

DAILY NEWSP APER ANALYSIS

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**CHANAKYA IAS ACADEMY
SECTOR 25 CHANDIGARH**

U.S. sinks Iranian vessel near Sri Lanka

Island nation's Navy responds to distress signal at dawn, rescues 32 sailors and recovers 83 bodies

U.S. submarine used torpedo for 'first time since the WWII' to sink a ship, says Secretary Hegseth

Ship was returning from Visakhapatnam after participating in International Fleet Review 2026

Meera Srinivasan
COLOMBO

U.S. and Israel hammer Iran on fifth day of war

A U.S. submarine attacked an Iranian warship on Wednesday, which sank in the Indian Ocean off the coast of Sri Lanka, bringing the West Asian conflict closer to the Indian subcontinent. At least 83 people were killed in the torpedo attack.

U.S. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth confirmed the strike at a press conference in Washington DC. "An American submarine sank an Iranian warship that thought it was safe in international waters. Instead, it was sunk by a torpedo," Mr. Hegseth said, terming it a "quiet death" and the "first sinking of an enemy ship" by a torpedo since the Second World War. "Like in that war," Mr. Hegseth said, "we are fighting to win". The Sri Lankan Navy

rescued 32 sailors and recovered 83 bodies after a dawn distress call from the Iranian frigate IRIS Dena, which sank about 40 nautical miles off Galle on the island's southern coast, Sri Lankan authorities said.

Distress call
The distress call from the

Out in the ocean

The Iranian ship that sank off Sri Lanka's coast on Wednesday was returning from the International Fleet Review 2026 held in Visakhapatnam in February

IRIS Dena, one of 6 **Moudge Class Frigates** of Iran, was commissioned in June 2021

IRIS Dena had a crew capacity of nearly 100 with around 140 persons believed to be on board

Sri Lanka Navy and Coast Guard receive emergency call at 5.08 a.m.

Sri Lanka Navy rescued 32 sailors and recovered 83 bodies

The U.S. has not sunk enemy ships by torpedo since the Second World War

The warship sank around 40 nautical miles off Galle on Sri Lanka's southern coast

Sunken ship: IRIS Dena in the Bay of Bengal on February 18, 1991

Indices tumble as markets respond to oil uncertainty

MUMBAI Indian investors continued selling on Wednesday, triggering the benchmark indices to tumble in the second consecutive session as oil prices surged on closure of Strait of Hormuz. The benchmark Nifty 50 and Sensex 30 closed at 24,480.50 and 79,116.19 points, down 1.5% and 1.4% respectively on Wednesday, responding to the oil shock. **PAGE 12**

sakhapatnam in February. When contacted, Iranian Ambassador to Sri Lanka, Alireza Delkosh, who was on his way from Colombo to Galle, told The Hindu: "We have no information yet on the cause, we are in close contact with Sri Lankan authorities. I am on my way to see the survivors."

Sri Lanka concerned
Sri Lanka has not commented on the U.S. claim of responsibility for the torpedo attack on the Iranian vessel. Sri Lanka had expressed "deep concern over the rapid escalation of hostilities" in the widening war in West Asia, now in its fifth day, and called on "all concerned parties to exercise maximum restraint and to take immediate and decisive action to de-escalate tensions".

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- Geopolitical dimension:
 - Escalation of West Asian conflict into the Indian Ocean maritime domain
 - Raises concerns regarding security of Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs).

Static Linkages

- The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) carries nearly 80% of global seaborne oil trade and is critical for global energy security.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- A U.S. submarine reportedly torpedoed and sank the Iranian frigate IRIS Dena in the Indian Ocean, about 40 nautical miles off the coast of Galle in Sri Lanka.
- The incident occurred amid escalating tensions in West Asia, indicating a possible expansion of geopolitical conflict into the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).
- Around 83 sailors were reported dead, while 32 sailors were rescued by the Sri Lankan Navy after receiving an early morning distress signal.
- The Iranian warship had recently participated in the International Fleet Review 2026 held in Visakhapatnam before returning to Iran.
- Sri Lanka launched a search and rescue operation under the International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (1979).
- The event highlights increasing militarisation of the Indian Ocean and the spillover of West Asian conflicts into South Asian maritime spaces.

Key Points

- Location of incident:
 - Indian Ocean near southern Sri Lanka
 - Approximately 40 nautical miles from Galle
- Casualties and rescue:
 - 83 bodies recovered
 - 32 sailors rescued
 - Estimated 140 personnel on board
- Strategic significance:
 - Reported first torpedo sinking of an enemy warship since World War II
 - Indicates continued relevance of submarine warfare
- Sri Lanka's response:
 - Naval vessels dispatched within two hours of distress signal
 - Rescue operations conducted under international maritime law

- Major Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) in the region include routes connecting the Strait of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb, and the Strait of Malacca.
- The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), 1982 governs rights over territorial waters, Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), and international waters.
- The International Convention on Maritime Search and Rescue (1979) obligates coastal states to assist vessels in distress.
- Naval power projection through submarines and aircraft carriers remains a key element of modern maritime strategy.

Critical Analysis

Strategic Concerns

- Escalation of naval conflict may destabilize the Indian Ocean Region, a key global trade corridor.

Maritime Security Risk

- Increased military activities threaten freedom of navigation and commercial shipping routes.

Impact on Regional States

- Countries like India and Sri Lanka face challenges in balancing strategic neutrality and regional security responsibilities.

International Law Questions

- Military action in international waters raises concerns about interpretation of maritime laws under UNCLOS.

Implications for India

- Necessitates enhanced maritime surveillance and naval preparedness in the Indian Ocean.

Way Forward

- Strengthen maritime domain awareness in the Indian Ocean.
- Promote regional security cooperation through mechanisms like IONS and IORA.
- Encourage diplomatic de-escalation of West Asian conflicts.
- Enhance Indian naval presence and strategic partnerships in the IOR.
- Reinforce international maritime law and freedom of navigation principles.

India ranks second globally in childhood obesity: study

China, India and the U.S. each have over 10 million children with obesity: the World Obesity Atlas report highlights risk factors such as poor physical activity levels and sub-optimal breastfeeding.

The Hindu Bureau CHENNAI

Nearly 15 million children aged five to 25 million children aged 10 to 19 in India were overweight or obese in 2025, according to the World Obesity Atlas, 2026 released on World Obesity Day, which falls on March 4.

The World Obesity Federation, a global organisation focused on obesity, warned that the world was set to miss the 2025 global target to halve the rise in childhood obesity. Though the deadline is now being extended to 2030, most countries remain off track, and India is no exception, it said.

Over 200 million school-age children aged five to 19 who are overweight and living with obesity are concentrated in just 10 countries across the world. By the end of 2025, eight countries were projected to have over 10 million children with high body mass index (BMI). China, India and the United States each had over 10 million children living with obesity. India stood second only to China in the num-

Worrying trend

The World Obesity Atlas found that more than one in five (20.7%) children worldwide are living with obesity and are overweight.



Projected number of children with high BMI and obesity in 2025



Projected number of children with high BMI and obesity in 2030

ber of children with high BMI (62 million high BMI, 33 million obesity). China led the two categories with 62 million children with high BMI and 33 million with obesity. The U.S. had 27 million children with high BMI and 13 million with obesity. This rise in childhood obesity is expected to have serious health consequences. The Atlas pointed out that in India, the number of children with disease indicators linked to

Among women aged 15 to 49, 13.4% have high BMI and 4.2% live with Type 2 diabetes. Children aged six to 10 consumed sugary drinks, averaging up to 50 ml per day. The Atlas found that over one in five (20.7%) children worldwide are living with obesity and are overweight. This was an increase from 14.6% in 2010. The Federation predicts that by 2040, a total of 507 million children will be living with obesity or be overweight.

Call for action

There is an emphasis on governments to act immediately. Johanna Kalloni, chief executive of the World Obesity Federation, said, "The increase in childhood obesity worldwide shows we have failed to take seriously a disease that affects one in five children. Governments urgently need to step up prevention and management efforts for children living with overweight and obesity, and ensure that they receive the care they need." It has called for strong action to reverse current trends, including taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages and restrictions on marketing to children.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context

- The World Obesity Atlas 2026, released by the World Obesity Federation on World Obesity Day (4 March), highlighted a significant rise in childhood obesity globally and in India.
- In 2025, India had around 41 million children (5–19 years) with high Body Mass Index (BMI).
- Nearly 15 million children aged 5–9 and over 26 million aged 10–19 were overweight or obese.
- India ranks second after China in the number of children with high BMI.
- The report warns that the global target to halt the rise of childhood obesity by 2025 will be missed, with the deadline now extended to 2030.

Key Points

- Global Situation
 - Over 200 million school-age children (5–19 years) with overweight/obesity are concentrated in 10 countries.
 - China, India and the United States each have over 10 million obese children.
- Country-wise Data (2025)
 - China: 62 million high BMI; 33 million obesity
 - India: 41 million high BMI; 14 million obesity
 - United States: 27 million high BMI; 13 million obesity
- Global Trend
 - 20.7% of children globally are overweight or obese.
 - This increased from 14.6% in 2010.
 - By 2040, around 507 million children globally may be overweight or obese.
- Risk Factors in India
 - 74% of adolescents (11–17 years) do not meet recommended physical activity levels.

- Only 35.5% of school-age children receive school meals.
- 32.6% of infants (1–5 months) experience sub-optimal breastfeeding.
- Sugary drink consumption among children (6–10 years) averages 50 ml/day.
- Among women (15–49 years):
 - 13.4% have high BMI
 - 4.2% have Type 2 diabetes
- Health Implications
 - Increased risk of Type 2 Diabetes, cardiovascular diseases, hypertension and metabolic disorders.
 - The number of children with disease indicators linked to high BMI in India is projected to rise significantly by 2040.

Static Linkages

- Body Mass Index (BMI)
 - Formula: $\text{Weight (kg)} / \text{Height}^2 (\text{m}^2)$
 - Indicator used to classify overweight and obesity.
- WHO BMI Classification
 - BMI ≥ 25 – Overweight
 - BMI ≥ 30 – Obesity
- Nutrition Scenario in India
 - India faces the Triple Burden of Malnutrition:
 - Undernutrition
 - Micronutrient deficiency
 - Overnutrition (overweight/obesity)
- Government Initiatives
 - POSHAN Abhiyaan – improving nutritional outcomes for children, women and adolescents.
 - PM POSHAN Scheme – providing cooked meals to school children.
 - Eat Right India – promoting balanced diets and reducing junk food consumption.

Critical Analysis

Concerns

- Rising sedentary lifestyle and urbanisation among children.
- Increasing consumption of processed and high-sugar foods.
- Lack of adequate physical activity infrastructure in schools.
- Marketing of unhealthy foods targeting children.
- Growing double burden of malnutrition in India.

Implications

- Increased healthcare burden in the future.
- Reduced productivity and human capital development.
- Higher prevalence of non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

Way Forward

- Promote daily physical activity in schools through sports and fitness programmes.
- Implement taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages and regulate junk food marketing.
- Strengthen school nutrition programmes like PM POSHAN.
- Encourage healthy dietary habits and awareness campaigns.
- Integrate obesity screening and counselling in primary healthcare.
- Improve breastfeeding practices and early childhood nutrition.

Constitutional values over star power in Tamil Nadu

The Tamil Nadu Assembly election is barely weeks away, and the seat-sharing deal between the ruling Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and the Congress has been sealed, with the Grand Old Party's high command agreeing to finalise the pact. This puts to rest what had been a dangerous temptation within sections of Congress – the idea that an alliance with actor-politician Vijay's Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) could be a viable alternative to Congress's long-standing ties with the DMK.



Srinivasan Ramani

This idea was cultivated by some second rung leaders in the Congress for vindictive personal reasons. The alliance held, but the episode deserves examination, not just as a tactical question but also as one which is core to the meaning of progressive politics in Tamil Nadu and what is at stake to preserve it.

A new party and its political concerns
It is imperative to understand the nature of the fledgling force that the TVK is and what it stands for, while evaluating the Congress's near-alliance with it. On September 27, 2025, 41 people, many from poor and marginalised backgrounds, were killed in a crowd crush at a TVK rally in Karur, central Tamil Nadu. The facts of the TVK's failure in organising the rally are not in dispute. For months, its rallies had been designed primarily to showcase frenzied crowds rather than communicate any substantive political message. Mr. Vijay's arrival in Karur was intentionally delayed by nearly seven hours to increase the crowd size. The organisers grossly underestimated attendance, expecting 10,000 people but that the turnout exceeded over 25,000. The crowd waited for hours without basic provisions before the actor-politician spoke briefly and hastily left the venue, as did several of his party's lieutenants following the crowd crush. Rather than accepting responsibility for what had happened, the TVK used social media with conspiratorial theories suggesting sabotage, despite there being no evidence of this. Mr. Vijay himself made these claims. When the Madras High Court constituted a Special Investigation Team in October to investigate the case and made pointed observations about the TVK's conduct, the party successfully obtained a Supreme Court of India order transferring the probe to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI). During questioning in January 2026, Mr. Vijay claimed that he was "not responsible" for the stampede. The party relies on whipping up mass hysteria as a means of mobilisation and promoting a personality cult rather than ideology. There is the taken presence of vicars of leaders such as Periyar, Ambedkar, and Kamaraj in backdrops at its rallies, but the party pays lip service to them. Its political project has been built more like a fan club than a democratic party. This is not a party that any force which is committed to

constitutional values can meaningfully align with. As this writer has previously argued in these pages, Tamil Nadu stands at a pivotal economic moment. It is India's second largest economy and is pursuing a transition from a middle-income economy to a high-value, innovation-driven model – a shift that requires sustained investment in research and development and diversified exports, which is possible only with good governance capacity and fiscal autonomy.

Politics and prosperity
The State's economic success has been built on the base of a distinct political culture. Its bipolar Dravidian system, far all its flaws of patronage and competitive populism, produced a governance model that combined industrialisation with welfare, and the DMK-led Secular Progressive Alliance, with its internal structure of mutual accountability between the Congress, the Left, the Viduthala Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK), and the DMK, is well placed to deepen that model. The alliance's sweep of all 29 Lok Sabha seats in the 2024 general election was a consequence of the ideological coherence made possible by each party shedding old antipathies toward the others.

The Congress, by staying the course, has ensured that this coherence holds – at least for now. But the episode has exposed how fragile the structure can be when one of its pillars were entertained the thought that the alliance was dispensable. The DMK-led alliance is not merely a State-level arrangement; it is a critical link in the national opposition to the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)'s centralising, majoritarian project. It is the BJP's politics of social engineering and minority-baiting can be not just morally necessary but also electorally viable. Had the Congress walked away, it would have broken a vital connection in the INDIA bloc, with Tamil Nadu being one of its strongest links.

What makes this alliance and Tamil Nadu's political culture more broadly worth fighting for is also the nature of voter choice in the State. Yes, a substantial number of the State's voters remain beholden to patronage and clientelism. But, there exists a significant and politically aware section of the electorate that has been shaped by decades of Dravidian mobilisation, rationalist movements, and a vibrant civil society spanning literature, cinema and popular culture. It stands with parties that are committed to social justice and decentralised power (federalism), and is willing to judge governments based on governance and performance rather than a mere pandering to identities of religion and caste.

This is in stark contrast to what is thriving in States across the north and west, where social engineering and the staking of hate toward minorities have proven sufficient for parties to win elections, regardless of their record on jobs, public services or institutional integrity. Tamil Nadu has, thus far, resisted this straightjacketing of voter choices into narrow communal binaries,

with a resistance that is one of the State's most valuable political assets.

Battle of ideologies
The promise of Tamil Nadu's relatively progressive politics is seen in the linking of welfare policies, even direct benefit transfers, with accountability for governance practices and government responsiveness. This is possible only when the political context is predominantly one of principles and clear-cut ideologies, alongside being a referendum on governance. This is why governments have alternated between the Dravidian parties – the DMK and the All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) – and their respective alliances, a competitive dynamic in which constitutional values such as secularism and social justice have never come under fundamental threat or question.

Yet, even in this case for ideological coherence is made, there are worrying signs within the DMK-led alliance. The alliance's expansion to include the Desiya Murpokku Dravida Kazhagam (DMDK), drawing on a residual vote base from its founder, the late actor Vijaykanth, and O. Panneerselvam, a three-time Chief Minister under the AIADMK, whose political career has been shaped by patronage politics and a near-obsessive reliance on the BJP rather than ideological commitment, do not naturally fit into an alliance whose core constituents share a framework of social justice, secularism, and democratic accountability.

The logic behind these inclusions is to do with realism and the additive accretion of support from sections backing these parties and individuals. In the short term, especially in a closely fought way contest with the TVK and Seeman's Naam Tamilar Katchi drawing votes, this arithmetic makes sense. But in the medium term, alliances that dilute ideology for marginal electoral gains risk affecting the distinctiveness of the progressive formation.

The DMK, for its part, must recognise that keeping the alliance's ideological core intact requires more than accommodating new entrants. This demands a new compact with its existing partners, one that shares not merely seats but also governance responsibilities, especially in local bodies.

In the end, the Congress made the right choice. Its future in Tamil Nadu and its national relevance as a force for progressive politics lies in strengthening its partnership with the DMK and the alliance's ideological core, rather than chasing the mirage of a personality cult. The 41 people who died in Karur remain a reminder of what personality cult politics costs. Tamil Nadu deserves a context in which constitutional values are not subordinated to star power, unlike in a national polity increasingly defined by communal mobilisation.

srinivasan.ramani@rediffmail.com

- Karur Rally Stampede (2025)
 - A crowd crush during a TVK rally in Karur resulted in 41 deaths.
 - The Madras High Court ordered an investigation, later transferred to the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) by the Supreme Court of India.
- Economic and Political Context of Tamil Nadu
 - Tamil Nadu is one of India's largest State economies and a major manufacturing hub.
 - The State aims to move toward a high-value innovation-driven economy through industrialisation, exports, and R&D investment.

Static Linkages

- Article 324 – Superintendence and control of elections vested in the Election Commission of India.
- Representation of the People Act, 1951 – Regulates registration and functioning of political parties and electoral processes.
- Coalition politics became prominent in India after the decline of one-party dominance post-1989.
- Regional parties strengthen federalism by representing State-specific interests in national politics.
- Social justice movements in South India, especially the Dravidian movement, shaped policies related to reservation, welfare and linguistic identity.

Critical Analysis

Advantages of the Alliance

- Ensures ideological coherence based on secularism and social justice.
- Maintains stability in Tamil Nadu's coalition politics.
- Strengthens national opposition coordination against centralised political dominance.
- Supports a governance model combining industrialisation and welfare schemes.

Concerns

- Internal disagreements over seat-sharing can weaken coalition unity.
- Emergence of personality-centric parties may dilute ideological politics.
- Expansion of alliances to include leaders without clear ideological alignment may reduce ideological clarity.
- Growing electoral fragmentation could lead to multi-cornered contests.

Way Forward

- Strengthen ideology-based coalition politics rather than personality-driven mobilisation.
- Promote transparent seat-sharing mechanisms within alliances.
- Encourage institutionalised party structures and internal democracy.
- Focus on governance performance, economic development, and welfare delivery to maintain voter trust.
- Ensure public safety and regulatory oversight during large political gatherings.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The DMK and Congress have finalised their seat-sharing agreement ahead of the Tamil Nadu Assembly elections.
- Some leaders within Congress had explored a possible alliance with Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK) led by actor-politician Vijay.
- The Congress leadership eventually decided to continue its long-standing alliance with the DMK, maintaining the Secular Progressive Alliance (SPA).
- The debate intensified after a crowd crush at a TVK rally in Karur (September 2025) where 41 people died.
- The episode highlighted issues related to personality-driven politics vs ideology-based political alliances in Tamil Nadu.

Key Points

- Alliance Politics in Tamil Nadu
 - Tamil Nadu has a bipolar political system dominated by Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) and All India Anna Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (AIADMK) alliances.
 - The DMK-led alliance includes **Indian National Congress, Left parties and Viduthala Chiruthaigal Katchi (VCK).
 - The alliance won all 39 Lok Sabha seats in Tamil Nadu in the 2024 general elections.
- Tamilaga Vettri Kazhagam (TVK)
 - A newly formed political party led by actor Vijay.
 - Mobilisation largely driven by fan-club networks and personality appeal rather than a well-defined ideological framework.

Climate risks must prompt international legal reforms

So far, states have focused on addressing climate change's biophysical impacts and finding burden-bearing formulas that avoid serious socio-economic harms to developing and least developed countries. The grave consequences of climate change are likely to prompt a renegotiation of some of the fundamentals of international law, including permanent sovereignty over natural resources (PSNR), requirement of territory for statehood, and unsetting of maritime zones.

The principle of PSNR is a fundamental right of states and peoples, which represents the resolve of developing countries to attain economic independence. Under the PSNR, a state has the right to extract fossil fuels above and below ground. The urgency to restrict global average temperature below 1.5°C is giving rise to the demand among many states, scholars and policymakers to phase out fossil fuel. Scholarly writings increasingly support a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty to keep large swathes of fossil fuels that remain in the ground.

The issue of fossil fuels, first raised at COP-28 and again at COP-30 – even outside the formal agenda – highlights growing momentum for a phase-out. The developing countries may accept limited obligations imposing on PSNR towards a common concern of mankind but these must not be permanent or disregard the interests of high fossil-fuel-dependent nations. The limited obligations should be accompanied by developed countries providing sufficient finance and transferring carbon neutral 'best available technologies' to developing nations.

Climate change and territory
International law specifies that territory is a necessary prerequisite for statehood. The 1933 Montevideo Convention in Uruguay established



Anwar Sadat
is an Associate Professor in International Environmental Law at the Indian Society of International Law, New Delhi.

Climate change may drive a renegotiation of key international law principles, including statehood, territory and maritime zones

the four criteria of statehood – territory, permanent population, government, and the capacity to enter into relations with another state – as the benchmark for state recognition.

Sea level rise (SLR) threatening small island states poses the question of their continued statehood. Although the presumption of state continuity is unquestionably part of customary international law, several states are not categorical about its application to SLR. The International Court of Justice, in its advisory opinion, has said that once a state is established, the disappearance of one of its constituent elements would not necessarily entail the loss of its statehood. Scholars have described the ICJ's opinion on this aspect as a very modest legal claim.

In 2022, the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) declared that international law does not contemplate its demise in the context of climate change-related SLR. Even the Montevideo Convention does not mention how much territory is to be lost to lose statehood. James Crawford, an authority on creation of state, is of the view that while a state must possess territory, there is no rule specifying a minimum size. Despite these arguments and legal claims, statehood generally remains precarious and often borderline.

The unprecedented risks to be faced by small island states must prompt the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) to use the forum of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to apply equitable principles, addressing gaps in existing law beyond strict legal rules.

Climate change-induced migration
In international law, the status of people who are likely to move to another country in the context of SLR is unclear. Such people also lose

protections and benefits which accrued to them in their own country. The 1951 Refugee Convention defines a refugee as someone who moves to another country, or is unwilling to seek protection from their country of nationality, due to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion. As climate refugees do not fit in the 1951 ambit, Frank Biermann, an expert on Earth System Governance, suggests a separate independent legal and political regime created under a Protocol to the UNFCCC on the recognition, protection and resettlement of climate-refugees. Such a protocol could build on the political support from almost all countries as parties to the UNFCCC and the Paris Agreement.

Unsettling of maritime zones
SLR is likely to unsettle baseline (the legal expression of coast), which will correspondingly affect other maritime zones such as territorial sea, contiguous zone, exclusive economic zone and continental shelf. The adverse scenario has prompted an increasing number of states, especially Pacific Island states and the other small island states to declare the existing baselines as permanent, which means that coastal states do not need to adapt to their existing baseline due to SLR.

This approach is at odds with another approach which a state is permitted under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) to adopt (ambulatory baseline) in the context of SLR. Accepting either of these approaches would require changes in the interpretation of UNCLOS rules.

Thus, climate change-induced risks posed to the international legal order need to be renegotiated by the states on a priority basis.

2. Climate Change and Statehood

- Statehood criteria are defined in the Montevideo Convention (1933):
 - Defined territory
 - Permanent population
 - Government
 - Capacity to enter into relations with other states
- Sea-level rise threatens the territorial existence of small island states such as Tuvalu, Kiribati, and Maldives.

- International Court of Justice (ICJ) advisory opinions suggest that loss of territory may not automatically terminate statehood, though the issue remains legally uncertain.
- Pacific Islands Forum (2023) declared that climate-induced sea-level rise should not lead to the loss of statehood.

3. Climate Change-Induced Migration

- Climate impacts such as flooding, storms, and SLR may force large-scale displacement.
- However, climate migrants are not recognized under existing international refugee law.
- The 1951 Refugee Convention defines refugees as persons fleeing persecution due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or social group.
- Experts propose a new protocol under the UNFCCC to legally recognize and protect climate refugees.

4. Maritime Zones and Sea-Level Rise

- Maritime zones are defined under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), 1982.
- These zones include:
 - Territorial Sea – up to 12 nautical miles
 - Contiguous Zone – up to 24 nautical miles
 - Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) – up to 200 nautical miles
 - Continental Shelf
- Sea-level rise may shift coastal baselines, altering maritime boundaries and resource rights.
- Some states advocate fixed or permanent baselines to maintain existing maritime entitlements despite changing coastlines.
- This contrasts with the ambulatory baseline principle, where baselines shift naturally with coastline changes.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Climate change impacts such as sea-level rise (SLR), fossil fuel phase-out debates, climate migration, and shifting maritime boundaries are challenging traditional principles of international law.
- Discussions during COP28 and COP30 climate negotiations highlighted the need to reconsider legal doctrines like Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources (PSNR), statehood requirements, and maritime baselines.
- Small island developing states (SIDS) facing existential threats from rising sea levels have raised concerns about statehood, maritime rights, and climate displacement.

Key Points

1. Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources (PSNR)

- PSNR: Recognized under UN General Assembly Resolution 1803 (1962).
- It gives states the right to control and exploit their natural resources, including fossil fuels.
- However, global climate commitments under the Paris Agreement (2015) require limiting warming to well below 2°C and preferably 1.5°C.
- Scholars and policymakers propose a Fossil Fuel Non-Proliferation Treaty to gradually phase out fossil fuel production.
- Developing countries' concerns:
 - Restrictions on fossil fuels may affect energy security and economic development.
 - Climate commitments must follow the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR).
 - Financial support and technology transfer from developed countries are necessary.

Static Linkages

- Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) principle under international climate law.

- Paris Agreement (2015) temperature target of 1.5°C.
- UNCLOS (1982) framework for ocean governance.
- UN General Assembly Resolution 1803 (1962) on Permanent Sovereignty over Natural Resources.
- 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol on refugee protection.

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- Encourages global cooperation in climate governance.
- Protects vulnerable small island states and populations.
- Promotes sustainable energy transition.

Concerns

- Possible conflict with national sovereignty over natural resources.
- Economic challenges for fossil-fuel-dependent developing countries.
- Lack of clear international legal framework for climate migrants.
- Uncertainty regarding maritime boundaries and resource entitlements.

Way Forward

- Develop international legal frameworks for climate-induced displacement.
- Ensure adequate climate finance and technology transfer to developing countries.
- Establish legal clarity on maritime boundaries and statehood issues.
- Strengthen multilateral cooperation under the UNFCCC and Paris Agreement.
- Promote equitable energy transition balancing climate goals and development needs.

Bullying Anthropic

The U.S.'s demands for maximum flexibility on AI use are dangerous

Over the last few days, the U.S. Department of Defence unceremoniously cast out the AI firm Anthropic, which develops the coding assistant Claude, and designated the firm a "supply chain risk", the kind of cattle branding reserved for firms that are compromised by hostile foreign states. The reason was simple: Anthropic refused to relent on allowing its tools to be used for widespread domestic surveillance and fully autonomous weaponry. The high-octane conflict with the U.S. government – which accused Anthropic of following a "woke" and "radical" agenda – is a shocking escalation, despite prior concessions that would allow the U.S.'s defence establishment's use of Claude, which helps create and update code bases quickly. The conflict also sends a chilling message – a great power can do anything, with or without safeguards, to attain a strategic upper hand. This is a dangerous message to send in a multipolar world where shared standards around safety are increasingly difficult to achieve.

This is no longer the world of the Bletchley Park AI safety summit. It was a gathering that acknowledged the rapidly growing power of AI systems, and the shared global imperative to ensure that high-stakes risks be mitigated. What resonance does that worthy message have when the country on the frontier of AI development so publicly disavows any form of safety control for war, at a time when a reckless attack on Iran – with, reportedly, some assistance from Claude – is grinding on? Firms need to show some backbone when dealing with outrageous demands that could have chilling consequences in their home country and around the world. After all, if the U.S. demands the policy space for domestic surveillance in such a full-throated fashion, where does that leave countries where infiltrating the political opposition with spyware on their phones is already the norm? Anthropic showed this backbone, and it deserved the solidarity of its peers. Sadly, that is not what happened, as ChatGPT maker OpenAI appeared to give the U.S. defence department the flexibility it sought just hours after Anthropic became persona non grata. Despite OpenAI's assurances that its agreement provides key safeguards, AI safety has been harmed, with the other superpower and a host of middle powers around the world watching closely. Firms may not be the ideal characters to take a stand – taking into consideration, after all, their profit motivations – but as strong institutions are worn down around the world, there are few places to look to for leadership on safety. When a firm with billions of dollars at stake says 'no', it is not a promising sign of things to come when another steps in to say 'maybe, yes'.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- The Anthropic, an artificial intelligence company, was recently labelled a "supply chain risk" by the United States Department of Defense.
- The designation reportedly followed Anthropic's refusal to allow its AI tools to be used for large-scale domestic surveillance and fully autonomous weapons systems.
- Anthropic develops Claude, an AI assistant capable of generating and updating large software code bases.
- The move reflects growing tensions between technology firms and governments over the military and surveillance use of AI systems.
- Soon after the incident, OpenAI reportedly expanded cooperation with the U.S. defence establishment, highlighting diverging approaches among AI firms regarding defence collaboration.
- The episode has revived the debate on AI safety, ethical deployment of AI, and global standards for regulating high-risk artificial intelligence technologies.

Key Points

- Artificial Intelligence as Strategic Technology
 - AI is considered a critical emerging technology influencing economic growth, national security, and global power competition.
- Military Uses of AI
 - Autonomous weapon systems
 - Intelligence analysis and surveillance
 - Cyber operations and software development
 - Battlefield logistics and decision support
- Corporate–Government Conflict
 - AI firms may resist cooperation with governments when demands conflict with ethical AI principles or privacy concerns.
- Global AI Safety Debate
 - The Bletchley Park AI Safety Summit emphasised international cooperation to mitigate risks from advanced AI systems.
- Geopolitical Dimension
 - Competition among major powers such as the United States and China is intensifying the global race for AI dominance.

Static Linkages

- Dual-use technologies can be used for both civilian and military purposes and therefore require regulatory oversight.
- Autonomous weapons systems raise ethical issues concerning accountability, proportionality, and distinction under international humanitarian law.
- Right to Privacy is recognised as a fundamental right under Article 21.
- Rapid technological advances often require new governance frameworks and regulatory mechanisms.
- Strategic technologies influence global power distribution and national security policies.

Critical Analysis

Advantages

- AI can significantly enhance defence capabilities, intelligence analysis, and cyber security.
- Strengthens technological leadership and strategic advantage in global competition.

Concerns

- Risk of mass surveillance and erosion of civil liberties.
- Development of lethal autonomous weapons systems without human oversight.
- Lack of global regulatory frameworks for AI safety.
- Corporate dependence on government contracts may weaken ethical resistance by firms.

Way Forward

- Establish global norms and treaties on military use of AI.
- Ensure human oversight ("human-in-the-loop") in lethal decision-making systems.
- Promote transparent AI governance frameworks involving governments, industry, and civil society.
- Encourage international cooperation on AI safety standards through multilateral platforms.
- Develop national AI ethics guidelines and regulatory frameworks to balance security and rights.

Reckless Tickers

Damaging nuclear facilities under an unstable regime poses great risks

Nuclear facilities have faced unprecedented threats of late. Since its capture by Russian forces in 2022, Ukraine's Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant has faced repeated shelling and drone strikes. While Russia wished to be the sole nuclear-armed successor to the Soviet Union, Israel has viewed Iran's nuclear programme as an existential threat and has attacked its weapons sites since 2024. In 2025, the U.S. launched targeted strikes against Fordow and Natanz, which enrich uranium, and Isfahan, a fuel cycle complex. U.S. President Donald Trump claimed they were "obliterated" but the IAEA found that the enriched uranium stockpile was largely intact at Isfahan. On March 2, the IAEA had said that the Bushehr and Tehran reactors had not been hit or damaged until then, although strikes on March 3 surfaced reports of damage to the Bushehr airport (according to Iran's state media) and again in Natanz. The broader pattern of attacking nuclear facilities is worrisome. Aside from overt attempts, at least one hacking attempt has breached the National Nuclear Security Administration, which manages the U.S.'s nuclear stockpile, while ransomware groups have targeted global energy firms and Brazil's state nuclear operator. The Geneva Conventions prohibit states from endangering nuclear facilities if they release "dangerous forces" but neither the U.S. nor Israel seems mindful of the risks. Iran has also accused the IAEA of spying for Israel.

Physically destroying a facility only removes one layer of risk; the humanitarian and environmental effects are often intractable. A damaged reactor core or spent fuel pool could release caesium-137, a long-lived isotope that causes acute radiation sickness and contaminates land for decades. Radioactive particles can be carried by winds, affecting global food security. Damaging nuclear facilities overseen by an unstable regime also risks loss of custody of enriched uranium. Such strikes do not achieve a strategic resolution and could in fact accelerate Iran's resolve, marked by its shift of assets to deeper, more clandestine facilities. Military force also destroyed the diplomatic and verification frameworks required for long-term safety, leaving negotiations as the safest way to restore stability in the region. Iran is already facing 60% inflation and the U.S. can trade sanctions relief for IAEA monitoring. Iran has also finalised long-term deals with Russia and China, in return securing air defences and navigation systems to negate western advantages, and bringing Tehran back to the table could also reduce its dependence on these burgeoning partnerships. Conversely, military action risks refugee exodus from a population of 93 million, asymmetric retaliation against the U.S.'s Gulf bases, and the inalienable threat of nuclear disaster.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Nuclear facilities worldwide are increasingly facing military and cyber threats, raising concerns about global nuclear safety.
- Since 2022, the Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant in Ukraine has faced repeated attacks after its capture during the Russia-Ukraine conflict.
- In West Asia, Israel has viewed Iran's nuclear programme as a major security threat and has reportedly targeted nuclear-related sites since 2024.
- In 2025, the United States conducted strikes on Fordow, Natanz, and Isfahan, which are important uranium enrichment and fuel cycle facilities in Iran.
- The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) later stated that enriched uranium stockpiles were largely intact, indicating limited strategic impact of the strikes.
- There have also been cybersecurity threats to nuclear infrastructure, including hacking attempts on nuclear security agencies and ransomware attacks targeting energy operators.

Key Points

- Nuclear installations are vulnerable during armed conflicts, as seen in Ukraine and West Asia.
- Uranium enrichment facilities such as Fordow and Natanz are crucial in nuclear fuel production and potential weapons development.
- IAEA inspections and safeguards play a key role in verifying nuclear activities.
- Damage to nuclear facilities could release radioactive isotopes such as Caesium-137, leading to long-term environmental contamination.
- Radioactive fallout can spread through wind patterns, potentially affecting agriculture, ecosystems, and global food supply.
- Military strikes may delay but rarely eliminate nuclear programmes, and could push countries toward more secretive nuclear development.

Static Linkages

- Geneva Conventions (Additional Protocol I, 1977) prohibit attacks on installations containing dangerous forces such as nuclear power plants if civilian harm is expected.
- International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was established in 1957 to promote peaceful use of nuclear energy and implement nuclear safeguards.
- Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), 1968 aims to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons and promote disarmament.
- Caesium-137 is a radioactive isotope with a half-life of about 30 years, making contamination long-lasting.
- Major nuclear disasters such as Chernobyl (1986) and Fukushima (2011) highlight the severe environmental and health impacts of radiation leaks.

Critical Analysis

Concerns

- Risk of radioactive leakage and environmental disaster if nuclear reactors or spent fuel pools are damaged.
- Civilian casualties and displacement due to radiation exposure.
- Escalation of geopolitical conflicts in already volatile regions.
- Possibility of loss or theft of enriched uranium, increasing proliferation risks.
- Military actions may undermine international monitoring mechanisms and diplomatic frameworks.

Arguments made by proponents

- Strikes may temporarily disrupt nuclear weapon development.
- Demonstrates strategic deterrence against adversaries.

Way Forward

- Strengthen IAEA inspection and verification mechanisms.
- Promote diplomatic negotiations and nuclear agreements to resolve disputes.
- Develop stronger international norms against attacks on nuclear facilities.
- Improve cybersecurity protection for nuclear infrastructure.
- Encourage regional dialogue and confidence-building measures to reduce tensions.

As Iran confronts existential threat, its minorities will shape the contest



RAJA MANDALA
BY C. RAJA MOHAN

US PRESIDENT Donald Trump's telephone conversations with Kurdish leaders in the last few days have highlighted the role of minorities in shaping Iran's political future. Media reports say Trump spoke with two influential Kurdish figures — Masoud Barzani and Bafel Talabani — operating in the borderlands between Iran and Iraq.

Kurds are the only large nationality in the Middle East without a state of their own. Kurdish geography — straddling Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran — has always cast a large shadow on the Middle East's politics. Several Iranian Kurdish groups, operating from the adjoining autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq, have waged intermittent insurrections against Tehran for decades. As the US-Iran conflict escalates, the Kurds insist on having a voice in any political rearrangement of Iran after the fall of the Islamic Republic.

This brings us to a question often debated in Israel and the US: Can Iran's ethnic and sectarian divides be leveraged to produce regime change? Probing the internal contradictions of an adversary — its domestic cleavages as well as the fragility of its alliances — has been integral to strategy since antiquity. It remains central today in the contest between the US-led coalition and Iran. Washington's hope is that internal opposition can destroy the clerical regime from

within as it comes under external military pressure. Tehran's calculus is no different. It is betting that a regional escalation and rising costs for Arab allies will strain the US coalition and provoke political backlash at home.

By firing missiles and drones at Gulf cities and targeting American assets across Arab lands, Iran has sharpened domestic questions in the US about the wisdom of Trump's war. It has also exposed the contradiction between Trump's promise to end America's wars and his decision to initiate a major conflict with Iran with no clear strategy for victory.

Can Washington do the same with Iran? That Iran is divided at home is not in doubt. Revolutions have rarely reconciled universalist rhetoric with internal diversity. The communist regimes in Russia and China — despite promises of equality and autonomy — struggled to accommodate their many nationalities, a tension still visible in Russia's war in Ukraine and China's policies in Xinjiang and Tibet.

A revolution grounded in religion might appear better placed to manage co-religionists who differ from the majority. Yet Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution, despite its claims to speak for all Muslims, has never fully secured the affections of its religious and ethnic minorities. Iran's internal diversity is striking: Persians form about 60 per cent of the population; minorities include roughly 16 million Azeris, 8-10 million Kurds, around 3-4 million Arabs (many in oil-rich Basra), 1.5-2 million Baluch, and several other smaller communities. Although Iran is predominantly Shia, it has alongside Sunni Muslims, Christians, Zoroastrians and Bahá'ís.

These internal fissures — both ethnic and religious — have long been viewed by Iran's adversaries

as structural vulnerabilities. The strategic logic is straightforward: Empowering internal divisions is far less costly than invasion or occupation. Great powers — imperial and regional — have all been tempted by this logic. But its historical record is mixed; the persistence of the idea does not guarantee predictable outcomes.

Since 1979, the Islamic Republic has managed minorities through a combination of coercion and co-optation. Economic neglect, cultural restrictions and securitisation have produced deep resentment — especially in Kurdish, Baluch and Arab-majority regions. Of all minority communities, the Kurds — comprising nearly 10 per cent of Iran's population — remain the most politically active. Unsurprisingly, they figure prominently in the US and Israeli calculus on weakening Tehran. But the degree of resentment varies across Iran's minorities. The Azeris, nearly 19 million strong and the largest non-Persian group, remain relatively well integrated in the Islamic Republic.

Iran's minorities do not form a unified bloc. The regime's internal repression has intensified radicalisation. Still, some in Washington and Tel Aviv sense opportunity. A strand of Israeli strategic thinking has long argued that Iran's challenge is not only ideological. Its size, energy resources and national power potential make a unified Iran a formidable neighbour. A fragmented Iran, this view holds, would be easier to manage over the long term.

Critics counter that such schemes underestimate the strength of Iranian national identity. Iran is diverse, but its sense of nationhood runs deep. Talk of partitioning the country is profoundly offensive to Iranian nationalists

who oppose the Islamic Republic. Minority leaders, meanwhile, remain wary of exiled figures like Reza Pahlavi, whom they see as centralising nationalists reluctant to accommodate genuine autonomy.

Washington confronts a similar dilemma. It has long viewed minorities as leverage, yet these communities lack a shared political vision. Kurdish aspirations differ sharply from those of the Baluch or Arabs; the Azeris are strongly invested in the Iranian state. This lack of coherence limits the utility of any minority-based strategy.

At the same time, there is no escaping an important regional reality — the growing fragmentation of the Greater Middle East. The writ of central authority has collapsed in Yemen, Libya, Syria and Sudan. Iraq and Lebanon remain deeply divided along sectarian and ethnic lines. Even the once-solid state structures of the Sahel — from Mali to Niger — are fraying. The region-wide pattern is one of competing pressures: Central governments struggling to preserve territorial integrity while religious, ethnic and tribal identities push for autonomy or dominance.

Nation-building across the post-colonial world has always wrestled with these twin imperatives: Centralisation for state-building, and accommodation of minorities for the widest possible political legitimacy. Only a few have managed the balance successfully. As the Islamic Republic now confronts an existential threat from the US-led attacks, Iran's minorities will inevitably shape both the internal contest and the broader evolution of political modernisation in the Middle East.

The writer is contributing editor on international affairs for The Indian Express and is associated with the Institute of American Studies, Jindal Global University, and the Council on Strategic and Defence Studies, Delhi

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Reports indicate that Donald Trump recently interacted with Kurdish leaders Masoud Barzani and Bafel Talabani.
- These discussions occurred amid rising US-Iran tensions and speculation about political changes in Iran.
- Kurdish leaders operate in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq, bordering Iran, where some Iranian Kurdish groups have historically opposed Tehran.
- The issue has revived debate on whether Iran's ethnic and sectarian diversity could influence its political stability.

Key Points

- Ethnic Composition of Iran
 - Persians – about 60% of the population.
 - Azeris – about 16–19 million (largest minority).
 - Kurds – about 8–10 million.
 - Arabs – about 3–4 million, mainly in Khuzestan.
 - Baluch – about 1.5–2 million, mainly in Sistan-Baluchestan.
- Religious Composition
 - Majority Shia Muslims.
 - Minorities include Sunni Muslims, Christians, Zoroastrians and Bahá'ís.
- Kurds in the Middle East
 - One of the largest stateless ethnic groups in the world.
 - Spread across Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Syria.
- Iran's Minority Policy
 - Combination of political integration and security control.
 - Some regions with minority populations report economic neglect and cultural restrictions.

A strand of Israeli strategic thinking has long argued that Iran's challenge is not only ideological. Its size and national power potential make a unified Iran a formidable neighbour. A fragmented Iran would be easier to manage

Regional Context

- West Asia has seen state fragmentation and ethnic conflicts in countries like Yemen, Syria, Libya and Sudan.
- Central governments often struggle to balance territorial integrity and minority autonomy.

Static Linkages

- Nation-states often face tension between centralised authority and regional autonomy.
- Ethnic identity, language and religion are key drivers of political mobilization.
- External powers have historically used internal divisions of rival states as strategic leverage.
- Strong national identity can limit separatist movements even in diverse societies.

Critical Analysis

Strategic Perspective

- Internal divisions may weaken state cohesion and create geopolitical opportunities for rival powers.

Limitations

- Iranian minorities do not form a unified political bloc.
- Strong Iranian nationalism reduces chances of large-scale fragmentation.

Regional Implications

- Attempts to exploit ethnic divisions could destabilize West Asia further.
- Cross-border ethnic groups may lead to regional spillover conflicts.

Way Forward

- Encourage inclusive governance and minority rights protection.
- Promote regional diplomacy and conflict-resolution mechanisms.
- Strengthen economic development in minority-dominated regions.
- Avoid external strategies that could trigger state fragmentation and humanitarian crises.

Doubts over HPV vaccines are misplaced



ANURAG AGRAWAL

THE SPATE of misinformation on the rollout of human papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination, as part of the national immunisation programme, reminds me of the saying, "every nationalist doubts, but not all doubts are rational". What matters is whether we use doubt as a tool to eliminate bias or to amplify it. That distinction is the difference between using evidence to guide health policy and cherry-picking fragments to promote conspiracy theories.

Let us first ask why virtually every major scientific body in the world — including ICMR and CDC — and about 160 countries, including almost every high-income nation, recommend HPV vaccination. HPV is responsible for an overwhelming majority of cervical cancers. In addition to a large proportion of anal, oropharyngeal, vulvar, vaginal and penile cancers. While men are at risk of HPV-mediated cancer, the risk is greatest for women. While some countries recommend vaccination for men, there is a near-universal consensus on vaccinating women.

India has one of the highest burdens of cervical cancer globally. The vaccines now in use, including Gardasil, part of India's rollout, have been found to be effective in large trials and, more importantly, in real-world programmes involving tens of millions of adolescents across multiple countries.

These are not small pilot studies. These are population-scale interventions followed over years. The findings are consistently striking: Dramatic reduction in HPV infection and precancerous lesions, and, where sufficient time has elapsed, a decline in cervical cancer itself.

Now, let us consider the concerns. Some point to adverse events reported in earlier studies, particularly an Indian study in 2009 in which seven young women who had received the Gardasil vaccine died. The concern deserves examination, not dismissal. Indeed, it was thoroughly investigated, and the public report showed that while there were deficiencies in the trial, there was no evidence that vaccination led to these deaths. For the record, two deaths were due to poisoning, one drowning, and one was a confirmed case of cerebral malaria.

In any large trial, untoward events — in-

cluding deaths — unrelated to the intervention will occur. The occurrence of an adverse incident after an intervention does not prove that it was caused by the intervention.

Science addresses this issue in a simple yet rigorous manner: We compare the rate of events in those who received the intervention with those who did not (controls). If a vaccine causes harm, the vaccinated group will show a statistically significant excess of that harm. While the 2009 study did not have a control arm, large trials (Future I, Future II, Patricia) and post-licensure surveillance for HPV vaccines, including Gardasil, have been conducted. Except for syncope, which is more common among adolescents after receiving any vaccine, there have been no confirmed adverse events occurring at higher than expected rates after HPV vaccination.

Reports of rare adverse events have been, and will continue to be, taken seriously. For example, HPV vaccination was temporarily stopped in Japan due to reports of pain or numbness. After extensive investigation, it became clear that this was not due to the vaccine and vaccination resumed in 2021. It is absolutely rational to demand an effective adverse effect monitoring system. However, to ignore a vast amount of high-quality evidence and give credence to isolated reports is irrational.

Another line of concern is about choice — whether giving a vaccine against a sexually transmitted infection to young girls is morally appropriate. These are legitimate social questions that merit examination. The HPV vaccination programme is offered, not imposed. Parents retain the right to forgo vaccination for their children. A preventive vaccine is ideally given before a high exposure risk. Administering the vaccine to those aged 9–14 is not an endorsement of sexual activity at that age; it is just a way to maximise the benefit of the shots.

India has the opportunity to prevent thousands of future cancers in young women. Every year that this vaccine is delayed is one in which real harm accrues. Scepticism strengthens science. Manufactured doubt weakens public health.

The writer is dean, Trivedi School of Biosciences, Ashoka University. Views are personal.

It is rational to demand an effective adverse effect monitoring system. However, to ignore a vast amount of high-quality evidence and give credence to isolated reports is irrational

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- India has initiated steps to include Human Papillomavirus (HPV) vaccination in the Universal Immunisation Programme to reduce cervical cancer cases.
- Public debate emerged due to misinformation regarding vaccine safety and morality.
- Global health bodies such as the World Health Organization, Indian Council of Medical Research, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention strongly recommend HPV vaccination.
- HPV vaccines such as Gardasil are already used in more than 160 countries.

Key Points

- HPV (Human Papillomavirus) is a sexually transmitted virus linked to several cancers.
- Causes ~95% of cervical cancer cases worldwide.
- Cervical cancer is the second most common cancer among women in India.
- India records over 1.2 lakh new cervical cancer cases annually (WHO estimates).
- HPV also causes anal, oropharyngeal, vulvar, vaginal, and penile cancers.
- Recommended vaccination age: 9–14 years (before virus exposure).
- Vaccine schedule: Two doses for adolescents.
- Large trials such as Future I, Future II, and Patricia confirmed vaccine efficacy.
- Long-term vaccination programmes globally show reduced HPV infections and precancerous lesions.

- Adverse effects are generally mild; serious safety concerns have not been proven in large-scale studies.

Static Linkages

- Preventive healthcare is a key pillar of public health systems.
- Vaccination works through adaptive immunity and antibody formation.
- Herd immunity reduces transmission when a large population is vaccinated.
- Cervical cancer screening methods include Pap smear and HPV DNA testing.
- India's national immunisation efforts operate through the Universal Immunisation Programme (UIP).

Critical Analysis

Benefits

- Major tool for cervical cancer prevention.
- Cost-effective compared to cancer treatment.
- Improves women's health outcomes.
- Supports WHO goal of cervical cancer elimination.

Concerns

- Vaccine hesitancy due to misinformation.
- Ethical debates on vaccinating adolescents for an STI-related disease.
- Need for robust monitoring of adverse events.
- Limited awareness and access in rural areas.

Way Forward

- Strengthen public awareness campaigns about vaccine safety.
- Integrate HPV vaccination with school-based health programmes.
- Improve cervical cancer screening coverage.
- Strengthen Adverse Events Following Immunisation (AEFI) surveillance.
- Promote domestic vaccine production to reduce costs.

To build trust, AI needs to be anchored by human agency



NANDITESH NILAY

LAST MONTH, India hosted the global AI summit. This week, there are sleepless nights in Delhi over the gathering war in West Asia and the plight of 10 million Indians there. One of the key themes that emerged at the AI summit was how the human element and human agency remain fundamental to trust and accountability in systems. That trust has resurfaced in the current discourse around the war as Anthropic's Dario Amodei pushes back against the US government on using AI for surveillance and in the battlefield. As the world grapples with these threats, there's a different path — one rooted in both the quiet progress of domestic reform and the unyielding moral compass of the individual. These two forces could ensure an ethical core in our most powerful technology.

Three recent examples illustrate this idea that trust is forged through the alignment of law with justice. One significant milestone in this pursuit is the Repealing and Amending Bill, 2025. By stripping away outdated and discriminatory colonial-era laws, the state signalled a commitment to modernising justice and governance and reshaping the compact between citizen and state. An example is the amendment to the Indian Succession Act, 1925. For decades, Hindus, Buddhists, Sikhs, Jains, and Parsis in the former presidencies of Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta were burdened by the discriminatory requirement to obtain court probate for their wills. The omission of Section 213 has removed this geographical and religious disparity, bringing tangible relief to millions. This is the "quiet progress" of reform — the dismantling of archaic barriers to ensure the law reflects the spirit of equality and secures inheritance for the future.

While policy provides the framework, individual acts of courage offer the soul. Consider the reported story of Haji Akhtar, a Faridabad scrap dealer who discovered Rs 15 lakh worth of gold misplaced in a sack of junk. Akhtar's decision to return the jewels — without the gaze of a CCTV camera over him or the pressure of the police — was a triumph of an ethics rooted in daily lived experience rather than in a value imposed or programmed. This, when a Chinese robot was being passed off as an indigenous one at a summit stall.

Bridging the gap between individual acts of honesty, the looming power of AI, and policy lies at the core of the MANAV framework unveiled at the AI summit. MANAV is a reminder to act with accountability and morality in every digital interaction. It reaffirms that inclusivity ensures justice is transparent and caring.

In this framework, for AI to be successful, it must adjust to a world of billions of "kharava" (humans) who, whether literate or illiterate, refuse to fall in their hosting of honesty.

Nilay is the author of Being Good, Aaire, Insaan Banen and Ethikos. He teaches and trains courses on ethics, values and behaviour.



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On fertiliser prices, strategy, not firefighting

AMONG THE major sectors likely to be disproportionately impacted by the ongoing US-Israel vs Iran war, and which has implications for India's food security, is fertilisers. India imports a fourth of its urea consumption and nearly 40 per cent of that from West Asia. The domestically produced urea, too, is mostly based on imported natural gas, again up to 85 per cent sourced from the likes of Qatar, the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. India's import dependence is still more in phosphatic and potassic fertilisers, including their raw materials and intermediates such as rock phosphate, sulphur, ammonia and phosphoric acid. Ukrainian drone attacks on Russian oil refineries had already led to a key global sulphur supplier banning exports and driving up world prices. And with the war in Iran (which is itself a leading exporter of urea and ammonia) disrupting gas shipments, things cannot get worse.

The last time India had seen international prices of fertilisers go through the roof, in line with that of oil and gas, was in the run-up to and post Russia's invasion of Ukraine four years ago. India has also had problems from China, which, until 2023-24, was its largest supplier of urea and di-ammonium phosphate (DAP). Indian agriculture, in that sense, has become as vulnerable to geopolitical risks, whether from wars or import dependence on China, as to climate change. Policymakers need to find ways to manage and mitigate both, which calls for a strategic, as opposed to firefighting, approach.

The government has frozen the retail price of urea (at Rs 5,922 per tonne since November 2012) and DAP (at Rs 27,000/tonne since the Covid pandemic). The underpricing has resulted in unrestrained consumption, with sales of urea alone rising from under 30 million tonnes (mt) in 2017-18 to a projected 40 mt this fiscal. Farmers at one time had to be incentivised to use chemical fertilisers to boost crop yields. Today, they must be discouraged from over-application and be made aware that India imports half of its natural gas requirement — which will only go up — and hardly has any mineable rock phosphate, potash or elemental sulphur reserves. Capping consumption of urea and DAP, promoting high nutrient-use fertilisers amenable to targeted delivery through drip irrigation or foliar application, and providing subsidy on a per-acre rather than product-specific basis is the way forward. The Narendra Modi government's AgriStack initiative, to create unique digital IDs for all farmers and link these to their land records and cropping data, can be the right platform for it.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- Geopolitical conflicts in West Asia and the Russia-Ukraine region are disrupting global fertiliser supply chains.
- India imports about one-fourth of its urea consumption, with nearly 40% sourced from West Asian countries such as Qatar, UAE, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.
- Domestic urea production is dependent on imported natural gas (around 85%).
- India is even more import-dependent for phosphatic and potassic fertilisers and their raw materials like rock phosphate, sulphur, ammonia and phosphoric acid.
- Disruptions in Russia and Iran — major fertiliser exporters — have pushed global prices higher.
- This exposes Indian agriculture to geopolitical risks, similar to climate-related vulnerabilities.

Key Points

- High Import Dependence
 - Urea imports: ~25% of total demand.
 - Heavy imports of DAP, MOP, rock phosphate, sulphur and ammonia.
- Supply Concentration Risks
 - West Asia supplies natural gas and fertiliser inputs.
 - China was India's largest supplier of Urea and DAP until 2023-24.
- Price Control by Government
 - Urea price fixed at ₹5,922 per tonne since 2012.
 - DAP price capped at ₹27,000 per tonne since COVID period.

- Rising Consumption
 - Urea consumption increased from <30 million tonnes (2017-18) to nearly 40 million tonnes (2025-26).
- Subsidy Burden
 - Fertiliser subsidy is among the largest agricultural subsidies in India's budget.
- Digital Governance
 - AgriStack initiative aims to create digital farmer IDs linked to land records and cropping data for targeted agricultural support.

Static Linkages

- Nutrient Based Subsidy (NBS) Scheme (2010) applies to phosphatic and potassic fertilisers but not to urea.
- Neem-Coated Urea Policy (2015) aims to reduce diversion and improve nitrogen efficiency.
- Ideal N:P:K ratio recommended for soil health is 4:2:1, but India's ratio is often heavily skewed toward nitrogen.
- Integrated Nutrient Management (INM) promotes balanced fertiliser use along with organic manure and biofertilisers.
- The Haber-Bosch process is used globally to synthesise ammonia from nitrogen and hydrogen for urea production.
- Excess fertiliser use contributes to soil degradation, eutrophication and greenhouse gas emissions (nitrous oxide).

Critical Analysis

Positives

- Subsidised fertilisers ensure affordability for farmers.
- Help maintain high crop productivity and food grain production.
- Support food security for a large population.

Concerns

- Artificially low prices cause excessive nitrogen use.
- Imbalanced fertiliser consumption harms soil fertility.
- Increasing fiscal burden of fertiliser subsidies.
- High import dependence exposes agriculture to geopolitical shocks.
- Environmental impacts including soil nutrient imbalance and groundwater pollution.

Way Forward

- Shift from product-based subsidy to per-acre or DBT-based subsidy.
- Promote balanced fertiliser use through nutrient-based pricing.
- Encourage precision agriculture (drip irrigation, fertigation, foliar sprays).
- Expand domestic fertiliser production and diversify import sources.
- Promote biofertilisers and organic alternatives.
- Use AgriStack for targeted fertiliser distribution and monitoring consumption.

Mind the expertise gap in NGT

THE NATIONAL Green Tribunal (NGT) Act, 2010, envisioned the creation of a watchdog that would combine legal and ecological expertise to strengthen the country's environmental governance. More than a decade later, the tribunal's record is, at best, mixed. In its interventions in sand-mining and river pollution cases, the NGT underlined the importance of scientifically established standards and often acted swiftly to enforce them. Its directions on curbing air pollution have also been grounded in careful reading of technical information, though their impact has often been blunted by weak implementation. At the same time, critics have pointed out that several NGT rulings on infrastructure projects do not reflect a rigorous engagement with ecological realities. Now, an investigation by this newspaper has found that the tribunal ruled in favour of project developers in four out of five cases between 2020 and 2025. The government maintains that these decisions reflect the merit of individual cases. However, another finding underscores the need for a more critical lens: Nine of the 13 expert members appointed since 2016 previously held senior positions in the environment ministry. This raises concerns about conflict of interest — and institutional propriety — since the tribunal's appellate jurisdiction covers key government decisions.

Environmental concerns associated with development projects — including displacement of people, pollution, groundwater depletion, harm to biodiversity, and inadequate waste management — cannot be resolved solely through legal interpretation. They require specialised knowledge. That is why the NGT Act mandates the agency to have 10-20 judicial members and an equal number of expert members. Expert positions in the NGT, however, have rarely been filled, forcing its benches to function without the technical acumen envisioned by the law. The tribunal's pool of experts has been drawn largely from the Indian Forest Service. While former administrators bring valuable domain knowledge to the table, the complexity of today's environmental challenges require inputs from scientists, economists, engineers, urban planners and legal scholars. This expertise deficit has contributed to uneven decision-making and raised questions about the NGT's ability to independently evaluate scientific claims.

Climate change has made environmental governance more complex. An effective watchdog today must be adept at risk assessment and planning adaptation. Strengthening the NGT's technical capacity will, thus, require more than filling vacancies. It calls for equipping it with multidisciplinary expertise. This newspaper's investigation should serve as a wake-up call.

KEY HIGHLIGHTS

Context of the News

- A recent investigation reported that the National Green Tribunal (NGT) ruled in favour of project developers in about 4 out of 5 infrastructure-related cases between 2020–2025.
- Questions have been raised regarding institutional independence as 9 of the 13 expert members appointed since 2016 previously served in the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC).
- The NGT Act, 2010 mandates equal numbers of judicial and expert members, but many expert posts remain vacant.
- Environmental governance is becoming more complex due to climate change, pollution, biodiversity loss, and developmental pressures, highlighting the need for stronger technical expertise in the tribunal.

Key Points

- Established: 2010 under the National Green Tribunal Act, 2010.
- Purpose: Effective and expeditious disposal of environmental cases.
- Jurisdiction: Matters related to
 - Environmental protection
 - Forest conservation
 - Natural resource management
 - Environmental compensation and damages.

- Guiding Principles:
 - Sustainable Development
 - Precautionary Principle
 - Polluter Pays Principle
- Time Limit: Cases should ideally be disposed of within 6 months.
- Composition:
 - Chairperson (retired Supreme Court judge / Chief Justice of High Court)
 - Judicial Members
 - Expert Members (environmental science, forestry, ecology, engineering etc.)
- Benches:
 - Principal Bench: New Delhi
 - Zonal Benches: Pune, Bhopal, Chennai, Kolkata
- Concerns Highlighted:
 - Vacancies in expert member positions
 - Limited multidisciplinary expertise
 - Possible conflict of interest
 - Weak implementation of NGT orders.

Static Linkages

- Article 48A: State shall protect and improve the environment.
- Article 51A(g): Fundamental duty of citizens to protect natural environment.
- Environmental governance laws include:
 - Environment (Protection) Act, 1986
 - Forest Conservation Act, 1980
 - Water Act, 1974
 - Air Act, 1981
- Environmental jurisprudence developed through Public Interest Litigation (PIL).
- NGT replaces earlier National Environment Appellate Authority (NEAA).

Critical Analysis

Significance

- Provides specialized environmental justice mechanism.
- Ensures faster disposal of environmental disputes.
- Promotes accountability for environmental damage.

Issues

- Vacancies of expert members weaken technical decision-making.
- Over-representation of retired bureaucrats instead of multidisciplinary experts.
- Conflict of interest concerns due to previous roles in regulatory bodies.
- Poor implementation of tribunal orders by authorities.
- Balancing economic development and environmental protection remains difficult.

Way Forward

- Ensure full appointment of expert members as mandated by the Act.
- Include multidisciplinary experts (scientists, economists, engineers, urban planners).
- Strengthen institutional independence and transparency in appointments.
- Improve monitoring and enforcement of NGT orders by states and pollution control boards.
- Enhance technical research support and climate risk assessment capacity within the tribunal.