. It could be connected by pipeline to the major oil fields of

south-western Iran, and its deep-water location meant it was one of the few places where the new generation of supertankers could dock easily. After the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the facilities were nationalised. During the Iran-Iraq War in 1980-88, Saddam Hussein's forces repeatedly bombed the island's oil terminal, but Iran rebuilt it and kept exports flowing.

#### **Export hub**

Up to 90% of Iran's crude exports pass through the Kharg Island terminal. Oil from Iran's largest producing fields, such as Ahvaz, Marun and Gachsaran travels via pipeline to the Kharg island before being loaded onto tankers that sail through the Strait of Hormuz and into global markets.

Kharg typically handles between 1.3 and 1.6 million barrels of oil a day. In the weeks before the U.S. and Israel launched the war on Iran, exports briefly surged close to three million bar-

rels a day. The island can load up to a maximum of seven million barrels a day and store roughly 30 million barrels at a time.

Most of that oil now goes to one country: China. China has emerged as the largest buyer of Iranian crude, importing more than 80% of the country's oil exports. Iran earned \$35.76 billion from oil exports in 2024, with China accounting for over 90% of that. Whoever controls the island effectively controls the main outlet for Iran's oil.

The idea of targeting Kharg Island is not new, it has long been part of Mr. Trump's thinking. Nearly 40 years ago, he suggested striking Iran's main oil-export hub if tensions escalated. “I'd be harsh on Iran,” he told *The Guardian* in 1988. “One bullet shot at one of our men or ships, and I'd do a number on Kharg Island. I'd go in and take it.”

The attack on Kharg could cripple the global supply, potentially pushing prices even higher. On Friday, Brent crude traded at \$103.8 a barrel, up from \$73 before the war broke out. Iran had earlier warned that any strike on the island would trigger swift retaliation. The war now appears set to escalate further – bad news for the global energy market and consumers.

**1. Parliamentary panel warns of fertilizer shortage - 1**

# Parliamentary panel warns of fertilizer shortage

**A.M. Jigeesh**

NEW DELHI

With the kharif season setting in by month-end, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Fertilizers, headed by Trinamool Congress MP Azad Kirti Jha, has warned of an acute shortage of essential fertilizers.

Citing the ongoing geopolitical tensions in West Asia and the consequent pressure on international shipping routes, the committee, in a report tabled in Parliament on Friday, underlined the need for a “forward-looking strategy” to safeguard India’s fertilizer supply chain.

**FULL REPORT ON**

**» PAGE 10**

# Ahead of kharif season, India stares at fertilizer shortage

Parliamentary standing committee seeks structured measures including a 'Fertilizer Supply Security Fund' to tide over crisis

**A. M. Jigeesh**  
NEW DELHI

**W**ith kharif season set to begin by month-end, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Fertilizers headed by Trinamool Congress MP Azad Kirti Jha, has warned of an acute shortage of essential fertilizers.

Citing the ongoing geopolitical tensions in West Asia and consequent pressure on international shipping routes, the panel, in a report tabled in Parliament on Friday, underlined the need for a "proactive and forward-looking strategy" to safeguard India's fertilizer supply chain.

Though the government has been putting up a brave face by maintaining that the country has adequate stock of urea, Nitrogen-Phosphorus-Potassium (NPK) and Di Ammonium Phosphate (DAP) fertilizers, the Union Fertilizer Department, headed by former BJP president J.P. Nadda, has been working with various ministries to ensure adequate supplies by the beginning of May across the country to meet the requirements during kharif season.

Recommending a 'Fertilizer Supply Security Fund', the parliamentary panel observed that India's dependence on imports for critical fertilizer inputs



**Far cry:** The panel observed India's dependence on imports for critical fertilizer inputs remains a major structural vulnerability. ANI

remains a major structural vulnerability. On urea, one of the most used fertilizers, the panel noted that domestic production of urea stood at 306.67 lakh metric tonne (LMT) in 2024-25, and imports of approximately 85 LMT were projected for 2026-27, entailing a subsidy outgo of ₹91,000 crore for indigenous urea and ₹31,999 crore for imported urea.

The domestic production meets only about 10% of rock phosphate requirements, potash is almost entirely imported, and sulphur also has limited domestic availability. "This near-total import dependence exposes the country's fertilizer supply chain to the full brunt of geopolitical disruptions, global commodity price volatility, and foreign exchange risks. In particular, the ongoing geopolitical tensions in the Middle East and the consequent pressures on inter-

national shipping routes underline the need for a proactive and forward-looking strategy to safeguard India's fertilizer supply chain," it said.

The panel flagged "acute shortage" of DAP during recent seasons, which necessitated a special additional support package of ₹3,500 per MT over and above the nutrient-based subsidy for DAP, and cited it as a stark illustration of this vulnerability. Urging the government not to wait for a crisis to trigger corrective action, it mooted a "Fertilizer Supply Security Fund."

Though the import share of urea decreased from 28.5% in 2020-21 to 15.5% in 2024-25, the panel said production had remained stagnant at approximately 305-315 LMT against a consumption of around 390-400 LMT, resulting in continued substantial import volumes.

## 2. Atomic clock on NavIC satellite calls time; ISRO;s ‘GPS’ weakens - 9

# Atomic clock on NavIC satellite calls time; ISRO’s ‘GPS’ weakens

At least four satellites needed to keep NavIC functional, Centre says; failure of IRNSS-1F’s Swiss-made clock will bring number down to three; space agency to install indigenously developed rubidium clocks for next series of satellites

**Jacob Koshy**  
NEW DELHI

**T**he last atomic clock aboard the Indian Regional Navigation Satellite System (IRNSS)-1F has failed, the Indian Space Research Organisation has said in a statement. This further weakens the country’s indigenous “GPS” system, called NavIC.

Atomic clocks are critical to satellites to offer positional, navigational, and timing services. Since the eight satellites in the IRNSS system were launched between 2013 and 2018, the Union government has encouraged Indian enterprises, including manufacturers of computer and electronic goods having timing services, to rely on NavIC for determining the Indian Standard Time.

Currently, the U.S. GPS, with its 30 satellite systems, is the reference standard for such purposes.

“On 13th March 2026,



The second of the new navigation satellites, NVS-02, failed to reach its intended orbit after launch in January 2025. FILE PHOTO

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. IRNSS-1F satellite launched in March 2016 has completed its design mission life of 10 years on 10th March

2026,” the ISRO said in a statement on its website on Friday.

Nine IRNSS satellites have been launched since 2013. Eight of them reached their intended orbit. The last of this constellation of satellites (IRNSS-1I) was launched in 2018.

While equivalent Ameri-

can, Chinese and European systems provide global positioning services, NavIC is expected to do so only within India and within a radius of 1,500 km. This is, however, viewed more as a fallback system in case of future global conflicts in which India is denied access to these foreign constellations.

### RTI query

In July 2025, the ISRO revealed in response to a Right to Information request that five of the NavIC satellites were completely defunct, with all three clocks in each not working. In one of the three satellites with functioning atomic clocks, two of the three clocks had failed.

The atomic clocks in this constellation of satellites were imported by the ISRO from SpectraTime, a Switzerland-based maker of high-precision atomic clocks. Four working satellites could be relied upon for providing positional

and navigation services, Union Minister of State for Space Jitendra Singh has said in Parliament. With the failure of the IRNSS-1F’s clock, their number is down to three.

For the next series of satellites that will replace the impaired and ageing fleet of IRNSS satellites – two of the three being used have passed their rated shelf life of 10 years though it’s possible for these systems to function beyond – ISRO has decided to install indigenously developed rubidium clocks.

One replacement satellite, the NVS-01, launched in May 2023, hosts an indigenously developed rubidium (atomic) clock. The second, the NVS-02 satellite, launched in January 2025, failed to reach its intended orbit.

The ISRO had earlier said that it would be launching at least three satellites by the end of 2026 to replace defunct and ageing satellites.

### 3. 41 of 166 tiger deaths in country last year reported in Maharashtra - 9

# 41 of 166 tiger deaths in country last year reported in Maharashtra

**Snehal Mutha**  
MUMBAI

Of the 166 tiger deaths recorded in the country last year, 41 occurred in Maharashtra, the State government informed the Legislative Council during the ongoing Budget session.

Forest Minister Ganesh Naik said the State recorded 41 tiger deaths in 2025, according to data from the National Tiger Conservation Authority (NTCA). He was responding to queries from members regarding recent tiger deaths reported from the Pench Tiger Reserve in Nagpur district.

Members of the Legislative Council, including Satyajit Tambe and Parinay Fuke, raised concern after the death of one adult tiger and two cubs from the reserve, after similar incidents in December and January.

Responding to the queries, Mr. Naik said several measures are being taken to curb poaching and protect wildlife.

#### Curbing poaching

“The Special Tiger Protection Force and dog squad are constantly patrolling to monitor poaching activities. Technology is also being used to track suspicious movements, including the use of camera surveillance and mobiles enabled with



The Maharashtra government says the Special Tiger Protection Force and dog squad are monitoring poaching activities. FILE PHOTO

the M-Stripes app. A Wildlife Crime Cell has been established,” Mr. Naik said.

Mr. Naik also mentioned the creation of a Rapid Rescue Unit and a Transit Treatment Centre.

The issue of wildlife poaching and human-wildlife conflict has figured prominently in the State legislature discussions during the Budget session, with legislators raising concern about the deaths of both humans and animals, including tigers and leopards.

Mr. Naik told the House that changes in animal behaviour and habitat patterns had intensified such conflicts, with animals often entering agricultural fields.

Referring to leopards, he said that the State Cabinet had approved a proposal to change their protec-

tion category from Schedule I of the Wildlife Protection Act – which receives the highest level of protection – to Schedule II, where penalties are less stringent, and the government has approached the Union Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change to formalise the change.

Environmentalists, however, have strongly opposed the move and urged Prime Minister Narendra Modi to reject what they described as a “cruel and regressive” proposal.

“The government should focus on protecting forests and preventing encroachment into wildlife habitats to reduce conflict between humans and animals. Diluting legal protection for leopards will send a dangerous signal at a time when wildlife habitats are

already under immense pressure,” said NatConnect director B.N. Kumar.

He called for a comprehensive forest conservation policy that would increase forest cover while strictly regulating human intrusion into wildlife zones.

#### Legal safeguards

Activists also pointed to India’s global recognition for conservation initiatives such as Project Tiger and Project Lion, arguing that weakening legal safeguards for protected species would run counter to that vision.

Environmentalists also noted that Maharashtra’s leadership had emphasised the need to balance development with conservation, with Chief Minister Devendra Fadnavis repeatedly saying that “economy and ecology go together” and that human-animal conflict should be addressed through thoughtful and community-driven policies.

Nandakumar Pawar of Sagar Shakti blamed large-scale destruction of forests due to mining, industrial expansion and infrastructure projects for pushing wildlife closer to human settlements.

“Instead of addressing habitat loss, the government is talking about killing voiceless and innocent wildlife,” he said.